



## Lesson Six: When you meet with God...be transformed.

### Reflection/Discussion

There is no magic formula for becoming a person who loves greatly. We need God's help to do this, so it is important that we continue to ask for his help as we did in the last exercise. But there are other ways of helping this process along. Becoming more reflective about ourselves and others is part of the process. Whilst we would probably become more aware of our own (and other's) weaknesses which we may find uncomfortable, we will also discover the reasons for those weaknesses.

We mustn't leave God out of the equation. We don't travel down this road alone. We invite the Spirit of truth to travel with us and guide us on our journey. We must start by believing that God's ways are better than our ways, and his plan for our life is better than any we could come up with. Whenever we face trials and hardships, we need to give those situations to God so that he can bring good out of them. As he does so, the process of transformation ever more into the likeness of Jesus Christ continues....which leads us nicely onto our next lesson!

### Teaching

Matthew 6: 10a/ Luke 11: 2b "...your kingdom come,"

### We were made to grow...

When we talk about God's kingdom coming, we perhaps tend to do so in the context of this world we live in. We look around at all the bad things going on and ask in our prayers that one day, when God's kingdom comes in all its fullness, everything will be made better. There's nothing wrong with this idea of God's kingdom, but in the context of this course on prayer I want to focus on the idea of praying for God's kingdom to come into fruition in us as individuals.

The fundamental idea behind Christian spirituality is that God intends for us to grow as human beings into the likeness of Christ. As we do so, our capacity for a deeper relationship with God also grows, and one of the key ways for this to happen is through prayer. True prayer is transforming! As Brian C. Taylor writes, *"In this relationship of prayer, I believe that God wants to awaken us to joy for the divine life within and around us; to help us respond to this presence by becoming people of loving compassion; and to come to complete honesty about everything in us that stands as an obstacle to this joy and love. Through a life of prayer, over time, we are transformed...This spiritual growth is the whole point of a life of prayer: not to attain and sustain pleasant or deep 'spiritual'*

*experiences for ourselves, but to be transformed by God into a more perfect fulfilment of the persons we are created to be.”*<sup>1</sup>

One definition for prayer that I recently picked up was this, *“prayer is relaxing into the realisation that God loves you.”*<sup>2</sup> For many people that might seem an odd definition of prayer. We are so geared up to the importance of doing (or getting God to do) that we can easily end up treating prayer in the same way. We pray in order to make things happen. We pray for someone to be ‘born again’. We pray for someone to be healed. We pray for an end to fighting. We pray for someone to be blessed. We can all too easily have a utilitarian approach to prayer - it has to solve a problem.

Now, none of this is wrong. We can certainly pray for these things, and more. But prayer is also about being and becoming. The exercise of prayer helps to bring about the refining transformation of the heart from a mixture of good and bad desires, into a pure heart of love that reflects the heart of God. It is a journey from selfishness to complete self giving. Jesus said, *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (John 15:13). That is where the journey is supposed to take us. Whilst our consumer oriented world encourages us to get what we want for ourselves, the message of Christ is that we should be equally concerned for others as we are for ourselves. This is the person we are called to be, a kingdom person, and prayer is part of that process of change.

### Reflecting God’s light...

Thinking about the definition of prayer I gave above, the picture we get is of the human heart soaking in the light and love of God, which soon begins to reflect that light and love to others. I have this quote from a mystic who was not a Christian, *“The rose transmits its scent without a movement. I have a definite feeling that if you want us to experience the aroma of Christianity you must copy the rose. It irresistibly draws people to itself and the scent remains on them. A rose does not preach...it simply spreads its fragrance.”* St Francis of Assisi made a similar point when he said, *“Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”* Both these quotes are about Christians ‘being’ before ‘doing’.

When Jesus was baptised we read that the Holy Spirit came on him like a dove, *“And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’”* (Matthew 3: 17). God was not ‘well pleased’ with Jesus because of what he had done. If these words were heard from heaven the moment after Jesus had died on the cross we might have reasonably assumed they were in response to the successful fulfilment of his mission. In fact they come before Jesus had really got going with his mission. Prior to this he had just lived a quiet life as a builder/carpenter providing for his mother, brothers and sisters. The reason why the Father was ‘well pleased’ with the Son was because he looked into the heart of his Son and saw the goodness, and the love, and the light that radiated from him. From that goodness came good actions, just as out of a bad heart

---

<sup>1</sup> “Becoming Christ” by Brian C. Taylor, 2002, page 4.

<sup>2</sup> “Personal Prayer According to the Monastic Tradition” by Columban Heaney, a Cistercian monk.

come bad actions, *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander”* (Matthew 15: 19).

So, when we pray *“your kingdom come”*, we may be referring to things going on in the world around us, but it can also be a prayer of the transformation of the heart into one that reflects the heart of God. When men and women commit themselves to a life time of prayer, whether as monks, nuns or as ordinary Christian folk, they are committing themselves to being and becoming a pure hearted citizen of God’s kingdom. They won’t just wear the badge of being a Christian. They want to be a people who naturally release the scent of heaven wherever they go. These people have learnt to take time out from the busyness of each day in order to stop what they are doing, be whom God has made them to be, and relax *“into the realisation that God loves [them].”*

### Grace through prayer...

The reason why prayer is so important in this process of transformation is because we cannot do it by ourselves. That does not mean we need make no effort in doing those things which will help us to move forward, whilst avoiding those things that hamper our progress. But, ultimately, the change that leads us into becoming children in God’s kingdom is a spiritual one and can only come through the grace of God. Or as Richard Foster writes, *“When we despair of gaining inner transformation through human powers of will and determination, we are open to a wonderful new realization; inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received. The needed change within us is God’s work, not ours. The demand is for an inside job, and only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given.”*<sup>3</sup>

Foster’s book on the spiritual disciplines (Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, Study, Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service, Confession, Worship, Guidance and Celebration) might seem to contradict his own statement above. But he goes on to say, *“God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”*<sup>4</sup> Occasionally that act of grace comes in a moment; in answer to a prayer or in the midst of worship. Many Christians can witness to a special time in their life when God did something which changed them from the inside and set them free from some destructive habit or disabling fear, etc. But for most of the time that freedom comes with the slow drip of regular prayer, reflection, worship and confession. It is as we spend time with God and attend to his presence that this gift can flow in our lives.

### Exercise

I hope you have noticed how we are building up our ten minute prayer time with the different exercises. Firstly, we prepare for our time with God by quietening our thoughts in whatever way suits us. Then we address him in a way that is familiar for us – whether we use the term ‘Father’ or something else we feel more comfortable with. Next, we focus our thoughts on the God of love

---

<sup>3</sup> “Celebration of Discipline – The path to spiritual growth” by Richard Foster, 1986, page 5.

<sup>4</sup> “Celebration of Discipline – The path to spiritual growth” by Richard Foster, 1986, page 6.

and ask for his help in becoming a person who reflects that love, both back to him, and then to others. And now is the time to acknowledge our dependence on the one who is above us.

In Samuel 16 we read the story of Samuel anointing David as the future king of Israel. David wasn't around when Samuel arrived in his home town of Bethlehem. He was out in the countryside looking after the sheep. But once Samuel had discerned that the one he was supposed to anoint was not present he told Jesse to *"Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives"* (verse 11). When David arrives and Samuel realises that he is the one, *"Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came on David in power"* (verse 13). If David had refused to come home, preferring to stay with the sheep, God's grace would not have come on him in power. If Samuel had refused to pour the oil on David he would not have received God's anointing. Grace is offered by God, but there is always a requirement for us to come to the place where we can receive it.

In a church I used to attend, after the sermon had been preached, the congregation were invited to respond to the sermon by physically walking forward to the front of the church to pray or be prayed for. I did this on occasions if I felt particularly moved to do so. But a friend of mine told me that I should make it a habit of going forward. At the time I disagreed with her, but I have come to see the wisdom of her words. There is something important about going forward to receive God's grace. That simple action says that I have chosen to do all I can do in order to receive what only God can give. So in this prayer exercise, in the quietness of your mind, make the choice to go forward to receive from God his transforming grace. One way of doing this is by imagining Jesus standing a little way away, walking over to him, and falling to your knees before him. You might even like to act this out, and on your knees echo Thomas' words, *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:28). Then stay there for a while in that place of humble submission.

#### Exercise in brief:

- 1) Pray – give God this time you have set aside for him.
- 2) Sit still and spend a moment becoming attentive to God.
- 3) Ask God to help you become a person who loves him, yourself and others more.
- 4) Approach Jesus in your imagination and fall to your knees in front of him.
- 5) Allow time for God's grace to pour over you as the anointing oil did over David.
- 6) Close the exercise with a prayer of thanks.

#### Encouragement

##### *Rees Howells 1879 – 1950*

Howells was an ordinary coal miner who was impacted by the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905. He felt God's call on his life to first live in dependence on him through prayer, which later took him out to Africa as a missionary where he witnessed revival happening there. Then, on returning to Wales, he established the Bible College of Wales in Swansea to train others for the mission field.

Howells' life is littered with extraordinary answers to prayer which included miracles of healing and conversion, as well as God's provision for the work that he had called him to do. The book *"Rees Howells Intercessor"* by Norman Grubb tells the story of this remarkable man. Step by step God led Howells through experiences that taught him to trust God alone, and not to be swayed by

the attitudes of the society or personal fears. It was a journey of faith in which he was tested many times. But as he trusted God, so God proved himself to be trustworthy.

When I read the above biography on Rees Howells one of the things that struck me the most was how often he seemed to hear God speak to him. If he had been a man who just told God about his problems, or the needs of others, he would probably have never accomplished much or become well known. But it was because he had an acute sense that God was guiding him both in big things and in small, and he had the willingness to follow those instructions, that he ended up achieving much for God's kingdom on earth.

One little story from his book illustrates this sense of communication he had with God, and the challenge that came with it! Howells and his wife were due to travel to London on their way to the mission field in Africa. They had been given the money for their train journey but some of it had to be spent on provisions they would need in Africa. This left them with almost no money for the journey, but no one else knew about this. On the day they were due to leave many friends came to see them off at the train station not realising they had only enough money to get to another town twenty miles away where they would have to change trains for London. Arriving in that town they had breakfast with some friends before walking back to the station with no money in their pockets. This is what he says happened next. *"The Spirit then spoke to me and said 'If you had money what would you do?' 'Take my place in the booking office,' I said. 'Well, are you not preaching that my promises are equal to current coin? You had better take your place in the queue.' So there was nothing I could do except obey. There were about a dozen people before me. They were passing by the booking office one by one. The devil kept on telling me, 'Now you have only a few people in front of you, and when your turn comes, you will have to walk through. You have preached much about Moses with the Red Sea in front and the Egyptians behind; but now you are the one who is shut in.' 'Yes, shut in,' I answered, 'but, like Moses, I'll be gloriously led out!' When there were only two before me, a man stepped out of the crowd and said, 'I'm sorry I can't wait any longer, but I must open my shop.' He said goodbye and put thirty shillings in my hand! It was most glorious, and only a foretaste of what the Lord would do in Africa, if we would obey."*

### **Sayings of the Desert Fathers/Mothers**

Amma Syncletica, *"Just as one cannot build a ship unless one has some nails, so it is impossible to be saved without humility."*