

PRAYER – BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

SPIRITUALITY SERIES



INNER STILLNESS

You can be still inside on two levels. The first is becoming still in order to make space to think; it results in prayer in words.

A good way to do this is to take an object (eg. a leaf, a nail, a spoon – almost anything). Look at it with close attention. You will find thoughts arising in your mind and then prayers arising out of your thoughts. You can also use your breathing to become still. Breathe in what you long to receive from God, and breathe out all that gets in the way between you and God. (see also the leaflet *Prayer in a Busy Life*) Or do the same in church, allowing yourself to become aware of God's presence by focusing your attention.

There is a deeper level of interior stillness which goes beyond words; it results in deepening inner silence. This is a space which allows God to be in your soul without your wanting a 'reward': you are just giving God your whole self and letting God choose what happens. This takes concentration and practice, and is helpfully supported by a prayer word. This is called contemplative prayer.

WORD AND SILENCE

The prayer of silence is always only part of your prayer; usually you come out of a time of silence wanting to talk to God in words and to thank him for what you have experienced. Most people who practice daily silent contemplation also say a set form of prayer in words (the daily office), as well as their personal prayers.



TRULY PRAYER

Some people worry that silent contemplation is Eastern meditation, or opens up their mind to unknown outside influences. But contemplative prayer is consciously offered to God the Holy Trinity before you begin. It is not a technique you use on yourself, but an opening to God's grace. You are offering God not only the level of your thoughts, but also much deeper layers of your heart and soul. You are safe in God's hands.

Achieve stillness, and thousands around you will find salvation.

St Seraphim of Sarov

A PRAYER WORD

Choose a word that you associate with God, such as 'love' or 'peace' or 'Jesus'. Repeat it gently to yourself, first with your lips, then just in your heart. It is normal to be distracted by thoughts, and nothing to worry about. As soon as you notice you are distracted from your prayer word, return to it gently.

Don't be angry with yourself; the more attention you give the thoughts, the less attention you are giving to the prayer word, and the silence is lost. After weeks or months of regular practice, you may notice that the word isn't necessary all the time; go with what works for you.

DID IT WORK?

Many people don't begin this kind of prayer until their pleasure in other kinds of prayer has gone dead. Sometimes you may feel wonderful, but sometimes you will

feel nothing at all. If you have committed to a set period of silent contemplation every day, often your set prayer time is a constant battle with distractions and feels more like war than prayer.



What is happening is that you are letting go of wanting any measurable 'result' in your prayer. This is a prayer of pure offering of yourself; you are not asking to get

anything out of it. What you have done is offer God these twenty minutes (or whatever) for him to use as he sees fit, and he has taken you at your word.

Each distraction is an invitation to offer God your attention again, via the prayer word. So 1000 distractions means 1000 acts of obedience to God – you can't lose unless you walk away and break off your prayer time. Talk to God afterwards but not during your silence.

You will know your prayer of silence and stillness is 'working' when you notice a change in your outward behaviour. You will become more calm and serene, more able to love a challenging neighbour as well as a nice one.

Inner stillness is like a clear lake that reflects the face of Christ without distortion. Holiness is revealed to be world-affirming and open-hearted. What is happening is that God is doing deep structural work in your soul, at your invitation. You can't watch while it's going on, but you can see the effects.

You learn to accept other people as they are. Whatever you do is done in the presence of God and for his glory. Even when life is hard, you carry within you the peace that passes all understanding, because you know by experience that nothing can separate you from God.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

If you are serious about committing to regular prayer, working with a spiritual director is strongly recommended.

Such a guide can support you in your exploration of a deepening relationship with God, and help with any difficulties.

Typically you would see a spiritual director four to six times a year. More information is on the leaflet *Spiritual Direction or Accompaniment and You*, available on the diocese website: portsmouth/anglican.org.



Daily Prayer

Daily Prayer is the official app to help you follow Morning, Evening and Night Prayer, wherever you are.

For every day of the year, it presents the three services in full and include Bible readings (NRSV translation), psalms, canticles and seasonal variations.

It allows you to:

- Access Morning, Evening and Night Prayer for yesterday, today and a month ahead
- Listen to full audio of Morning and Evening Prayer (Contemporary Services)
- Switch between Contemporary and Traditional formats with one click
- Find details of Feast Days, Festivals and Commemorations from the Common Worship Calendar
- Read Bible passages in full (NRSV translation) without the need for a separate Bible app

