



Week 1: Contemplative Rhythms for an Exhausted Life

Overview

We will spend 10 weeks discussing the theology and practices associated with five values: 1) *Contemplative rhythms for an exhausted life.* 2) *Racial reconciliation for a divided world.* 3) *Interior examination for a world living on the surface.* 4) *Sexual wholeness for a culture that splits bodies from souls.* 5) *Missional presence for a distracted and disengaged people.*

This week we are discussing contemplative rhythms for an exhausted life.

We often live on the brink of burnout. We need a spirituality that roots us in a way to be present to God so we can avoid the superficiality of our age. We have much to learn from the monastics who, like Jesus, live an orderly life of prayer, silence, and solitude. We need the kind of rhythms that allow us to slow down and pull back so that we can re-enter the world as instruments of peace.

Introduction

Let's begin by introducing ourselves. Be open to yourself, to God, and to the people in your group. It is ok if you feel a little bit uncomfortable. Just know you are invited to be as vulnerable as you would like to be.

As a group let's commit ourselves to these guidelines:

1. Speak only for yourself, use "I" statements
2. Keep your sharing to 2-3 minutes, give room for others to share
3. No fixing, saving, or setting other people straight
4. Trust and learn from silence, there is no pressure to share
5. Observe confidentiality, what is said in the group stays in the group

Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow *love*; where there is injury, *pardon*; where there is doubt, *faith*; where there is despair, *hope*; where there is darkness, *light*; and where there is sadness, *joy*.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as *to console*; to be understood as *to understand*; to be loved as *to love*. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

For Starters

After the following paragraph is read aloud, complete the questions below on your own and then be ready to share some of your thoughts with the group.

In the beginning of Chapter 1, Rich writes, *“Our lives can easily take us to the brink of burnout. The pace we live at is often destructive. The lack of margin is debilitating. We are worn out. In all of this, the problem before us is not just the frenetic pace we live at but that gets pushed out from our lives as a result; that is, life with God.”*

1. Have you experienced the burnout, or near burnout, that Rich mentions? What was that experience like?
2. What are the factors that lead to a hurried life? In other words, why are people so busy in general? What caused you to lead a busy life?
3. Is the current pace of your life sustainable for the next 10, 20, or 30 years?

Let's Talk

Review the five guidelines for our discussion.

1. What are some of the pros and some of the cons of the rapid pace of modern life?
2. Rich described that when he first encountered monastic spirituality at a weekend retreat, there were times of “sheer boredom and dread.” How do you feel when you imagine practicing things like silence and solitude?
A. Excited B. Fearful C. Uninterested D. Something else

Read Mark 1:29-35

3. What words or phrases stand out to you?
4. What resonates within you as you see Jesus intentionally stepping away?
5. What if anything in popular culture tempts you to speed up so you can do more?
6. What obstacles stand in your way to living a more prayerful, more patient, more contemplative kind of life?
7. How does pulling back from the world in order to be with God prepare you to re-enter the world?
8. Next week we will talk about the specific practices of this kind of life, but what can you begin to do this week to make changes in your habits or schedule to slow down in order to be present with God?