

Spiritual Disciplines
Philippians 4:4-8
Meditation
7.19.20

Jerry Stiller passed away on May 11, 2020.

He's known, among other things, for playing
George Costanza's father, Frank
In the largely popular sitcom *Seinfeld*.

When Frank's wife, Estelle, gets on Frank's case
His knee-jerk reaction is to start yelling.

Following his rant, he yells,
Serenity, serenity now!

George finally asks him why he says that.

His dad says he heard it once on a self-help recording.

He says it is to help keep his blood pressure down
When he gets angry.

George pauses and then he asks
"But do you have to yell it?"

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We all need a self-help recording
To cope with the stress and anxiety
Of living in these days!

We could all do with a little serenity.

It has been quite the year, hasn't it?

With the ongoing threat of Covid 19

The juggling of work from home

Our children's safe return to school

The lack of social interaction

Systemic racism and violence

Feelings of loneliness, isolation and depression

Our stress and anxiety levels are reaching peak levels.

How do we cope?

How do we get through it?

How do we find strength?

How do we find peace?

How do we find encouragement?

Well, look no further!

Start practicing the spiritual disciplines.

Through them, you will find the peace of God.

Now don't think practicing spiritual disciplines

Will turn you into a monk, mystic or minister.

It might!

And don't think practicing spiritual disciplines

Will make you a religious fanatic.

Spiritual disciplines are tools to help be better equipped
To cope with the stresses of daily living.

Spiritual disciplines can make us better people.

Through them, we experience God's grace and peace.

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Our society thrives on superficiality.

We are not pushed to think too deeply about anything!

If it can't be said in 200 words or less
It's better not to say it at all.

And certainly our Adversary
Doesn't want us probing too deeply
Into the recesses of our souls.

Afraid we might find him in control
Instead of the One we profess to follow.

The spiritual disciplines puts God in control of our lives.

And in them, we discover a joy-filled, purposeful life
A life in harmony with our Master's.

Over the course of the next few weeks
We will look at each of twelve spiritual disciplines.

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Richard Foster in his book
Celebration of Discipline
Identifies 12 spiritual disciplines.

1. Inward Disciplines
 - a. Meditation
 - b. Prayer
 - c. Fasting
 - d. Study
2. Outward Disciplines
 - a. Simplicity
 - b. Solitude
 - c. Submission
 - d. Service
3. Corporate Disciplines
 - a. Confession
 - b. Worship
 - c. Guidance
 - d. Celebration.

I'd like add one more to the list, Stewardship.

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Today, we look at meditation.

The psalmist writes,

Psalm 119:148 NRSV My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may meditate on your promise

When I think of meditation

I usually think of the eastern mystics
And their style of meditation.

As I understand it

They seek to empty themselves of all thought

But Christian meditation is the opposite.

It seeks to fill the mind with Christ.

According to Bible scholar and preacher J. I. Packer
In his book, "Knowing God;"

Meditation is, *"the activity of calling to mind, thinking over, dwelling on, and applying to oneself the various things one knows about the works and ways and purpose and promises of God."*

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When we choose to follow Jesus
How do we learn to live a Christ-filled, Christ-like life?

Our pastors tell us to go to church regularly
Read our Bibles
And behave like good Christians.

All well and good!

But how do we find the strength and courage
And how do we experience the peace and joy
Promised when we receive Christ as Savior?

Much of it comes through the joy of our salvation.

The rest of it takes intent, discipline
And the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we meditate we fill our mind with the things of God
We begin to experience God's presence.

And God's presence always brings peace.

The more God fills the more we become.

Let me say it another way . . .

What we think about, we become!

Think about Christ . . . become like Christ!

The Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, wrote

*Watch your thoughts, they become words
watch your words, they become actions
watch your actions, they become habits
watch your habits, they become character
watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.*

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To be a better person

Better able to cope with the stressors of today
We start with the heart and soul.

It is there where true transformation takes place.

Paul writes

Romans 7:15 (ESV) For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

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Meditation helps to integrate

Our inner self with our outer self.

It brings us before the grace of God

Giving God the chance to transform us.

According to Richard Foster

There are three methods of Christian meditation.

The first is *Lectio Divina*,

Lectio Divina is Latin for divine word.

Foster writes

The meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you (p. 29).

As people of the Book

We believe the Holy Scriptures has the potential
To reveal the presence of God.

For example:

Let's say you meditate on the words of Christ;
Peace I leave you . . . (John 14:27a).

You do not need to know the context of these words
Nor why Jesus said them.

You're after what he is offering . . . peace!

In *Lectio Divina*,

You take a passage, a psalm, a saying of Jesus

And ponder the words over and over

With the expectation that God means them for you.

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Foster calls another Christian meditation *centering*.

Centering is when we sit in silence, still before God
And listen for that “still, small voice.”

Try this: close your eyes
Place your palms down

And imagine giving something to God
That burdens you.

Something like, “God, I give you my anger.”
Or, “God, take away my obsessions.”

Release it to God by placing your palms away from you.

Now turn your palms up
Symbolizing your desire to receive God.

Something like: “God give me patience.”
Or, “Give me peace.”

And spend the next moments, palms up, in silence.

Don't do as Frank Castanza did and yell out
Serenity! Serenity now!

I don't think it's going to work that way!

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A third kind of Christian meditation
Is to enjoy God's creation.

This is not worshiping the trees and rocks and things,
But worshiping the Creator who created them.

**Psalm 19:1 ESV The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**

This kind of meditation comes easiest for me
For I enjoy being in the out of doors.

I enjoy quiet places.
I enjoy wild places.

I find serenity in nature
The sights, the sounds, and the smells.

Here's a thing to do.

If it is a clear night, take the opportunity
To go out and away from the light pollution
And take a look into the sky.

See the glory of the heavens.

And if you do it soon
You might see the comet NEOWISE.

It is in the northwest part of the sky
An hour after sunset.

You had better see it now.

Because, it won't be back for 7,000 years.

All the research points to the fact
That spending time in nature
Is good for the soul.

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So how do we do it?

How do we meditate?

You need to locate a few things
Before you attempt meditation.

Silence, solitude, time and no interruptions.

I know, right?

You need to be intentional about setting the time and place.

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With the meditations of Lectio Divina and centering,
You need to be in a comfortable position.

I would suggest a straight-back chair
Where you can sit comfortably.

Just sit in the quiet of the moment
And seek to slow the mind of its racing thoughts

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In meditating on God's creation
Choose a walk through the woods or by the lake.

Climb a mountain just for the view.

Sit and watch the surf
Or the sunrise over the Atlantic.

Don't think about anything,
But what is immediately around you.

Use all of your senses!

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With any of these meditations
I don't guarantee immediate success.

It takes practice.

After all, that's why it's Spiritual DISCIPLINES.

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In a world trying to keep us distracted
Trying to keep us on the superficial
Trying to preoccupy us

We have the opportunity
In the slower pace of our pandemic days
To find time to connect with God.

Yes, please attend our online services
Yes, read your Bible
Yes, live and act like a Christian.

But to find the grace, strength and courage for daily living
Reach into your soul and discover God's presence.

There you will find everything you need.

My advice? Begin . . .

Begin with a word or two from today's passage

As translated in "The Message;"

Philippians 4:8 (MSG)

⁸⁻⁹ Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

Don't yell is like Frank Costanza
Whisper it over and again

Serenity now! In Jesus name. Amen.