

## HESYCHIA: PRAYER OF THE HEART

In Mark 6:31 Jesus said to his disciples, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” In response to this command of Jesus, some Christians from the Eastern Orthodox tradition developed a spiritual practice called *hesychia* (derived from the Greek ησυχια).

*Hesychia* means “rest” or “stillness.” This is not the rest of sleep or relaxation, but rather the soul’s rest from both external and internal distractions. *Hesychia* refers to a quality of stillness, quietness and attentiveness. David describes *hesychia* in Psalm 131:1-2:

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

There is a natural progression in *hesychia*:

### 1. SOLITUDE

(separation from others) —

In solitude we disconnect from the endless series of activities, social engagements, entertainment, distractions and diversions of normal social life *so that we might be alone with God*.

### 2. SILENCE

(Refraining from speech) — Silence means quieting both our inner and outer

worlds *so that we might listen to God*.

3. ATTENTIVENESS — Solitude and silence are most effective when you use a passage of Scripture, a meaningful line of a hymn or an attribute of God to focus your thoughts.

*Hesychia* culminates in an active and creative silence of the heart (“prayer of the heart”). A familiar Biblical image of *hesychia* is Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus in rapt attention and adoration as she listened to her Lord (Luke 10:39).

## SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR CULTIVATING HESYCHIA:

✿ Come into the presence of the Lord. Seek His presence through prayer and worship. In the beginning, ask only for the Lord’s presence and fellowship. You may want to sing the Doxology or a favorite hymn or chorus. Some may want to pray the Lord’s Prayer. Allow the beauty and wonder of God’s creation to draw you into God’s presence.

✿ Choose one or more of the Scripture texts below (or chose one of your own) to focus your mind and heart on your heavenly Father. Read the chosen text(s) slowly and meditatively. You may want to read them out loud to hear the rhythm and cadence of the words. Allow the text to shape your thoughts. Listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking through the text.

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♣ Release any distracting thoughts that come to mind. If this is difficult, write your thought down so that you can return to it after the retreat. When your mind begins to wander, return to your chosen Scripture text.

♣ Focus periodically on your breathing. Allow the rhythm of your breathing to relax your body and mind. If you are tired or sleepy, take a short walk or give yourself permission take a nap. Maybe the thing you need most right now is physical rest. That's okay. Return to prayer when you wake up.

♣ After a while, ask God to bring to mind anything in your life that you are clinging to that is keeping you from fully trusting Him:

- a. Maybe there is a sin that needs confession and forgiveness.
- b. Maybe you have a hurt that needs His healing touch.
- c. Maybe there is a broken relationship that you need to release to God.
- d. Maybe there is a fear that you need to surrender.
- e. Maybe there is anger that you need to release.
- f. Maybe there is a situation in which you need to relinquish control.
- g. Maybe there is a risk in faith that God is asking you to take.
- h. Maybe there is a step of obedience that you have been resisting.

♣ Allow at least 30 minutes of silence to just listen for the gentle whisper of God.

## SCRIPTURE TEXTS FOR REFLECTION AND MEDITATION:

NRS PSALM 46:10

“Be still, and know  
that I am God!

NLT PSALM 131:1

LORD, my heart is not  
proud; my eyes are not  
haughty. I don't concern  
myself with matters too  
great or awesome for me.  
2 But I have stilled and  
quieted myself, just as a  
small child is quiet with its  
mother. Yes, like a small  
child is my soul within me.

NLT MATTHEW II:28

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls.

NRS JOHN 6:35

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.



Solitude and silence are a means to quiet your own heart – to lay aside the cares and anxieties of everyday existence to focus your entire being on God. The goal of solitude and silence are to create a quiet space in the heart in order to be present with and attentive to the Lord. It is in this place of quiet stillness that we hear the “still, small voice” or “gentle whisper” of the Lord (1 Kings 19:12).

