

Checkin' Out My Walk

#30 - Laodicea - Spiritual Formation & Its Deceptive Tentacles - Part II

Ezekiel 33:6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'

Desire For Spiritual Experiences Is Increasing

We live in an age of mysticism with people lusting for spiritual reality and spiritual experiences. The danger: Unbiblical practices will give people a real spiritual experience, but not from God. Deception is the likely outcome. God puts a boundary around the means by which we come to Him and grow in Him for our own protection. Ignoring the boundary set by Biblical guidelines, could be a matter of life and death or a matter of our spiritual growth.

The cover story for the February 2008 issue of *Christianity Today* was "The Future Lies in the Past." It describes the "lost secrets of the ancient church" that are being rediscovered by evangelicals. The referenced ancient church is the Roman Catholic, beginning with the so-called "church fathers" of the early centuries.

The article states: Many young evangelicals dislike both "traditional Christianity" and the seeker sensitive churches. Traditional Christianity is described as too focused on "being right," too much into "Bible studies" and "apologetics materials." The seeker sensitive church is too much of a show and entertainment. Instead, the young evangelicals are lusting after "a renewed encounter with a God" that goes beyond "doctrinal definitions."

Mysticism refers to experiencing God beyond the boundaries of Scripture.

They desire to "break out the candles and incense," pray the "lectio divina" and learn the "Catholic ascetic disciplines" from "practicing monks and nuns."

The introduction of these practices (centering prayer, contemplative prayer, labyrinth walks, etc.) is an insidious offensive by those the Bible identifies as false teachers.

Spiritual Formation: A movement whose goal is for an individual to achieve Christ-likeness through the practice of certain disciplines. It has provided a platform and a channel through which contemplative prayer is entering the church. The problem with contemplative prayer is its mystical/Eastern (non-Christian) roots and its mind-emptying techniques (entering the "silence," breath prayers, chanting mantras, etc.).

Contemplative Spirituality: A belief system that is the heartbeat of the spiritual formation movement. It uses ancient mystical practices to induce altered states of consciousness (the silence) and is rooted in mysticism and the occult but often wrapped in Christian terminology. The premise of contemplative spirituality is pantheistic (God is all) and panentheistic (God is in all). These disciplines will find the "god within us" even if we are not born again.

Common terms used for this movement are "spiritual formation," "the silence," "the stillness," "ancient-wisdom," "spiritual disciplines," and many others.

In their book *Finding Grace at the Center*, Roman Catholic monks Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington write: "We should not hesitate to take the fruit of the age-old wisdom of the East* and "capture" it for Christ. Indeed, those of us who are in ministry should make the necessary effort to acquaint ourselves with as many of these Eastern techniques as possible.... Many Christians who take their prayer life seriously have been greatly helped by Yoga, Zen, TM and similar practices, especially where they have been initiated by reliable teachers and have a solidly developed Christian faith to find inner form and meaning to the resulting experiences."

*Isa. 2:6 For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; They *are* soothsayers like the Philistines, They are pleased with the children of foreigners. [East (qedem) denotes antiquity or that which is of old as well as the East.]

Thomas Merton is seen as a reliable spiritual guide to spirituality. He wrote, "The life of contemplation...is the life of the Holy Spirit in our inmost souls. The whole duty of contemplation is to abandon what is base and trivial in [your] own life, and do all [you] can to conform...to the secret and obscure promptings of the Spirit of God."

Ray Yungen states in his book, A TIME OF DEPARTING

(How Ancient Mystical Practices Are Uniting Christians With The World's Religions)

It's tough to figure out how to explain the way to identify the beginnings of the Spiritual Formation and the Emergent Church movement when it tiptoes into the church, because it's more the absence of what should be present than it is a stark, head-on attack.

"*Deception often occurs when there is 99 percent truth and just 1 percent falsehood,*" according to Yungen. "*It only takes a little leaven or white lie to leaven or taint the greater lump, which is truth.*" The transformation begins.

John MacArthur states in his book, THE TRUTH WAR:

"*Rarely are their assaults on the truth open and head-on attacks. Instead, they prefer to work underground, drilling little holes in the foundations of truth itself.*"

MacArthur: Contemplative prayer is invading churches like a virus in which submicroscopic pathogens *contaminate the body many hours or days before the victim is aware of its presence*. This is subtly changing the beliefs and doctrines of the evangelical church as we know it. People are being encouraged to reach a state of no-thinking - a blank mind which leads one to enter an altered state of consciousness that opens a person up to demonic influence.

Mark Yaconelli, in his book *Downtime* which is designed to aid teens in developing the contemplative life, writes, "I sometimes invite students to a time of prayer by asking them to focus on the very simple act of breathing...Close your eyes and simply notice your breathing...Imagining with each in-breath that you are breathing in God's love, and with every out-breath you are releasing every distraction, anxiety, every tension and resistance to God."

Brennan Manning: author of *The Signature of Jesus*: "The first step in faith is to stop thinking about God in prayer...Contemplative spirituality tends to emphasize the need for a change in consciousness...we must come to see reality differently...Choose a single, sacred word... repeat the sacred word inwardly, slowly and often...Enter into the great silence of God. Alone in that silence, the noise within will subside and the Voice of Love will be heard.

John Mains: *Word Into Silence* > "The silence is there within us. What we have to do is to enter into it...to become the silence...Silence is the language of the spirit."

Ray Yungen: (*A Time Of Departing*, p. 150) The mantra is the key to entering the non-thinking mode. "When a word or phrase is repeated over and over, after just a few repetitions, those words lose their meaning and become just sounds. ... if this repeating of words were continued, normal thought processes could be blocked, making it possible to enter an altered state of consciousness because of hypnotic effect that begins to take place. It really makes no difference whether the words are 'You are my God' or 'I am calm,' the results are the same."

Yungen: "Unknown to most people, a blank mind in a meditative state is all that is necessary for contact with a spirit guide." "Those who lack discernment are at great risk."

Quote in article by Dallas Willard

We have a problem today in Evangelical circles. We're not only saved by grace, we're paralyzed by it. I'm Southern Baptist, and we often preach to you for an hour, telling you: you can do nothing to be saved. Then sing to you for forty-five minutes trying to get you to do something to be saved. That's confusing! I hope we can see within God's Word the union of passivity and activity because spiritual formation requires us to take wise steps in accomplishing it.

The "old man" will not be put off, and the "new man" put on, unless I do something--and, indeed, unless I do the right things. So the need as we approach the topic of spiritual formation, is to understand as well as we can what is our part and what is God's part, and take care of our part that God may be able to work with us in bringing us to be the kinds of people that we need to be and he wants us to be. (If the idea that we must do something to "enable" God to do something bothers you, you have just hit a major barrier on the pathway of spiritual formation.)

We came to think that, in the language of some Protestants, "the Word of God is the only sacrament." What that meant... that we're saved and transformed by hearing the truths of the scriptures;

David Cunliffe: The transformation of the soul can best be achieved through the contemplative act of meditation and prayer.

John MacArthur: It is mysticism. The assumption is that spiritual truth is somewhere inside of you and that is not true. Spiritual truth is outside of you, it is external to you. It is in a book, outside of you. It is not in you. You can contemplate yourself all you want, you can go sit on a rock in the middle of nowhere and think and you will find in you no source of divine revelation whatsoever because divine revelation is external to you, it's external to every human being; it's in a book that God wrote. When you put the book down and start looking into your own brain, all you're going to do is be led down a black hole.

COMMONLY MISUSED VERSES TO SUPPORT CENTERING & CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

I. Psalm 46:10 "Be Still (Cease striving) and know that I am God."

Notes from Pastor Larry DeBruyn: This verse is not about mental emptiness or physical stillness

1. That would contradict what the Psalms already teach us about prayer and meditation.

2. We are to meditate actively and use our minds; not empty nothingness and waiting.

3. "The verb 'Be still' (Hebrew, *raph*) is used 46 times in the Old Testament with meanings describing laziness to ordering relaxation.

5. In no Biblical usage or context does the Hebrew verb enjoin God's people to meditate or contemplate. Rather, believers are to "rest and trust in God."

6. The context of this verse is one of war and conflict.

a. Verses 1-3 describe how God is our refuge or shelter when everything around seems to be falling apart.

b. Verses 4-7 God is described as our river of joy.

c. Verses 7 & 11 describe God as a stronghold, high tower & fortress.

d. Verses 8-11 - The scene is on the fields surrounding Jerusalem where the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers lay dead after The Angel of The Lord had defeated them.

e. "Be still" in this context literally means > "Take your hands off! Relax!"

Many times we need to take our hands off and allow God to work in His own time and way.

Warren Wiersbe: If we seize His promises by faith with both hands, we won't be able to meddle!

II. Ps. 62:1 Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him *comes* my salvation.

Understood in context, this verse offers a picture of submitting oneself to the Lord, trusting in and waiting patiently for Him to act according to His will.

(4 "L's" while waiting > Listen to Him, Look To & For Him, Live For and Long For)

"Only to God did [David] look with complete calmness." (Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Pastor DeBruyn: "Psalm 62 is not a call to unexpressed contemplation, but rather a song of expressed confidence.... The psalmist is not providing an example for retreating into silence. Rather he is telling fellow believers to go to God."

Warren Wiersbe: "To wait in silence before the Lord is not idleness or inactivity.

It is calm worship and faith, resting in His greatness and submitted to His will.

It is preparation for the time when God gives the orders to act."

Biblical Meditation

I. Psalm 63:6 "When I remember Thee on my bed, I meditate on Thee in the night watches."

Recall what God has done in the past and apply it to the present circumstance.

Remember: Our God is I AM, not I was.

II. Psalm 119:15,23,27,48,97 "I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways..."

²³Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes.... ²⁷So I will meditate on Thy wonders.

⁴⁸And I will meditate on Thy statutes... ⁹⁷O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day."

Note: Meditating means loving the Lord by pondering His Word and allowing its truths to penetrate our hearts.

Biblical prayer is our communication with God. As the Lord speaks to us through His Word, we speak to Him in prayer. Such prayers are rational, intelligent and flow from our minds. Paul said in I Cor. 14:15 that he would pray with his spirit and with his mind also > not either/or. When we pray we make use of our God-given intellect as we worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

I Thess. 5:17 We are to pray without ceasing.

Phil. 4:6 We are to make our requests known to God.

In prayer we praise God for His known attributes.

I John 1:9 In prayer we confess specific sins to restore fellowship.

Unfortunately Biblical prayer is not what spiritual formation advocates mean by contemplative prayer.

These writers have presented and promoted the contemplative view to the extent that many now see it as the only way to "go deeper" in the Christian life. They prompt people to plunge into contemplative practice. Their message leads people to experience the "lights" and the "inner adviser!"

The contemplatives have sold out to Catholic mysticism and abandoned the clear teaching of Scripture. Sadly, in the process many undiscerning evangelicals will follow suit.

John MacArthur summed up this profound and imminent danger in his book,

Reckless Faith: When The Church Loses Its Will To Discern > The evangelical consensus has shifted decidedly in the past two decades. Our collective message is now short on doctrine and long on experience. Thinking is deemed less important than feeling ... The love of sound doctrine that has always been a distinguishing characteristic of evangelicalism has all but disappeared.

II Tim. 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (myths).

Add a dose of mysticism to this mix and you have the recipe for unmitigated spiritual disaster.

THE SPREAD OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Today it is a rare person who has not heard the term contemplative prayer.

Seminary courses in Spiritual Formation proliferate like baby rabbits. Huge numbers are seeking to become certified as Spiritual Directors to answer the cry of multiplied thousands for spiritual direction. And more."

Contemplative prayer is sweeping through evangelicalism and being widely being promoted.

It is difficult to find an influential evangelical leader who is *not* promoting it.

Lighthouse Trails maintains an extensive directory of individuals, influential churches, Bible colleges and seminaries that have capitulated to the contemplative movement.

See LighthouseTrailsResearch.com.

The Grand Valley Baptist Association of Grand Junction, Colorado, has the following contemplative books on its recommended list:

Prayerwalking by Steven Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick

The Celtic Way of Evangelism by George Hunter

Red Moon Rising by Peter Greig and Dave Roberts

SpiritLines Newsletter, a publication of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, unabashedly promotes Roman Catholic mysticism. The newsletter is the voice of their Office of Prayer for Evangelization & Spiritual Awakening, which is led by Wendy Minton Edwards (a "Spiritual Formation Coach"). Consider the themes of issues:

November 2007, Christian Meditation; September and October 2007, Spiritual Retreats;

March 2007, Silence. May 2008 issue> *With Open Hands* by Henri Nouwen,

Spiritual Direction and Meditation by Thomas Merton,

Call to the Center by Basil Pennington, *Beginning Contemplative Prayer* by Kathryn Hermes

In the book *Spiritual Friend* (1980), Edwards said the contemplative prayer movement is "THE WESTERN BRIDGE TO FAR EASTERN SPIRITUALITY" (p. 18).

Question: Is The Labyrinth A Spiritual Walk For The Born-Again Christian?

The use of a labyrinth is quickly spreading and infiltrating much of the Evangelical world.

The labyrinth is a circle with a twisting path that winds its way to the center and is used for prayer and meditation which is the doorway between worlds and the key to the metaphysical.

The labyrinth is an ancient symbol of wholeness with a purposeful path to a journey to our own center and back. It creates a sacred place to "That Which is Within."

This journey to the center of your deepest self broadens your understanding of who you are.

To go "within" is an occult eastern mystical practice using meditation and controlled breathing patterns. To go "within" is to search for one's own divinity. Reaching the center has a symbolic message of enlightenment. Contact with the higher self - inner self- or the search for divinity is the ultimate goal of occultism.

The International Labyrinth Society says it is a "tool for personal, psychological and spiritual transformation."

The World-Wide Labyrinth Project's goal is "to facilitate the transformation of the Human Spirit." [Observe: Human Spirit is capitalized, testifying to the New Age view that man finds divinity within himself.]

The labyrinth is a device designed to bring a person into a higher spiritual realm whether they are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, New Agers, atheists or even so called Christians.

"Regardless of our differences, the labyrinth is a path we can all walk together"

"Most of the practicing New Age occult world has known and still does, that the introduction of the labyrinth prayer walk is a victory for their cause, bringing the unsuspecting Christians into agreement with the overall plan of the Aquarian Age, where those participating in this practice could be captured or ensnared into the ways of Satan."

Used by pagan religions for centuries before the coming of Christ, the labyrinth was "Christianized" by the Roman Catholic Church as part of its desperate search for spirituality apart from the Bible. [These were popular during "the dark ages" for the common person did not have access to the Word of God thus there was no spiritual light or discernment. Christians of that time would walk the labyrinth to aid their contemplative prayer and reflection. The labyrinths fell into disuse, and most were eventually forgotten or destroyed. At the time of the Reformation as people began to have access to the Word of God and were able to be discerning of the spirits, the experiential, empirical, and occult practices fell into disuse or were abandoned as people became obedient to the mandates of Scripture.]

Native Americans called it the Medicine Wheel; Celts called it the Never Ending Circle; it is called the Kabbalah in mystical Judaism.

The most famous labyrinth was built into the floor of the Roman Catholic Chartres Cathedral in France in the 13th century. It has been duplicated at the Riverside Church in New York City and Grace Cathedral (Episcopal) in San Francisco, both hotbeds of theological liberalism and New Age philosophy.

Instructions: Clear your mind and become aware of your breath. Find and honor your own pace on the path, which will often change throughout the three stages of the walk.

Moving around one another is the key to discovering and staying with one's own flow.

The three stages of the labyrinth testify to its paganism. The stages are:

1. Purgation (Releasing) ~ A releasing, a letting go of the details of your life. This is the act of shedding thoughts and distractions; a time to open the heart and quiet the mind.
2. Illumination (Receiving) ~ When you reach the center, stay there as long as you like. It is a place of meditation and prayer. Receive what is there for you to receive.
3. Union (Returning) ~ As you leave, following the same path out of the center as you came in, you enter the third stage, which is joining God, your Higher Power, or the healing forces at work in the world. Each time you walk the labyrinth you become more empowered to find and do the work you feel your soul reaching for.

Proponents of prayer labyrinths speak of using the labyrinth to "become enlightened, realigned with the universe, and increasingly empowered to know one's Self and to accomplish the work of the soul. Nearly all find it (the labyrinth) a powerful tool for discernment, allowing them to be more alert to what God might be trying to say."

God's instructions are already crystal clear... it is time to sit up and pay attention.

Deut. 12:1-3 "These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe to do in the land which the LORD God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth. "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. "You shall tear down their altars and break their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and destroy their name from that place.

Ex. 34:12-13 "Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim.

II Cor. 6:14-16 "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?..."

Warning: Any terms in New Age circles such as enlightenment, Christ Consciousness, breath prayers, new gospel, centering prayers, contemplative prayer are suspect and to be avoided by the Christian.

God forbids His people to associate with heretical and pagan things such as meditation practices, labyrinths, mystical practices and Mary worship.

To break down the walls of separation from error is an exceedingly dangerous thing.

Deut. 32:28 For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.

Jer. 10:2 "Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen..."

Deut. 18:9 Thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of [the] nations.

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord.

Note: Sorceries are also forbidden in the New Testament.

Revelation 18:23 and Galatians 5:19-21 strenuously forbid such practices.

Rom. 16:17 "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

I Cor. 15:33 "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."

Col. 2:8 "Beware lest any man spoil (cheat) you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

II Cor. 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."