

# Faith Formation Contemplation Praying in the Moment

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## Praying in the Moment

- Contemplation vs. Meditation
- Centering Prayer, Thomas Keating, OSB
- Taize Prayer, Creighton University Campus Ministry
- Walking with God, audio mediation from PathwaystoGod.org and Pray-as-you-go.org
- Contemplative Prayer at St. Ignatius, 1st & 3rd Mondays via Zoom (See bulletin)

## Contemplation vs. Meditation

During a recent online retreat one of the retreatants asked the director, "What's the difference between Contemplation and Meditation?" Many seem to use the words interchangeably but there is a distinct difference in focus. Contemplation asks us to "stay in the scene" while Meditation asks us to "be more mentally active." What might that mean?

If one is a stargazer, you might just lay on a hillside gazing out at the awe inspiring display of light and color. Simply being there in the moment is contemplation. Even when one takes in the number, trajectory, velocity and origin of stars and galaxies, this is contemplation

as long as one stays in the state of awe and wonder. If I begin to leave that and argue various theories of the origin of the universe, I'm leaving contemplation (the moment) to engage in intellectual activity outside the moment.

A better example might be one where I were to attend a wedding of a good friend. If I stay in the moment and sit with the love of the couple, God's presence, even the community of believers, we're still contemplating. But if I begin to make value judgements and think those shoes don't go with the dress, that music is inappropriate, the minister is droning on, well then I've left the moment and cease contemplating.

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## Becoming More Attentive.

As noted above, entering into contemplation does not mean that we enter into a void, a distancing of ourselves from the world. It may require us to let go of various things that distract us from our intended focus. For example, we won't try to contemplate the Nativity while sitting in front of the evening news. Yet, for many of us, setting up a

contemplative environment might include adding sounds like a running stream or a gentle piano accompaniment.

If you never noticed, we are embodied people. Sometimes we have to give our hands something to do as we sort through the days graces and flaws. While some may enter into this kind of contemplative state while knitting

or performing mundane chores, it is also possible to become more contemplative while walking or even jogging.

Noting this kind of need for help settling in or settling down, experience has shown that some are helped by repetitive chant, a certain song or even a walking prayer space like the Labyrinth.

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(Continued from "Becoming more Attentive")

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Finding God in All Things

If you find yourself distracted and something like Centering Prayer has not been fruitful, you may wish to consider trying Taizé. Taizé Prayer is a simple, contemplative form of worship, calling us to dwell deeply on Christ's presence around and within us. (Creighton) Mantra songs (like "Jesus, Remember Me"), prayerful silence, and short readings guide the focus of the prayer in a candle-lit environment. Creighton University's Campus ministry offers some virtual options for you to try this prayer practice. <https://www.creighton.edu/ministry/campusministry/ws/taizeprayer/>.

If you are someone who needs to be engaged in an activity, you may wish to try "Walking with God." This is more of a meditative exercise (i.e. more intellectual activity and reflection) however it does open one's self to a colloquy (conversation with God) about what is happening in your life. It is very intentional, that is, being in the moment, noticing what is around you and how that stirs your soul. Yet for many of us, this kind of walk with a trusted friend can lead to very deep conversations. In this case, a deep conversation with God, which is one fruit of prayer.

You may wish to check out the page "Walking with God—a Prayer Guide." <https://www.pathwaystogod.org/resources/walking-god-prayer-guide>. It offers a 40 minute guided audio meditation that you can try at home or take with you on a walk.

## More on Contemplation (Continued)

This is not to say that Contemplation is better than Meditation, it is to simply note the difference. There will be times when one is asked to stay in the moment and times when you might be asked to make judgements and/or apply lessons to one's own life. However, such judgements and/or lessons might, at times, be a distraction from what is important. For instance, to sit with a friend in the hospital dying from lung cancer requires a certain amount of presence, of being in the moment. Now is not the time to make judgements about lifestyle choices of the patient. That is for a different time and place.

Being in the moment and letting go of distractions takes practice. Thomas Keating introduced a type of prayer known as Centering Prayer which practices this "being in the moment" and "letting go" of distractions. See <http://www.centeringprayer.com>. This practice of attention is good not only for prayer but for the ability to "be

in the moment" with family and friends, letting go of the distractions that keeps us from paying close attention.

Rose Meyler describes Centering Prayer as a prayer of receptivity, acknowledging and affirming God's presence within us, a letting go of thoughts that take us away from our intention of receiving God's love. When we get engaged with these thoughts, we simply come back to our intention. She is part of a local group that offers Intentional Prayer (a combination of Centering Prayer followed by Lectio Divina) <https://www.centeringprayer.net/IntentionalPrayerGroup>. Rose also offers her help and advice for those who wish to start a practice of Centering Prayer with a group from Loyola. See the bulletin for more information.

Back to Contemplation. Being in the moment is not a stripping of our selves to a bare minimum. Quite the opposite. To immerse ourselves in a contemplative moment can engage all

the senses as well as the imagination. Looking at the stars "whirl" about us on a summer night might include an awareness of our own movement through the heavens, a sense of our weight, our own radiance. We might even recall a musical piece that heightens our awareness of a sense of dance or a sense of God.

Then again, there is always time later for us to reflect on an experience and meditate on its meaning. Ignatian Contemplation will ask us first to "enter into the scene", to pay attention to detail and to our reactions and later bring these to God in colloquy or dialogue. It may be very much like pulling out an old photo album and going through the stories from the pictures there. We really do gain a lot from this kind of "standing back" and sharing after the moment.