Contemplative Prayer

Whether I have reached the depths of "contemplation" or not I don't know, but God has met me in prayer as I have recently set aside real time for Him. He has been pleased to renew my vision for Him as the majestic God who listens to us and reveals His presence to us! He shatters rocks and shakes the earth, and indeed the whole creation, by His presence, yet in the end He sends a gentle breeze our way. Jesus Christ, who endured the one, terrible moment on the cross was raised again for us; he is the only son of David who could claim that he had finished all that God wanted him to do. His kingdom, unlike all the others, is in fact firmly established. Then he quietly breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples, and that same Holy Spirit now indwells His temple, which is us. I close my eyes to imagine the kingdom of God and open them right away again to look around me and see that the kingdom is right here. I can even see and touch it because Jesus walked right here, and the Holy Spirit is here with all of us who believe!

God paints the great swirls of the cosmos with one easy stroke of His brush and pays attention to the speck of dust who speaks to Him in prayer. He shows us that we are connected to the story of the Bible itself; we, in fact, are the continuation of the story. The continuity between the characters of the Bible and us is utterly intact, because it is the Holy Spirit who still moves over the surface of the whole world, just as the wind of God blew over the surface of the sea in the beginning. God has indeed shown me how my own circumstances, and my past, are part of the great story as well. The God who is utterly free, and full of surprises too, continues to be in my own story! This is His greatest revelation to me. He comes to me freely in prayer, in His own time and in His own way, and shows me who He is. Surely, He is beyond words. He is far beyond words. He has restored my feelings for Him and has shown me what His feelings are for me, and He has shown me that prayer is, in fact, the best thing in life itself. That has been my experience with prayer recently, and I'm sure that many, many other people have a similar experience as well.

My readings in the Bible during this recent period have consisted of several of the historical books-- Genesis (I realize that the initial chapter consists of a beautiful and mysterious poetic account of the creation), Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings. There is nothing like reading a narrative of what has happened in the past; it is better than reading the loftiest poetry of the Bible. I would recommend reading the historical narratives and then writing your own poetry!

Some may say that the historical books are not that simple, and the point is well taken. However, the best method of studying these books is to read them, perhaps with some attention to historical/cultural context and detail, but mostly by simply paying attention to the main intentions of the authors themselves and then thinking about the books. This was certainly the intention of the authors themselves as they wrote. I would not presume to define precisely how another person should study the text, or which texts they should study; study as you need to study. I hope that you will see what is recommended here if you wish to use the Bible as a basis for prayer-- just focus on reading the text and looking hard for the intention of the writer. Go on to pray to God about what happens in the text. This method of prayer is known classically as *lectio divina*. It is not the method that is the key, however. God Himself is the key. Wait for our great God to pass nearby. Or perhaps the Spirit of God will whisper quietly. God is free; we should wait.

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