

# Degrees of Prayer

## *Meditation*

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ([Proverbs 23:7](#))

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# Motivation of Prayer

- Sincere desire to:
  - Connect with God
  - Overcome sin
  - Be transformed
  - Sacrifice anything to achieve the above goals

# Prayer is Wrestling

- Jacob: “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”
- **St. Augustine** – “Why did Jacob wrestle with Him? Because ‘the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force’ ([Matthew 11:12](#)), Why did he wrestle? In order to take Him by labor; as whatever we get after strife, we hold to it more strongly”
- Perseverance in prayer – overcoming our nature through the Grace of God
- Virtue achieved through prayer vs. Virtue freely given



# Strife in Prayer

Note, They who would enter into the kingdom of heaven must strive to enter; that kingdom suffers a holy violence; self must be denied, the bent and bias, the frame and temper, of the mind must be altered; there are hard sufferings to be undergone, a force to be put upon the corrupt nature; we must run, and wrestle, and fight, and be in an agony, and all little enough to win such a prize, and to get over such opposition from without and from within.

- Matthew Henry

# Prayer is the Weapon

- **Vocal** Prayer
- Uses words and sentences
- Our own words or from a prayer book
- Introduction to a real dialogue with God



# Mental Prayer

## 1. Meditation

Silent Inward prayer of the mind and heart

Focused on the Word of God

Reflection:

Irrational creation – sun, moon, mountains, etc.

Rational creation – Man

Law – The commandments of God

Soul – The eternal spirit of man

Purpose: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

“Know” – deep, abiding, experiential knowledge

Driving vs. passing a written driving test

# Mental Prayer

## 2. Contemplation

Not focused on Scripture

**Meditation** focuses on the written word, while **contemplation** is no longer restricted by it, but relies on the totality of knowledge and insight attained

# Degrees of Prayer

## 1. **Vocal prayer**

Standing before God in fear

“Ask and it shall be given you”

## 2. **Mediation**

Moving toward God in longing

“Seek and you shall find”

## 3. **Contemplation**

Resting in the arms of God in love

“Knock and it will be opened to you”



# Meditation

**Psalm 119:48** - My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, Which I love, And I will **meditate** on Your statutes.

**Psalm 39:3** - My heart was hot within me; While I was musing (**mediating**), the fire burned (within me)...

# Focused on the Bible

- Immersing ourselves in God's Word - all our thoughts become Biblical
- Based on studying and putting Scripture into practice
- Not proper to meditate on anything but the Bible
  - **Meditation** affects our "emotional and intellectual makeup"
  - Should not be "so stamped except by the holy Word of God"
  - Testament to how we are affected by sinful influences
- "Merely **meditating** on the Word of God in quietude and slowness for several times will surely end up inflaming one's heart."

# Focused on the Bible

- Reading the words slowly, audibly, and relishing their meaning
- Goal: The Bible flows spontaneously from our lips
- Man becomes a storehouse for the Word of God
- **Psalm 119:11** - Your word I have hidden in my heart,  
That I might not sin against You.



# Meditate on what?

- Historical – Creation to the end of time
- Legal – Commandments and ordinances of God
- How God deals with His people
- Psalms is a great source of all-inclusive **meditation**
  - Heavenly and earthly creation
  - Law – a lamp to my feet and a light to my path
  - Purity, depression, thanksgiving, youth, old age, etc.

# Spontaneous Prayer

“Spontaneous prayer, in the Orthodox tradition, cannot, therefore be counted as prayer unless man is imbued with the Word of God. He has to be well trained in correct **meditation**.

Otherwise his words will come forth unbiblically, and his words will fall short of expressing the will of God and His thought.”

- Fr. Matthew the Poor

# Spontaneous Prayer

- Agpeya prayers are boring or limiting?
- Actually what is limited is our ability to pray the words with concentration in spirit and truth
- The goal of prayer should be connection with God. The words of the Agpeya are designed to allow just that.

# Benefits of Meditation



“Fervent prayer and meditation burn up the passions and evil thoughts like a consuming fire. It gives wings to the soul, it creates a spiritual mind whose ministry before God is not by the lips but by the spirit” – St. Isaac the Syrian

# Benefits of Meditation

- Our minds have been corrupted by the world
- Seeks to renew the mind to its intended state, allowing us to focus completely on God
- **Romans 12:2** - And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
- To see things as God sees them



# Benefits of **Meditation**

Prayer draws the mind near to God. By means of **meditation** the mind gains the courage to gaze at Him searchingly, and to become purified and sanctified. This is the kind of **meditation** that rules over, which masters all thoughts. The mind is thus illumined by hidden inward mysteries, which inspires it with the knowledge of God.

- St. Isaac the Syrian

# Benefits of Meditation

## Ephesians 3:17-19

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

# Benefits of Meditation

- Keeps our heart warm and aflame with the love of God
- Leads the soul to measure itself against the Gospel.
- Meditation → Contemplation
- Leads to scrutiny of one's virtues (or lack thereof)

# A Monk's Story

A monk went to his master in the morning, sad after a long night he had spent in **meditation** counting the virtues of his fellow monks. He said to his master, "Father, I have wasted the night in vain-sitting the whole night and counting the virtues of brother so and so, and found that they were thirty virtues; and I grew sad, since I found that I own nothing, not even one virtue of them." But his master said, "Your sadness because your soul is void of virtues and your **meditation** on the virtues of another is better than thirty virtues."

# How to Practice Meditation

- How to enter into **meditative** prayer?
- Requires psychological effort and mental concentration
- Relinquish preoccupations with outward affairs
- Conscience must stand alert to combat these preoccupations and identify that they are an obstacle to prayer of the heart and communion with God

# How to Practice Meditation

- When man moves inwardly and willfully to love God, even though somewhat coercively at the beginning, divine love starts to flow immediately.
- This spiritual action happens during spiritual reading – transporting a man from spiritual deadlock to interior depth and prayer
- Man's mind might easily be distracted focusing from one thought or image to another
- It is at this point that we must intentionally and quickly ask God for help so that the divine grace would set us free from distractions

# Practical Steps in Prayer

- Prayer rule – Spiritual father
- Quality vs. Quantity – Not reciting words, but expressing the words from our heart
- Attentiveness – Read the prayer beforehand to be familiar with the words
- Learn prayers by heart
- Private prayers after Agpeya – Ask God's forgiveness for inattention
- Remember God throughout the day:
  - Jesus Prayer
  - Memorize Psalms to recite

# Perseverance in Prayer

- How bad do we want it?
- Zacchaeus & Bartimaeus
- Do we quit at the first sign of resistance and difficulty?
- Do we do the same in other areas of life?
- Would a person with cancer cancel their chemo treatment because they are too busy with work?



## Needs Time to Master

"Only slowly do the rays of the sun drive away the night and usher in a new day, and thus, only slowly does one become a perfect contemplative."

- St. Isidore

# Needs Time to Master

“One should also know that meditation is an art that one needs time to master. However, progress is easy and rapid, though invisible, as it is in all spiritual virtues. The more we progress, the more we feel our deficiency and disability. So much so that when we reach a high point we look around as though we have not made any progress. Such is the action of grace; it hides our progress from our eyes that we might not fall into pride or vanity. Paradoxically, inasmuch as we become more dominated by a feeling of deficiency, we have good reason to believe that we have covered a good distance...But still, we have before us a hill, which we must prepare to surmount.”

- Fr. Matthew the Poor

# The Road Ahead

By what rule or manner can I bind this body of mine? By what precedent can I judge him? Before I can bind him he is let loose, before I can condemn him I am reconciled to him, before I can punish him I bow down to him and feel sorry for him. How can I hate him when my nature disposes me to love him? How can I break away from him when I am bound to him forever? How can I escape from him when he is going to rise with me? How can I make him incorrupt when he has received a corruptible nature? How can I argue with him when all the arguments of nature are on his side?...

# The Road Ahead

...If I try to bind him through fasting, then I am passing judgment on my neighbor who does not fast -- with the result that I am handed over to him again. If I defeat him by not passing judgment I turn proud -- and I am in thrall to him once more. He is my helper and my enemy, my assistant and my opponent, a protector and a traitor. I am kind to him and he assaults me. If I wear him out he gets weak. If he has a rest he becomes unruly. If I upset him he cannot stand it. If I mortify him I endanger myself. If I strike him down I have nothing left by which to acquire virtues. I embrace him. And I turn away from him...

# The Road Ahead

...What is this mystery in me? What is the principle of this mixture of body and soul? How can I be my own friend and my own enemy? Speak to me! Speak to me, my yoke-fellow, my nature! I cannot ask anyone else about you. How can I remain uninjured by you? How can I escape the danger of my own nature? I have made a promise to Christ that I will fight you, yet how can I defeat your tyranny? But this I have resolved, namely, that I am going to master you...

- St. John Climacus

# Summary

- Prayer is struggle
- **Vocal**, **Meditation**,  
**Contemplation**
- Benefits of **Meditation**
- Perseverance in Prayer
- How to Practice **Meditation**

