The Gospel of the Kingdom, Inner Stillness, and the Passions

Rev'd Dr Jeff Bailey, Canon for Leadership Development

Part I

I'd like to start by having you close your eyes for a moment, and call to mind someone in your life at any point from the past who had a spiritual quality to their life that awakened in your own life a greater hunger for God. This may be someone you knew well, or it be someone you had only fleeting interactions with – but they come to mind as someone whose presence awakened in you a greater hunger for God.

When I think about my own answer to that question, I think back to a number of years ago, when I was about 30 years old, a friend of mine gathered together a group of young leaders to meet with one of his mentors named Dallas Willard. Like many of you, I had known of Dallas through his books, and had been positively impacted by them. But at this particular stage of things, I and many of my friends were interested in different conversations. This is when conversations about postmodernism were bursting onto the evangelical scene, and we were reading books about the missional church and epistemology and other trendy topics. So I went to these meetings with Dallas in Southern California with a kind of ambivalent mindset.

Well, I was unprepared for how life-altering my interactions with Dallas were. Part of it was that he talked about the gospel in ways that profoundly challenged some of my assumptions, but also because his entire presence radiated a kind of goodness and love that was quite palpable. It was something that transcended personality – Dallas was actually a quite low-key personality. But I remember standing next to him in line as we were getting food for lunch, asking him a question, and has he turned to answer me, his entire presence communicated this mix of goodness and gentleness and authority, and decades later I can still remember the way it affected me. And those two days with Dallas opened up my heart to God in a bigger way. And it was not just me – during our breaks I would gather with some of my other friends who were there, and the first thing everyone talked about was about how weirdly and powerfully effected they were by their interactions with Dallas.

I later learned that our experience was not an isolated case. Dallas died about nine years ago, and not too long ago I was re-watching his memorial service, where Christian leader after Christian leader got up to talk about similar experiences in their relationship with Dallas. John Ortberg is a Presbyterian pastor who had been mentored by Dallas, and he told the story of the first time his wife, Nancy, joined him and Dallas for dinner. Ortberg said that, at one point during dinner Dallas began to speak about the goodness of God, and he said, "when I looked up, Dallas' face fairly glowed." And he said, "my wife Nancy is not a crier, but while Dallas was talking I happened to glance over at her, and tears were streaming down her face."

I have thought back often over the years – what was it exactly that was so transformational about being around Dallas? What was that quality of his presence that, simply being around him for a brief period of time, increased a desire and longing for God in my life and the lives of many others?

Some time ago I read a fascinating book by Dr. Stephen Muse, who is a psychologist and Director of the Pastoral Institute in Columbus, Georgia, and also an ordained deacon in the Eastern Orthodox church – and he considers this question by exploring the spiritual psychology of the church fathers in his book *Treasures in Earthen Vessels.* He writes:

> The way a person moves is affected by the quality of attention that accompanies their inner life of prayer and repentance. St. Anthony of the Desert pointed out "a soul that is truly…virtuous is shown in a person's walk, voice, smile, conversation and manner."
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> Muse goes on to write, "The inner disposition of the soul is revealed especially through changes in the small muscles of the face which are not directly under central nervous system control. It is possible, as St. John Cassian notes, 'to recognize the interior state from the look, the face, the bearing of a person.'"
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> "St. Gregory of Palamas even counseled his parishioners to notice the quality of prayerful attention that could be observed in a person's body, and then try to be near them! 'When you enter the church,' Gregory wrote, 'look for the more godly of those within, whom you can recognize just by seeing how they stand in attentive silence.'"
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> Muse then writes, "For the Fathers, the link between body and soul is so intimate that all inner attitudes must 'take shape' in an external behavior. A feeling (which is a movement of the soul) engages the depth of the human being only if it becomes incarnate in a gesture, a posture, or a bodily practice. A spiritual life that is purely "internal" remains [only] cerebral [or] conceptual…"

Muse goes on to write about a time he and his wife were in Russia, and they had the opportunity to visit a monastery. When they arrived at the monastery's worship service, they found that it was packed wall-to-wall with people. He writes,

> "During the service one monk, out of the 40 or 50 who were there, caught my attention and I watched him throughout the service. His body and presence conveyed a deep quality of penitence and humility. I thought to myself, if there is one monk I would like to meet, it would be him. Later when we were eating breakfast and preparing to leave, one of the monks asked if we had gotten the blessing of Staretz Ilia. I was surprised. "I didn't know you had a staretz," I said. [In Russian Orthodoxy, a staretz is an especially holy, often charismatically gifted, monk.] As we were brought to meet him, it turned out that this was the monk I had noticed earlier."

Muse concludes by asking: what happens to people when they find themselves in the presence of someone who communicates God's presence simply by their bearing? When this happens, he says, people are humbled and awakened in their hearts. People hunger and thirst for something that this world cannot give, and being in such a presence awakens their own hearts to God.

When I read this, it provides some categories for my experience with Dallas, and perhaps it resonates with some of your experiences, too.

But I want to suggest that this kind of quality of life, this overflow of a life with God that awakens a hunger for God in others, is actually crucial to our call to ministry, too.

In his wonderful book, *Leading God's People*, Christopher Beeley reflects on the pastoral approach of the early church fathers, and he writes this:

> "What ultimately moves people into a deeper life in Christ is not personal charm, social connections, or managerial expertise, no matter how useful they may seem in the short term. Instead, it is the real and palpable holiness of a leader steeped in the grace of Christ."

Philip Turner was at one point the Dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, and orthodox in both his theology and ethics. Following his retirement several years ago, he wrote an article reflecting on his outwardly successful career, a career he now views ambivalently as propping up a failing institutional church. His article lays out several priorities for the formation of ordained leaders for the church going forward, and he writes that the very first priority must be holiness of life:

> "I have placed this goal first because…[while it] is true that that people expect their clergy to be good preachers, effective leaders, and wise counselors…behind these functions lies the character of the person carrying them out. If they do not adequately mirror the holiness of life made present to us in Christ, they fail to impress the lives within their care. Apart from holiness of life, no matter their degree of competence, they leave no lasting impression. They effect no changes deep in the soul. Apart from [this], the Church will have no lasting effect and will fail in its mission."

I want to spend a few minutes this afternoon reflecting on how we might become these kinds of ministers, these kinds of people, in which the most important thing we do is pursue a life with God such that, in a way that goes beyond technique or skill, who we are becoming as people awakens a hunger for God in the lives of others.

To do that, I want to first consider the theological frameworks that might help us toward that end, and in particular to ensure we have an understanding of the gospel in which the transformation of our inner lives is intrinsic and not optional. And then, second, I want to spend a few minutes talking about some practices that might help us move in that direction in practical ways.

Part II

I begin with theology because our basic belief systems are so defining for us, often in ways we don't even realize. We live at the mercy of our ideas. And in some traditions, especially in the West, there can be a tendency to separate the doing of theology from spirituality. But as the theologian Vladimir Lossky once wrote, "the inner experience of the Christian develops within the teaching of the Church: the dogmatic framework molds the person. It is never possible to understand a spirituality if one does not take into account the dogma in which it is rooted."

Another way of putting what Lossky is saying here might be the old leadership quote, "Your system is perfectly designed to give you the results you are currently getting." If we are not getting the results we hope for, including in the church, we may have to consider the theological systems that we are living by.

Of course, our own system of Anglicanism is a particular amalgamation of traditions. It embodies both catholic and reformed streams of Christianity, and its patristic roots draw from both the West and the Eastern traditions of the church. But the reality is that many of us come into Anglicanism through the distinctive stream of American evangelicalism, and even though that stream is historically very recent, it has been very formative for many of us.

That tradition has, in turn, shaped our understanding of the gospel, which means that many of us have been taught that the heart of the gospel must be understood in very narrow terms, namely a particular theory of the atonement. And while I am going to affirm that theory of the atonement in just a moment, I think that the restricting of the gospel to a theory of the atonement, as happens in some corners of evangelicalism, ignores the breadth of the mystery of the gospel, limits its missional power, and can keep us from resources that are necessary for in our spiritual lives.

Let me explain what I mean.

The creeds of the church are all in complete agreement that Jesus died for the sins of the world, that he was a substitute for humankind, that sin was dealt with decisively, that Christ

died in our place, rose from the dead, and broke the bonds of death for the salvation of humankind.

The church everywhere universal had agreed to that. To believe that is to be theologically orthodox.

However, when the church has historically attempted to get on the "inside" of that event, of Christ's work on the cross, to understand the actual mechanics of how Christ's death obtained the salvation of humankind, there has never been one single, orthodox answer. Rather there have been multiple answers, drawing upon a variety of images in the New Testament, the broader culture, and the tradition of the church.

So, for example, within the New Testament, the saving significance of the death of Jesus is talked about as justification, but also as redemption, reconciliation, sacrifice, and as triumph over evil. All of these are images drawn from different spheres of public life in the culture of the New Testament writers – images drawn from the marketplace, from personal relationships, from the temple, and from the law courts.

And then, not only in the New Testament, but throughout church history, theological models were developed that sought to explain with greater precision how Jesus' death accomplished human salvation. One theological model was referred to as Christus Victor, which said through the cross and resurrection Christ triumphed over evil powers to free humanity. One early model was called the ransom theory, because Mark 10:45 says that "the Son of Man came…to give his life as a ransom for many." And much thought went into questions like, Who pays the ransom? And who gets paid? But, of course, those questions that are nowhere addressed in the Biblical texts.

Despite the history and variety of theories of atonement, one model has come to dominate the landscape of Christian faith in American evangelicalism, and that is the model of penal substitution. This model is taken initially from St. Anselm and draws upon court imagery. According to this theory, humanity has, in its sin, turned away from God and so merits divine punishment. Jesus, in his death on the cross, died in place of (as a substitution for) sinful humanity at God's behest and in doing so satisfied the demands of God's justice by taking on himself the punishment humanity ought to have suffered.

Now, there has been considerable pushback in recent years in theological circles, including even evangelical circles, against the penal substitution theory, and it would take too long to explain the various reasons why this is the case. However, I want to affirm this model of the atonement – there is clear scriptural warrant for it, and variations of it have been clearly accepted across the church from the very beginning – Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.

However, there are some who defend this theory of the atonement as being the only, or the primary, legitimate model for understanding Christ's work on the cross, such that "the gospel" almost becomes equivalent to this particular theory, and thus requires that every aspect of Christian living somehow relate back to this model. And I think that is a mistake. I

think it is a mistake biblically and theologically, because it ignores the range of material that seeks to make sense of Christ's death and human salvation. It takes the incredible comprehensiveness of the gospel, and the mystery of the cross, and it sidelines other images and metaphors to make everything fit within it. It effectively, in the ears of many listeners, makes "salvation" equivalent to "forgiveness of sins."

But I also think it's a mistake missionally – because a model that emphasizes the forgiveness of sins may be heard as "good news" in cultures that are steeped in shame or self-introspection, whether that is the late-medieval period historically, or in other cultures around the world today – but in a culture like ours, which is not a shame-based culture, where concern about forgiveness of sin is not paramount, it's not clear that this lands in the same way.

It's not to say the model is not true, or does not speak to some truth of the gospel – the gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of the forgiveness of sins! But the gospel is also more than that. And I think that many of us experience in our ministry, and in our own preaching, that the culture longs for a gospel that goes beyond forgiveness.

What is that gospel? How would you want to communicate the good news of the gospel in ways that draws upon the Biblical data, the Biblical narrative, to the culture in which you minister today?

Here's one way of thinking about it:

What was the gospel that Jesus preached? Throughout the gospel accounts we see the gospel of the kingdom is a constant theme:

- In the opening scene of Jesus' ministry Mark writes that Jesus "came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'the kingdom of God is at hand.'"

- When Jesus commissions the 12, Luke 9 says "he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."

- A chapter later in Luke 10 he commissions the 72: "When you enter a town, heal the sick and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near you."

- And, of course, it doesn't stop with the gospel writers. Acts 19 says that in Ephesus Paul "spoke boldly for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God." And Acts 28 says that Paul lived in Rome for "two years, welcoming all who came, proclaiming the kingdom of God with all boldness."

But what does the kingdom of God mean practically? I do think that evangelicals today talk about the kingdom of God more than we used to. But what I often hear is the kingdom discussed as "allegiance to king Jesus." And while that may be true, that terminology has a

way of shifting the concept of the kingdom onto turf that is more comfortable to evangelicals, by framing it as something that requires a decision, some act of volition.

And while this may be part of it, in the gospel accounts Jesus is often talking about the kingdom as an in-breaking, almost spatial reality – something that comes close, that is near, that is at hand, something that people are invited to receive or enter into. It is not a metaphor; it is real and substantial. The effects of it are visible. The presence of the kingdom means that people are healed in both mind and body, and new relationships of love and forgiveness are established. So, there is a component of power that is intrinsic to God's kingdom.

But there is also a spatial immediacy to God's kingdom. Matthew's favorite way of capturing Jesus' teaching was to call it the "kingdom of the heavens", instead of the kingdom of God, as in the other gospels. For years the scholarly consensus was that Matthew used this term as a way of reverently avoiding the use of the word God because of his Jewish readers. That consensus has been increasingly overturned by recent scholarship, which shows that not only did Matthew repeatedly use the word for God elsewhere throughout his gospel, he also explicitly references the "kingdom of God" four different times. And so many commentators today suggest, instead, that Matthew is intentionally calling it the kingdom of heaven (or the heavens) in order to connect the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus to the God of the heavens in the Old Testament.

And God in the Old Testament was not only the God of the heavens we would call space, he is also the God who pervades the heavens we know as the air and atmosphere all around us: And so God speaks to Abraham out of thin air, just as he is about to sacrifice Isaac; God talks directly to Moses on Mount Sinai, and in the Tent of Meeting. Numbers 7:89 tells us, "…when Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him." Elsewhere in scripture, God suddenly appears out of nowhere as fire, whether as a burning bush, or a pillar of fire.

This continues in the New Testament, where God's voice is heard at Jesus' baptism, or where Moses and Elijah suddenly "show up" to converse with Jesus, or when a rushing wind is suddenly experienced in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost.

In other words, Matthew's terminology wants to make clear that the God of the heavens, and the kingdom of the heavens, is much closer to us than we often think. It not only pervades the entire cosmos, Matthew reminds us – it pervades the air right around us.

But here's the thing: while this would not have seemed unusual or farfetched to Jesus' listeners, or to the early church, wrapping our heads around this is more difficult for us. In her wonderful book on John Calvin, Julie Canlis (one of our speakers at convocation and synod last year) writes that there were categories of reality in the first century, Greek-speaking world that are largely inaccessible to us in the modern West today. She writes that when a Greek person living in the classical world experienced the world around him, he felt

an ‘extra-sensory link’ between himself and the visible world – an interconnection between the unseen cosmos and its human inhabitants.

Which suggests that the possibility of interacting with a substantial but unseen reality was something the early church could grasp, such that it reshaped their ideas of what was available to them.

How do we talk about this in our own day? How do we think about this kingdom that we have been invited to enter, to receive, in ways that bring home its tangible reality? I think it’s possible that new, emerging scientific consensus can help us in this regard.

Some time ago I was talking with a friend who reads scientific journal for fun, and he gave me a crash course on a phenomenon that Albert Einstein once called “Spooky Action at a Distance”. Have you heard of this? In my basic layman’s terms, it is possible for subatomic particles to become “entangled” with each other. This can happen to particles that are very near each other, but also to particles that are billions of miles, even light years, away from each other. And as a result of their connection – their entanglement – across even massive distances, influencing one particle here can directly and instantaneously influence another, even if it’s light years away. So, for example, if a particle that’s here spins one way, the particle it’s connected to will instantly spin the opposite way at exactly the same time. What it confirms is that there is the possibility for connection and instantaneous communication, faster than the speed of light, across vast stretches of time and space, in the physical world. And, in fact, recent studies have confirmed that this kind of mysterious connection happens not only at the subatomic level, but can be observed in objects that are nearly visible to the naked eye.

I mention this example simply to note that quantum physics tells us a different story about reality than the story that has governed, and perhaps limited, our modern assumptions about reality – including spiritual reality. The famous physicist David Bohm once wrote that modern science requires a radical change in how we conceive of the world. Rather than our instinctive, Newtonian assumptions that our world and the cosmos are made up of separate-but-interacting parts, the deeper revelation, he writes, is one of undivided wholeness.

Now here’s my question: Is it possible that the Creator of the universe, with all its unfathomable complexities that we are still only scratching the surface of in our modern scientific research – is it possible that in the kingdom of the heavens, the line between the material world and the spiritual world is in fact very thin, and much more porous than we believed?

And is it therefore possible that there is much greater presence and power available to us – something that is much closer to us in reality – than we thought? If we do in fact live at the mercy of our ideas, how might changing our ideas about the kingdom of God, the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus taught and demonstrated, change our own practices, and the practices we invite others into?

Part III

I want to spend a few minutes talking about those practices, in part because the things that we do with our minds and bodies to interact with God and his kingdom are often not as explicit in scripture as we might like. This lack of explicitness is largely because various practices were so assumed in first century culture, including Paul and the early church, that they did not have to be spelled out with much detail.

So, when we read Paul in saying "put off the old self and put on the new self" in Colossians 3, or "walk by the Spirit" in Galatians 5, or "train yourself for godliness" in I Timothy 4, our instinct is to read these words through a highly filtered, religious lens. "Put off the old self and put on the new self" sounds like metaphorical, vaguely exhortational language. But Paul almost certainly has commonly known strategies in mind here.

The first century world in which Paul was writing was hugely influenced by different schools of philosophy, like Platonism or Stoicism. And it is important to note that philosophy then functioned in a very different way than philosophy functions today.

Today philosophy is largely an academic, highly abstract discipline that is esoteric and hardly connected with people's real lives. But in the ancient world, philosophy played a role that is much closer to the role that psychology and counseling play in our own world today. People read philosophy then in the same way that people read Brene Brown or Jordan Peterson today. If you look at the titles of philosophical books people were reading in the first century, the titles included: How to Restrain Anger; How to Obtain Peace of Mind; and The Problem of False Shame. These are real titles from philosophers that everyday people were reading and talking about.

Philosophy was fundamentally therapeutic. And because it was fundamentally therapeutic, it employed a whole range of therapeutic techniques. To take just one example, people would listen to philosophical instruction, and then they would create short, memorable, pithy phrases based on that teaching which they would meditate on later. In their meditation exercises, they would imagine different scenarios in their life, and then imagine themselves responding to different circumstances using these principles.

This is simply one technique among many that was part of the culture for first century Christians. What everyone understood was that personal transformation could only occur with regular, bodily practices that enabled them to inculcate the philosophical tradition they had attached themselves to. It wasn't like you could believe the philosophy at a cognitive level without putting it into practice – the practices were intrinsic. And therefore, when the earliest Christians heard Paul say, "put on the mind of Christ", or "reckon yourselves dead to their sin but alive to God" – Christians would take up and modify techniques to which they had already exposed, and adapt them to Christian ends.

In the time that we have left, I want to talk about two of those practices that developed in the first few centuries of the early church, and taught by the church fathers. The first practice is watchfulness, and the second is the Jesus Prayer.

I'll say more about the specifics of these in a moment. But let me first say something about why they emerged as practices.

The church fathers say repeatedly that the ideal posture we want to operate out of as Kingdom-people is inner stillness. What is inner stillness? The fathers describe it as an "undistracted calm" in which one can be fully present to God and to whatever presents itself in the moment, whether that is a person or a task. Inner stillness, they say, is a learned detachment from all distractions, especially in our thoughts, which over time creates an inner stability from which we engage the world.

This posture is essential, the fathers say, because it is in this state that we are most able to receive the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and to be an instrument through which the Lord can work. Life in God's kingdom is a life that is aims to increasingly be moment-by-moment present to God. St Gregory of Sinai calls inner stillness a state of "receptive tranquility."

Most of us, however, are not operating on a regular basis in a state of receptive tranquility because we live with an inner turbulence that the Church Fathers called "the passions."

"The passions" mean something different from how we use that term today. For you and me, "passion" usually refers to a strong emotion that can be positive or negative. "She has a real passion for life," or "he was in a real passion when he killed the man."

But for the fathers, a passion is usually negative, and it isn't necessarily a strong emotion, though it can be. A passion is more like a state of mind – it can be a momentary affliction, but can also become habitual and engrained. Greed or vanity or jealousy are passions – there is no single official list. But the two dominant passions that everyone agrees are fundamental, and the root of many other passions are (1) desire and (2) anger. Desire and anger are not simply surface emotions, such as "I want that dress" or "I am angry at that person" – they are actually deeper forces at our core. Desire is what propels us forward in life – we want certain things, but we often want the wrong things, and when we don't get what we want, or our desire is thwarted in some way, we react in anger, or depression, or remorse, or jealousy.

Last week I was in London, and my one of my daughters went to a local café to pick up breakfast, and came home with a bunch of almond croissants. Now, I am a foodie and so gluttony is a constant temptation for me. And I have a particular and irrational love for almond croissants, and so I normally will try to not even have a taste of one. But last week I thought, I'm on vacation, I'm going to cut off this tiny corner. And I don't remember what happened after that, but moments later I heard my kids complaining that someone had eaten multiple almond croissants. And then, only moments later, my wife asked me if I had completed a task I had promised to do, that was necessary for us leaving the house for sightseeing, and I realized that I had not done that task as I had promised, which meant leaving later than we had planned, and she expressed some irritation with me – quite understandably. And I responded the way any mature husband would respond – I got defensive and irritated at her getting irritated with me! When we finally got on the London

tube, my blood sugar is now spiking massively, I'm mad at my wife for getting mad at me, and then I noticed this beautiful happy family with small children on the tube (who were politely saying "yes mummy" and "no mummy"), and I was suddenly thinking about our kids being that age when we lived in England and started feeling regret that perhaps we hadn't taken advantage of those years and we should have been better parents. And so there I sat on the tube, outwardly looking like nothing was going on, but inwardly caught up in a low-level brew of gluttony, anger, and regret.

Now let me ask you, was I in a state of receptive tranquility, fully present with an open heart towards God and those he had placed right in front of me? No! The passions of gluttony, of anger, of regret had created within me an inner turbulence.

Now, the fathers say that most of us live in varying degrees of this inner turbulence much of the time. And much of that inner turbulence occurs simply on the basis of interacting with our thoughts. Our minds are constantly, and often unconsciously, caught up in various passions of resentment or regret or vanity or envy, and these are often so engrained and habitual that we don't even realize how bound up we are, how unfree we are, how hindered we are from living interactively with God.

And therefore, the journey towards living interactively in God's kingdom, to living in a state of receptive tranquility, requires doing battle with the passions. The fathers say with great confidence that it is possible to obtain increasing freedom from them, if we engage in certain strategies. Let me just briefly mention two of those strategies.

The first practice is called watchfulness. Because the passions do not, as a general rule, come upon us all at once, but develop through stages, it is possible to grow more practiced at identifying an approaching passion before it is fully developed. The fathers named the stages of a passion as (1) impulse, (2) engagement, and (3) consent. Because we often live so unaware of the role the passions play in our life, we are often engaging with them before we even realize what's happening. But the fathers repeatedly note that it's possible to learn to recognize an approaching passion at the first stage, the stage of impulse, and to resist engaging with it.

But this requires vigilance – learning to look for and recognize those impulses that often go undetected. The passions sneak up on us, and this is not accidental. The fathers say this is intentional on the part of the enemy.

And so, in The Philokalia, St. Hesychios describes watchfulness as a growing process of self-awareness, and attentiveness to one's own thoughts: "Watchfulness is a continual halting of thought at the entrance to the heart. In this way predatory thoughts are marked as they approach, and what they say and do is noted. We begin to see in what ways and forms the demons are trying to deceive the heart and mind. If we are conscientious in this, we can gain much experience and knowledge of spiritual warfare."

What Hesychios is saying here is that through watching our thoughts, we not only arrest a passion earlier in the process, we become more self-aware and able to develop tactics over time, to gain increasing freedom from the passions.

Practically speaking, then, we might practice watchfulness by noticing when our thoughts get hooked with envy towards someone we think is having more success than we are, perhaps with their career or their personal lives or their families, and we immediately halt that thought, we don't engage with it, and we might immediately pray for that person to have even greater success and, if we dare, we ask God to increase our own hiddenness, because we know that leaning into humility instead of running away from it is the path to freedom and blessing.

When it comes to anger, we might practice watchfulness by learning to repress anger before it emerges. I know that is a counter-cultural message – we are wary of any talk of repressing something – but that is exactly what all the spiritual writers counsel: that allowing anger to flare up outwardly is nearly always a negative thing. Pay attention to your body the next time you get angry. You will be aware of the toxins being released in your body, and how it effects the people around you, and the amount of time it takes to recover from this and return to a state of tranquility. (This does not mean you should not prayerfully explore the roots of your anger with a therapist or spiritual director; this is not counsel to ignore or keep "stuffing down" your anger; this is more about how you interact with various passions "in the moment".)

When it comes to sensuality, the acquisitive desire for other people, we might practice watchfulness by allowing our peripheral vision to act as an alert system to guard our senses, because things like sight and sound can a primary channel through which the passions often attack. We practice such discretion not out of reactive prudishness, but because "receptive tranquility" requires that we avoid those things which will disturb the passivity we are trying to cultivate. We will also watch our thoughts with regard to memories, because memories are a primary tactic of the enemy, luring us in to engagement with sensual thoughts before we've even noticed. The sooner we notice a thought appearing, the easier it is to halt it in its tracks.

A second practice for overcoming the passions, in order to live a life of attentiveness to God, is the Jesus Prayer.

One of the things we are commanded in scripture to do is pray without ceasing. But if you're like me, you can have a wonderful time of prayer first thing in the morning, and start your day in a state of attentiveness to the Lord, a state of receptive tranquility. Right? And what kind of state are you in by, say, about 11:00 am?

Very early, in the first few centuries of the church, the fathers recognized the need for ways to obey scripture's command to pray without ceasing, and to remain in a state of spiritual vigilance. One of the ways you do that, they said, is by incorporating practices of simplicity and redundancy. The practice of repetitive detail, if done continually over time, helps one develop more focused attention. (This is one reason why liturgy is so important.) Modern

psychology has confirmed how powerful repetition can be in shaping our minds and hearts – far more than we think.

This is why the early church began to develop simple, repetitive prayers that you could repeat to yourself at given intervals, such that those prayers will eventually begin to arise within you spontaneously throughout the day, as a way to help ward off temptation, bringing your attention back from entanglement with your thoughts, and staying in communion with the Lord. In particular, the desert fathers began practicing prayers of a single word, such as Jesus, and this became the basis for the Jesus Prayer that developed in the following centuries in the Eastern church.

The most common form of the Jesus Prayer is: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." (There are shorter and longer versions, too.)

There are two ways to practice it: during your regular time of prayer, you might end with a minute or two of the Jesus prayer, simply repeating it 10 or 20 or even 100 times.

And then throughout the day, as often as you remember, you simply repeat it to yourself in the midst of activities. You can be praying it to yourself while doing the dishes, or even in conversation with someone. What you will find is that, relatively quickly after beginning this practice, the Jesus Prayer will arise spontaneously in your mind throughout the day. It is a means of practicing attentiveness to the Lord and to whatever he has in front of you.

Let me conclude by reading this helpful quote from Bishop Kallistos Ware:

> "Pray without ceasing," said St Paul. Some Christian groups in the 4th-century interpreted this to mean that we are to say prayers all the time. But this is not literally possible, for we have sometimes to eat or brush our teeth. Prayer, however, understood in a more extended sense, is not limited to the enunciation of words, but it signifies what St Gregory of Nyssa termed a 'sense of presence'. The aim of the Jesus Prayer is to establish within us this 'sense of presence', which will continue to exist at a deep level of our being even after we have stopped repeating the actual words of the Prayer. That surely is what St Paul meant by unceasing prayer: an implicit state rather than a series of explicit acts. Yet, in order that this implicit state may genuinely exist within us, it requires being sustained by outward prayers, frequently repeated. In this way, the regular use of the Jesus Prayer initiates us into the first beginnings of continual prayer.

I want to stop here. Let me briefly summarize what I have been exploring in this session.

First, I am suggesting that we are called to a life of ministry that does not ignore, but must go beyond, technique and skill – ministries in which, by God's grace, the overflow of our own life with God awakens in the hearts of others a hunger for God. I'm suggesting that this is perhaps one of the most essential things for the future of the church.

Second, this kind of ministry requires an understanding of the gospel in which the transformation of the human personality is both possible and essential. I have suggested that Jesus' preaching on the power and immediacy of the kingdom of God is one such biblical paradigm.

And third, this cannot remain a purely cognitive thing. We must learn those practices that can help us live in the reality of God's kingdom. I've suggested that the spiritual psychology of the church fathers can help us in this regard, and in particular their teaching on watchfulness and the Jesus prayer, as means to overcoming the passions and living in communion with the Lord.

Let's conclude with a contemplative exercise using the Jesus Prayer.

Suggested Readings

To Love as God Loves by Roberta C. Bondi

Way of the Ascetics by Tito Colliander

Philosophy as a Way of Life by Pierre Hadot

Treasure in Earthen Vessels by Stephen Muse

Orthodox Spirituality by Dumitru Staniloae

The Jesus Prayer by Bishop Kallistos Ware

The Art of Prayer, compiled by Igumen Chariton, edited by Timothy Ware