

**February 7, 2010 Philippians 4:6-7 “Prayer: C. S. I.” by Richard Boatman**

Recently we visited Caleb’s school and I was wandering the hallways. I came upon an art display presented by the junior high students. It was entitled “Go Van Gogh.” Each piece of art was of the same scene. I perused the various pieces and looked at the names of the youthful artists. One really stood out. This kid’s talent was well above all the rest. I committed his name to memory. When back with Larae I told her about the art display and asked her if she knew a boy at school named Vincent, because he is one talented young artist. She said, “That would be Vincent Van Gogh.” It hit me. This was a copy of Van Gogh’s original... *Vincent Van Gogh*. No wonder it was displayed in the middle. I guess it would be head-and-shoulders above the rest!

To understand the spiritual disciplines—prayer, meditation, study, fasting, worship, solitude, etc.—we need to understand God’s desire to paint his original image on our broken soul, in other words, to make us truly human—spirit, soul and body. For nearly three hundred years after the ascension of Christ, the Church had undergone persecution ranging from systemic bias to unspeakable acts of evil. But as terrible as persecution was, it actually had the effect of purifying the believers making them incredibly strong and bold and fit in the faith. However, after the Edict of Milan in A.D. 314, it became illegal to persecute Christians. This soon morphed into a privileged status for being a Christian. If one was not a believer, it became more-and-more difficult to “get ahead” in the Roman Empire. All kinds of spurious folks flooded into the Church, baptized in order to gain position in the new society. The Church that had been an impassioned force now became deluded and political.

Many of the sincere believers started heading to the deserts, literally, in order to escape the temptations of affluence and the seduction of mediocrity. In the place of persecution, they began developing disciplined communities that practiced a regiment of prayer, meditation, study, fasting, etc.—the spiritual disciplines. These disciplines came to be understood as means by which God used to paint his original image upon the canvas of our hearts and minds.

So what are the spiritual disciplines? Here are three definitions: “[They are] attitudes and actions that God sees fit to use as ordinary, normal channels to convey grace and to mature our lives.” –Steve Harper “The spiritual disciplines are pointed toward spiritual formation—and transformation... spiritual formation [is] a pattern, a series of concrete actions that will gently move us toward transformation in Christ. The disciplines themselves, however, are not transformative. The

transformation in us is God's work." –Richard Foster "[A spiritual] discipline is any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort." –Dallas Willard

Methodism's founder, John Wesley—a Type *A* personality who arose at 4 a.m. every day to pray two hours—said of the disciplines: "O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises.... Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days."

I thought it important to couch prayer in the context of the broader spiritual disciplines, prayer being a major brush stroke the Lord uses to restore us. Notice, *restore* and not merely *redeem*. Christ redeemed us from destruction in order to restore us *and* the entire planet to the original design. It is the difference in being delivered from Egypt to being empowered to claim the Promised Land.

Many weeks ago, Clarence Perrin brought me a small, used snow blower as a gift. He didn't need it anymore and knew I didn't have one. He worked-and-worked to show me how to start it. Finally, after many tries, it ran. When the first snow arrived I went out to start it up. Nothing. I tried and tried, but the small machine remained resolved in its defiance. I came back a few more times, always with the same result. Thankfully Bob Smith came over with his snow blower (as he often has) and got our driveway and sidewalks cleared. The *Toro* sat in my garage for the next few weeks, looking good but with no power to deal with snow. I mentioned to Tom Moore that I was going to take it over to *J. R.'s Auction & Repair* to see if he could fix it. Tom said, "Bring it down to my garage. My dad and I ran a small engines business for three years." Within two or three days, Tom had my snow blower up and running. It was just before another snow. I awakened at 6 a.m. with anticipation. I wanted to try out the *Toro*, but I didn't want to wake the neighbors. Finally, at around 6:50 a.m. I headed for the garage, feeling a lot like *Home Improvement's* Tim Allen...uh, uh, uh, uh! She started like a charm, and within minutes my driveway was clear. My *Toro* was no longer just redeemed to a place of safety in my garage; now it had power. Now it was doing that for which it had been created by its designer to do!

So what is prayer as we think of it within this process of redemption AND restoration, deliverance *from sin* and power *to live* in Christ? Philippians 4:6-7: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by **prayer** and **supplication** with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God that passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

There are three related and overlapping movements in prayer...Prayer: C. S. I. – *Communion, Supplication and Intercession*. Paul said, "...but in everything, by prayer **and** supplication..." Supplication means petition or specific requests. Notice *prayer* precedes *petition*. I believe Paul is referring to communing prayer, prayer that is centered in Christ, listening inwardly to the Spirit's witness or guidance. In Acts 9:40, Tabitha had died. Peter was brought in the room. The verse says, "Peter sent them all out of the room [just like Jesus had]; then he got down on his knees and prayed." Then it says, "and turning toward the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes...and sat up." It could be argued that Peter's first movement was to get into a place of discerning God's direction and directive.

I believe we often pray prayers of supplication or petition too quickly, before we have gained a sense of God. Jesus' own pattern gives us the importance of finding a place of inner quiet before making decisions. Listen to these verses: Matthew 14:13 – *Now when Jesus heard [of John the Baptist's death], He withdrew from there in a boat, to a solitary place by himself.* Matthew 14:23 – *And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.* Mark 1:35 – *And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a solitary place, and was praying there.* Luke 4:42 – *And when day came, He departed and went to a solitary place.* Luke 6:12 – *And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.*

In John's gospel Jesus said, "I only say that which I hear the Father say," and "I only do that which I see the Father do." It seems that communing prayer was his lifeline for such revelation to come. Beloved, if Jesus needed prayer—communing, listening, discerning prayer—we can live with nothing less.

Breath prayers are a simple method for centering that assist us in communing with God. (When we lived in Ogden, Larae had a list of responsibilities taped on the bathroom wall. A visitor saw it and commented to Larae how nice an idea that was for Caleb. Larae said, "It's not for Caleb; it's for my husband." I need it simple and spelled out...talk slowly and draw pictures if you can!) Breath prayers may seem pretty simplistic, but historically the Church has used them for this very purpose of communing prayer. Breath prayers are usually made up of two short phrases—one said mentally while slowly inhaling; the other said while slowly exhaling. Here are a few examples: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." "Shepherd of my soul, guide my life today." "Holy Spirit of God, fill me with your presence." "Precious Father, you are the giver of life." Find a solitary place—a car, chair, pew, bedroom—and practice God's presence. Slow *down* and center *in* God's life.