

# Growing God's People

the journal for teachers and other learners

## Growing in Love for God and Others

In exercising the gift of teaching, we take on a great responsibility for the spiritual growth and care of others.

Bearing such responsibility carries risk. According to James, few should endeavor to become teachers in light of the greater strictness under which the teachers will be judged (Jas. 3:1).

After writing that the office of teacher is surpassed only by those of apostle and prophet, Paul offers an additional warning: all who exercise the "higher gifts" must possess love for God and for their neighbor, or expect to gain nothing for their labors.

To the end that we be filled with a deep, transforming love for God and for others—flowing from an enriched understanding of God's immeasurable love for us—*Growing God's People* is published with a vision of teachers feeding upon the disciplines of

grace, stretching the horizons of the mind with exposure to books on teaching, deepening their understanding of biblical mandates and practices through theological articles, and becoming able teachers who model sound biblical interpretation.

Through this online resource we desire to serve the teachers and small group leaders of the Cedar Springs Church family as they instruct children, youth, and adults from the unfathomable depths of God's Word. Each bimonthly issue will feature a discipline of grace, a book review, an article on the theology of teaching, a poem from a Christian writer, and an exercise in biblical interpretation.

## The Practice of Meditation

*When we practice the spiritual disciplines, we stand against the basic principles of this world. Through participation in these "disciplines of grace" we come to know more deeply the intimate love of God and the sufficiency of His grace. In each issue of Growing God's People, we will focus on a spiritual discipline as it is practiced within the Christian faith.*

**By Robert Hodge**

As Christians we are called to walk with God, abiding in Christ and in His strength bearing fruit. Through the discipline of meditation Christians take brief respites in their journeys to draw water from deep wells of grace, returning to the trials of their day filled with the Spirit's power.

The practice of meditation is found throughout the Scriptures (for some examples see: Gen. 24:63; Ps. 1:2; Ps. 119: 97, 99; Mt. 14:13) as men and women of faith silenced themselves before the Almighty to hear from Him and be counseled with wisdom for life.

The practice of meditation will pit us against the spirit of our age the moment that we turn from the hustle and bustle of our culture to stand before a God who meets with us in solitary, sacred silence. His presence becomes magnified in meditation, precisely

because we have stepped away from temporal concerns to center ourselves anew before the One who gives life and wisdom to a covenant people.

"In meditation we are growing in to what Thomas à Kempis calls 'a familiar friendship with Jesus.' We are sinking down into the light and life of Christ and becoming comfortable in that posture. The perpetual presence of the Lord (omnipresence, as we say) moves from a theological dogma into a radiant reality," writes Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline*.

Meditation finds its proper context within the practices of the Christian faith. In Eastern religion, the purpose of meditation lies in a perceived need to be emptied; in contrast, Christians throughout the centuries have practiced meditation as a means of being filled with the Holy Spirit, discovering that through the exercise of our faith we might in ever-increasing amounts breathe in the transforming goodness offered us as we abide in Christ.

In this age we are tempted to read our daily portions of the Scriptures, pray, and be on our way to jobs, school, or errands. Yet for maturity and wholeness, we must stop and make space to ponder the passages we have read so that the fullness of wisdom is

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## ***Meditation, continued.***

made available to us for our own growth in Christ. From such times of meditation we can return to a passage for further reading, or later reach for the bookshelf to widen our understanding of the context in which the text was written or unlock the meanings of some of the vocabulary used by the writer.

To avoid being sidetracked by our own ideas and misunderstandings, the Scriptures must remain at the helm of our participation in this discipline. Anchored in the Word, we are free to focus our meditation upon a wide revelation of God—the beauty of our Lord, the holiness of our heavenly Father, the tenderness of the Holy Spirit, the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, the particular passage of God’s Word that we have read, God’s creativity and might as revealed in creation, and much more.

## **PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINE**

In Foster’s chapter on meditation, he shares several essential ingredients that will enable us to feast through the discipline of meditation: a quiet place, a comfortable and proper position, a means of spiritual breathing, an expectation of God’s presence, and a persistence in the practice of the discipline to which we have committed ourselves.

In a room or setting free from distraction and interruption,

place yourself in a sitting position that is comfortable. With your hands resting in your lap, place your palms down and quietly confess fears, sins, and anything that is pressing against you. Release those things, and with your mind, soul, and spirit focused anew, turn your focus to a passage or verse of Scripture and receive God’s words as a gift.

“Whereas the study of Scripture centers on exegesis, the meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage,” Foster writes. “The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you. This is not a time for technical studies, or analysis, or even the gathering of material to share with others. Set aside all tendencies toward arrogance and with a humble heart receive the word addressed to you.”

In time, meditation becomes a way of life. As those entrusted with the task of equipping the saints by teaching from the Scriptures, we must remain vigilant in our practice of the disciplines and fervent in our commitment to silence ourselves before God, ponder His words, and hear from Him wisdom from Heaven.

## **Teaching and Learning God’s Way**



### **The Missing Component Genesis 4.3-7**

*By T.M. Moore*

We may presume that Cain and Abel learned about sacrificing from their parents’ experience with God’s provision of the skins of animals, slain to make them acceptable in His eyes. At first glance, we might think that Cain’s sacrifice was rejected because it was not precisely of this nature. He brought the fruit of his labors from the fields he had cultivated. But this is not likely, first, since God later showed Himself quite willing to accept sacrifices of meal and other cultivated foods, and, second, because God always calls us to sacrifice out of what He has provided for us, from the fruit of what He bestows on us by His grace.

Something else is at work here. Cain and Abel both understood the importance of sacrificing to the Lord, but, as the New Testament makes clear, only one of them treated this as something other than a perfunctory duty. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Abel’s sacrifice was better because it was made *in faith*, that is, an expression of his heart’s love for God and desire to be pleasing to Him (11:4). Cain’s sacrifice was something other than an act of faith; indeed, John tells us that Cain’s offering was *evil*, and that it gave rise to the jealousy and rage which led him to kill his brother (1 Jn. 3:12). Things

done toward God – worship, doing good to others, even reading our Bibles – which lack the critical component of faith are unacceptable to God, and cannot give us the satisfaction of being pleasing to Him.

What are we teaching people about the Christian life? That it consists of so many duties and activities—going to church, being in a Bible study, doing good works—and that these *of themselves* are what God is seeking from us? If our teaching does not nurture faith in God—love for Him fueled by a deep sense of what He has done for us—then our teaching is leading people astray. Faith without works, James reminds us, is dead, being alone (Jas. 2:26). But works without faith are *worse than dead*—they can be evil, as Cain learned too late. Love for God must lie at the heart of all we are and all we do as the followers of Christ. And we who teach must make sure that our teaching does not simply offer a checklist of things our students need to do in order to keep God happy (or off their backs!). Unless our teaching communicates the unfathomable grace and goodness of God, and urges our students to meditate on these blessings until their hearts fill to overflowing with love for Him, we are doing them no favor, and may be setting them up for disappointment with God – or worse!

Teaching and learning God’s way is grounded in faith, must seek to nurture faith, and yields the fruit of faith in loving acts of sacrifice and service to God. Is this the way we approach our task as teachers of God’s Word?

## The Apologist's Evening Prayer

As teachers we are frequently put on pedestals and held in high regard. C.S. Lewis reminds us to seek humility before the Lord, lest pride begin to infect our souls. The last two lines alone are a prayer worth memorizing.

The poem—and many others of similar tone—can be found in *Poems of C.S. Lewis*, available from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more  
From all the victories that I seemed to score;  
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf  
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;  
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,  
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.

Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead  
Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.  
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,  
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.  
Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,  
Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.

– C.S. Lewis

## Featured Book

*Reviewed by Gus Diamondidis*

The preface to this book speaks of the need for and the intriguing ingredient left out of all types of education, that is, the lack of spirituality in education. This lack of spirituality is something that Parker Palmer is finding educators starving for, not only in Christian education, but in secular education as well. Palmer uses several key words, stories, and phrases that help the reader to understand his philosophy of education and the questions that have been raised from his inquiry into the modern paradigms now being used by educators.

One of the words that Palmer uses is “community.” A vivid illustration is used which helps to tie together the absence of community in education and to define what is meant by the word “knowledge.” Palmer tells the story from the documentary film *The Day After Trinity* of the development of the atomic bomb, which the scientists called “Trinity.” The emphasis of the story is that the scientists who developed the bomb and tested it only came to think of the outcome of their work the day after the test had concluded. This story is used to illustrate the way that knowledge is understood and taught in most of education today.

Knowledge, states Palmer, “treats the world as an object to be dissected and manipulated, a way of knowing that gives power over the world.” This type of knowledge is contrasted with that type which helps you to be related to the world, which is living in community with the truth. Palmer defines this type of knowledge as that which has its origin in love.

The intriguing thing about his book is the questions it raises such as “Where does our knowledge of knowledge come from?”



**TITLE:** *To Know as We Are Known*  
**AUTHOR:** Parker Palmer

What is its ultimate source? What is the wellspring of our passion to know? What is truth? How can I know truth? How can I teach truth?” Palmer answers these questions in ways that are not usual, where the knower and the known are not alienated from each other.

Palmer confesses candidly that his frustration of the knower and the known being separated from each other in relationship is what led him to want to bring hope to educators. He desires to renew the paradigm in which there is intimacy between the knower and the known as they are in community with each other, and in which knowledge and truth produce compassionate loving responsibility.

### New in the library...

The Holy Spirit, J.I. Packer.  
Understanding the Holy Spirit, by  
W. Hoesch.

In the Name of Jesus, by Henri Nouwen.  
God at Work? Signs of True Revival, by  
Jonathan Edwards.

# Preparing to Teach

## Hermeneutics

### Matthew 5:27, 28

*“You have heard that it was said,  
‘You shall not commit adultery.’  
But I say to you that everyone  
who looks at a woman with lustful  
intent has already committed adul-  
tery with her in his heart.”*



1

#### WORD STUDY

Look at how key words and phrases are used elsewhere in the Scriptures.

#### lust epithumeō

as “desire”  
Matt. 13:17  
Matt. 16:21  
Luke 22:15

as “covet”  
Rom. 7:7  
Rom. 13:9  
1 Cor. 10:6

as “lust”  
Matt. 5:28  
Rom. 6:12  
James 1:14  
2 Peter 3:3  
1 John 2:16

#### adultery moicheia

Matt. 19:9  
Mark 10:11  
Luke 16:18  
John 8:3  
James 2:11



Proper interpretation of Scripture requires a disciplined approach that incorporates the elements listed at the bottom of the page. For Scripture to interpret Scripture, we can begin by reading our text in the context of the chapter and book. Then, in careful word study, we look at how key words and phrases are used elsewhere in the Scriptures. From there, we can find further help in commentaries and in dictionaries of Bible and theology.

This page can be used for initial preparation for teaching a lesson or leading a small group, as well as to teach others how to use available resources to study the Bible.

#### James 4:1-4

*Raised in the same household as Jesus, we look to James.  
How would you describe, to your students, the Christians  
whom James is addressing?*

2

#### Acts 20:33

*Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders in this passage. How  
is lust better understood through the use of this word in  
reference to gold and silver?*

3

#### Biblical Themes

*Using a dictionary of theology, what are some of the key  
elements in Christ’s teaching on adultery?*

4



text



word study



commentaries



meditation



outline



presentation