

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

God is Not Distant - Week 2: Contemplation

1. What was your experience with the prayer practices on Sunday? Did you find any of them particularly helpful or meaningful?
2. How familiar are you with contemplative prayer practices? Are they something you practice regularly? Why or why not?
3. Read 1 Kings 19:11-13. Elijah was on the run from his enemies; he was in despair and had asked God to take his life (v. 4). Some versions translate “quiet whisper” as “silent sound” or “sheer silence.” Why do you think God chose to speak to Elijah that way? What can we learn from that?
4. Take 10 minutes to practice silence in God’s presence together. Set a timer so you do not have to think about it. Choose a “sacred word” that will symbolize your intent and consent to focus only on God during this time. It should be short and not distract you. Something simple like love, God, Jesus, peace will be fine. The word itself is not important—the intent to surrender is what’s important.

Close your eyes and tell God that you are willing to release your whole being in order to be one with God and that you are offering your sacred word to signify your intent. Ask Jesus to help you. Begin by slowly and silently letting the word rest in your mind. This is not a mantra to be repeated, it is only to signify intent, and your word will slowly drift away along with your thoughts. Whenever you notice a thought, emotion or memory, silently and gently offer your prayer word to replace it. Let your thoughts float by—do not be distressed by their presence, just acknowledge them and let them go with the help of your sacred word. Even “spiritual” thoughts or prayers—let them all go and allow God to work in your mind and heart, unencumbered by your “self.” At the end of your time, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a few minutes, allowing your thoughts to return.

Discuss your experience with the group.

5. Enter into an imaginative gospel reading together. Read John 20:24-29 four times, pausing for a few minutes after each reading.
 - The first time through, just listen to the story. Think about where and when it takes place, who is there, and what happens.
 - The second time through, look for more details: What are each of the characters doing and saying? How do they interact? What is the setting like? What is the atmosphere of this story?
 - The third time through, imagine yourself in the scene. What are you doing, thinking and feeling? What are the sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations you notice? What emotions do you experience?

- During the final reading, experience the events unfolding. When the reading ends, let the story continue to unfold within you, in your imagination, mind and heart. What will you say to Jesus?

Discuss your experience with the group.

6. How might you add contemplative prayer into your daily or weekly routine?

Practice for the week: Contemplative prayer practices

Set aside time this week to explore one or more of the contemplative practices posted to the Cedar Ridge website. Go to www.crc.org/resources-materials/ and select "Meditations" and then "Everyday Meditations." Alternatively, go to: tinyurl.com/yhnnxp4 or scan the QR code below.

