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A couple of weeks ago, Doyt introduced the Contemplative Tradition. If you recall, this tradition is one of six discussed in the Devotional Classics which is being used by many of you in your small groups. The six traditions are the Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical and Incarnational. Each of these traditions focus on a specific nature of Jesus' life. The devotionals in the book are from various Christians throughout the history of the church who wrote specifically on their experiences in one of these traditions.

When I first read these devotionals I came away with both a sense of inspiration but also a sense of weariness. On the one hand, these devotionals were from people who shared their struggles in discovering a spiritual path which I could relate to. But on the other hand, it seemed that each of these writers presented an extreme and radical (at least for me) process to get to that relationship with God. For every Thomas Merton, or Catherine of Genoa, there are countless of other Christians

who will never experience what these writers, apologists, priests, saints, theologians and philosophers went through.

So then, what is the purpose in reading these devotionals. For me, it was simply to put into perspective Christ's life and how these writers have exchanged their self-focused lives for that of a Christ-focused life and in so doing, found truth and a purpose for their being here on earth.

I am never going to be a saint, or a theologian, or a priest, or any of the roles these writers played, but by reading and reflecting on their struggles and discoveries, I get a sense of support. A sense of direction. A sense of purpose for accepting a Christian lifestyle.

The Contemplative Tradition has emphasized the fact that Jesus spent a good part of his time praying, in solitude. Prayer was a habitual practice and is what opened him up so completely to the presence of the Divine. This has been best captured by that famous prayer in Gethsemane: "Not my will but yours."

The contemplative tradition plays out the notion of "falling in love." It's about falling in love with God, or an intimacy with God.. Entering into God's great love for us and our responding love toward God is its abiding gift. Love is not some warm feeling or an abstract ideal. It is clear-headed action toward God and others rooted in Jesus' own sense of living for

others. The prayer-filled life is a deep inward movement that opens up into profound acts of love.

Now when Doyt was showing this slide, he played a game with you to see if you could identify the various authors in the Contemplative section of the book. Many of you could identify Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen (norven). I think some of you were also able to identify Julian of Norwich (that was impressive). But the others were not so easy to identify except the last one, Martin Luther who I think everyone was able to pick out in this line up. Why was that?

Martin Luther is a character larger than life. He is the “stuff” that legends are made of . On account of his rhetorical style and flare for the dramatic over-statement, stories about what Martin Luther said or did have typically been amplified as they are passed down through time. An example of this is a statement attributed to Martin Luther, but never actually found in his writings: “I have so much to do that if I didn’t spend at least three hours a day in prayer, I would never get it all done.”

We are still in the throes of celebrating the 500th anniversary of the nailing of his 95 Theses and even if modern writers are sometimes given to exaggeration, there is indeed extensive evidence to suggest that Luther was a very powerful influence on the nature and practice of

prayer. His influence is very much with us today as we practice a prayerful life.

So last week, we reflected on Thomas Merton's' humility and quietness, we are going to now look at Luther's focus on specifics such as what to pray for or being earnest in prayer. All these writers in the Contemplative section, developed unique praying habits and by studying these habits, or exercises, we can develop our personal contemplative style. But the initial instruction on prayer comes from Jesus himself in his instructions to his disciples as recorded in Matthew and Luke.

So, let's start with just some facts.

Martin Luther was an academic and religious figure who was strongly against the corruption of the Catholic church in the 16th century. Around this time, the church was heavily involved in the politics of the Holy Roman Empire and was pushing the practice of selling indulgences to raise money that was sent to Rome. This practice was getting a lot of pushback from the German principalities including Saxony where Martin Luther came from.



Reforming the church had begun way before Martin Luther, but Luther's Theses and the availability of the printing press, along with Luther's personality, made him the primary catalyst for what has become one of the most significant movements in Western Civilization.

1. We know Luther was born in 1483 in Eislebad (near Leipzig) which is where he died in 1546.
2. Nailing 95 Theses - the story goes that Luther stormed up to the Castle Church in Wittenberg, hammer in hand, and nailed his incendiary document to the front door. While this is a fittingly forceful image for the start of a religious movement, most Luther scholars have agreed that there is little evidence to suggest such a dramatic gesture ever took place. Luther himself seemed unclear on what he specifically did to spread his 95 Theses other than to send them to the local archbishop.
3. Name change – The name “Martin Luther” is known throughout the Christian world, just like that of his namesake, Martin Luther King Jr. But both of these iconic figures changed their names. Martin Luther was originally Martin Luder while Martin Luther King Jr was born Michael King Jr.
4. Near death experience – there is something about near death experiences and life changing conversions. Luther's father planned for him to study law. At age 21 he was caught up in a large electrical storm and in his fear of perishing, he prayed to St Anne, to save his life,

promising to become a monk if he survived. He survived, and, to his credit, followed up on his promise by becoming an Augustinian monk.

5. He had a big influence on how we celebrate Christmas today. Before the Reformation, children in Germany often received presents on December 6th, the day of St Nicholas. Meanwhile, Jesus' birth was not specifically celebrated at all, as the day of Epiphany, on January 6th, was the main day of celebration. Luther was against St Nicholas being so particularly revered, so over time St Nicholas' day lost more and more of its importance in the Protestant faith. In its place, the birth of Christ began to be celebrated which led to the modern celebration of Christmas Eve in Germany and many other European countries.

6. Friendly kidnapped – After publishing the Theses, Luther was called to Rome to answer for his heresy. When he did not comply, he was excommunicated and brazenly burned the papal bull which announced his excommunication. But, in 1521, he was called to the Diet of Worms where an assembly of church and political leaders met in the presence of the Holy Roman Emperor, to explain himself and his emerging theology. This is where he stood in front of the Emperor and said his most famous lines “Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me, God.” His mentor, Fredrick the Wise assumed Luther wasn't going to come out of this Diet unpunished, so he arranged for a group of his knights to “kidnap” Luther and hid him until things calmed down a bit.

7. Translated the NT into German – while things were calming down, Luther decided what the German people needed was the New Testament in their own language. So, in about two weeks, he translated the entire NT from Greek into German.

8. One Catholic tradition Luther opposed was celibacy in priests and in 1525 he married Katharina von Bora, an ex-Cistercian nun. He met her while helping a group of 12 nuns who wanted to leave that order as a result of the reformation. In this case, 11 of the nuns were either returned to their families or found husbands. The one remaining nun was none other than Katharina. Luther has written that he initially never felt an attraction to her, so she took matters (some would say desperately took matters) in her own hands and proposed marriage to Luther, to which he said 'OK'. As it turns out, it was one of his best decisions. She was the glue that kept his family and movement together. At times, his household included their own eleven children, a refugee family of four, a number of orphans, visitors and a small staff.

9. Vulgarity – Surprisingly for a man of God with such aggressive faith in his convictions, Luther is known to have expressed himself with crude and sometimes downright vulgar statements. While I don't want to repeat his potty-talk in front of this group, see me afterwards if you are curious.

These facts just point to the fact that Luther was human. And being human, he had all the frailties, temptations, crudeness – either in

thought or action – that we all have. And in spite of this, he journeyed through life with unusual piety especially when it came to the topic of prayer.



Martin Luther saw prayer as crucial to human life, a life created by the relationship to God. In this relationship God starts a conversation, communicating God's words of law and promise. Prayer is a part of the human response to God's speaking, a response itself shaped by the words of command and promise. Luther thought that God's promise to hear prayer defines both the nature of God and the nature of the human relationship to God, as well as the human approach to life. Luther's comments and instructions on prayer permeated his work. Luther sought to build a Bible-centric prayer practice that reflected the key insights of his theology. Humans respond to God's actions in law and promise when they pray regularly, forthrightly, honestly, and frequently. Freedom in Christ sets humans free to use prayer practices that help them to do this.



The sources for the Devotional were compiled from three primary sources and demonstrate Luther's insight into the subject of prayer. Remember, Luther was first and foremost a pastor who sincerely believed his role was to instruct, to nurture and to motivate his followers

through all the uncertainties of the Reformation, especially in its early years.

For Luther, prayer is rooted in the Bible and of utmost importance. This should not come as surprise because, central to Luther's ideas for reforming the church was to put the Bible in the people's hands. Luther recognizes that prayer is hard work. Luther, the reformer, seeks to instruct those around him in a gentle, humble, constructively practical manner so that prayer will really begin to change the lives of God's people – just like it is supposed to do.

Central to Luther's position in prayer is that prayers get answered. Most of his efforts as a pastor in teaching his congregants as well as in his personal life, was to show a discipline towards praying that was personal, communicative and humble. In the Devotional, Luther writes first about the three types of praying:

- Supplication –In “supplication” we strengthen prayer and make it effective by a certain form of persuasion.” An example of this is Paul urging “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God” or when Paul says, “I.. entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”
- Petition – “Petitioning” is stating what we have at heart, naming the desire we express in prayer and supplication. In the Lord's Prayer are seven petitions (who knows the seven petitions? 1) “Hallowed by thy



name...”, 2) “Your Kingdom come”, 3) “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”, 4) Give us this day our daily bread”, 5) “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us”, 6) “Lead us not into temptation”, 7) “But deliver us from evil”. Christ says, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth.

- Thanksgiving – “In “thanksgiving” we recount blessings received and thus strengthen our confidence and enable ourselves to wait trustingly for what we pray.”



For discussion



Martin Luther once wrote that “praying is like breathing in and breathing out...breathing in knowledge of God as I am reading Scripture and breathing out praise. When Jesus gave us instructions to pray, He said: “But when you pray, go into your inner room, shut your door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not babble on like pagans, for they think that by their many words they will be heard. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him”

In the Devotional, there were three main points Luther raises around praying with expectations.

- Unceasing Prayer – “There is no Christian who does not have time to pray without ceasing. I mean spiritual praying, that is: no one is so heavily burdened with his labor, but that if he will he can, while working, speak with God in his heart, lay before Him his need and that of other men, ask for help, make petition, and in all this exercise and strengthen his faith.” **What do you think this means?**
- Praying in Faith – this is the title of the Devotional and is key to Luther’s points on praying. “Prayer is a special exercise of faith. Faith makes the prayer acceptable because it believes that either the prayer will be answered, or that something better will be given instead. This is why James says, ‘Let him who asks of God not waver in faith, for if he wavers, let him not think that he shall receive anything from the Lord.’ This is a clear statement which says directly: he who does not trust will receive nothing, neither that which he asks nor anything better.”
- Laying the Need or not prescribing the answer – “From this it follows that the one who prays correctly never doubts that their prayer will be answered, even if the very thing for which one prays is not given. For we are to lay our need before God in prayer but not prescribe to God a measure, manner, time, or place. We must leave that to God, for he may wish to give it to us in another, perhaps better, way than we think is best. Frequently we do not know what to pray as St Paul

says in Romans, and we know that God’s ways are above all that we can ever understand, as he says in Ephesians. Therefore, we should have no doubt that our prayer is acceptable and heard, and we must leave to God the measure, manner, time and place , for God will surely do what is right.”



For discussion



Whether it is through his writings or his sermons and teaching on prayer, Luther certainly carried and shared a rich understanding of a “deep and abiding” relationship with God. Whether you consider yourself contemplative or the entire idea is brand new to you, we can all learn from Luther as we yearn for our own “deep and abiding” relationship with God. And remember, Martin Luther was just a human like you and me on a spiritual journey. The big difference between him and us is that he found a way to share his journey to generations of Christians since the Reformation.

And now for your homework assignment: