

## Sharing the Faith Journey in your home

### Spiritual Traditions Part 5: Contemplative Tradition

By Beth Barnett

Richard Foster's book *Streams of Living Water* and the *Renovare Spiritual Traditions Workbook* for small groups encourages us to reflect on the different ways that people have practiced their discipleship in different ways, in different times and places, contexts and challenges over the centuries. Six major 'traditions' or 'spiritual orientations' or 'ways' are identified:

Contemplative  
Incarnational  
Holiness

Evangelical  
Social Justice  
Charismatic

This session explores opportunities in the contemplative tradition through adopting its ways (or disciplines). Pick one or a few of the following activities, try them with your household and see what happens.

You will need:

Prayer labyrinth ([www.yfc.co.uk](http://www.yfc.co.uk) or make own)  
Paper, pen, texta  
Large dried lima beans, fine tip marker, moist cotton wool.

### Practicing the Contemplative Tradition

There's an old motherly piece of advice that runs: Two Ears, One Mouth. This is meant to indicate a good balance or ratio between our time spent listening and talking.

This is what the Contemplative Tradition is about.

The Contemplative Tradition leads us in the prayer-filled life. Even on the micro scale, in conversations and small momentary interactions we can check our 'balance'. How much are we listening and how much are we talking? How much are we fiercely controlling and how much are we freely responding?

To maintain balance, we can check the micro as an indicator for the macro orientation of our lives. We can choose to really listen to others, especially our kids and our God, twice as much as we talk. This is a strategy for recreating 'on the road', when longer pit stops aren't available. In this tradition we are given the gift of simplicity to explore and express God's faithfulness to us and our faith response to God. This is for everyone. In our highly literate and articulate culture, those who don't read or talk may in fact be our best mentors in this spiritual discipline.

## Read together:

God has given us lots of different ways to understand the world, each other and God. Our eyes, ears, feelings, actions, and encounters with other people all help us with this. We know that in the busyness of our day and the noisiness of life God is with us, loving us and leading us in good ways, but sometimes quietness, stillness and simplicity help us to listen to God and know God in new ways. What are the activities of the contemplative tradition?

### **What are the activities of the contemplative tradition?**

Quiet, listening, breathing, patterns, simplicity, repeated prayers, pictures, silence, routine.

## Some things to do together

### **Prayer Labyrinth**

[www.yfc.co.uk](http://www.yfc.co.uk) or via the [www.rejesus.co.uk](http://www.rejesus.co.uk) website.

Take the prayer labyrinth.

It takes a while (about 40 minutes) to do it all in good measure, but you can skip through sections. It's not designed to be family friendly, but it may inspire you to adapt one or more of the 'stations' and do them not just in cyber space but in real time and your space. If you have kids, don't make them sit through the whole thing, but show them the idea of a labyrinth (many kids will already be clued up on this). Then try making your own household labyrinth. Just a few stations and some arrows to follow around the house will do, perhaps some stones by the bathroom.

### **Walk**

Take a stroll together and be aware of the rhythm of your footsteps on the ground, your breathing in and out. Listen to the sounds of the world around you. Talk if you like, but also savour the silence. If you are walking with your kids, it is a great gift to them to just listen as they talk.

### **Run**

Running is also a great way to engage with the contemplative life. Feel the rhythm of your feet as they pound the secure earth beneath you. Feel your breathing getting stronger and stronger. Encourage your kids to listen for God as they run.



### **Open and Close the day with a simple repeated phrase**

We are awake to God,  
We are open to God  
We rest in God,  
We are at peace in God



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### Listen

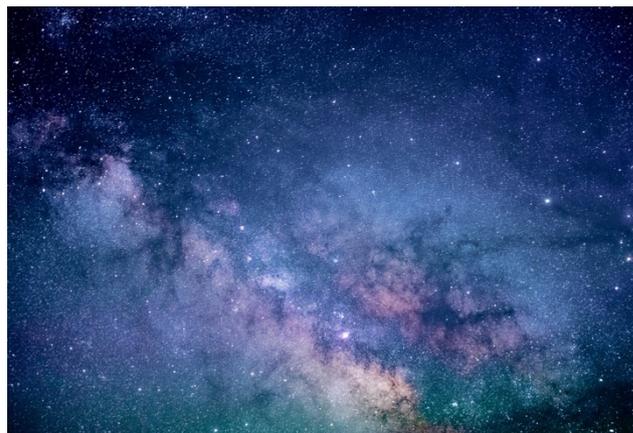
Lie in bed for an extra 5 minutes and listen for the sounds of the world that is already awake. Listen especially for the birds. You can extend this by creating a log book of your listening. Stick up a piece of paper in a prominent place, perhaps near the breakfast table, and a cup of textas. Encourage the members of your household to write or draw what they heard in their extra 5 minutes of listening.

### Star Gazing

Spend 5 minutes at the end of the day outside looking at the stars (This article was written in New York City, where there isn't a single star to be seen. The lights of the city create a haze at night that obscures the stars). If you know the song 'Indescribable' by Chris Tomlin or have a recording of it listen as you look out into the depths of space, and if you have the courage (and sympathetic neighbours) belt out the chorus in full voice.

### Speech Bubble Journaling

Get a blank piece of paper and draw a large 'speech bubble' in the middle of it. Set aside 10 or 15 minutes to sit quietly and simply say to God "I am listening". Don't write or draw anything for 5 minutes. Then pick up a pen, texta, crayon, charcoal or pencil and write or sketch what has emerged for you. You may have a strong sense of something **from** God, or perhaps a sense of things blocking/ distracting your listening. Like many spiritual disciplines, if this is done more than once, a picture of your journey, and the patterns of your life in God can be traced more clearly than in just one hit.



### Lectionary Readings

1. Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30, Romans 7:15-25a
2. Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, Romans 8:1-11
3. Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, Romans 8:12-25
4. Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52, Romans 8:26-39



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Some ways of using the lectionary readings for contemplative prayer:

### Simple Words

Matthew 11: 28-30

“Come to me all you who are tired and stressed, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke and learn from me, because I am considerate and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This passage is a classic in the Contemplative Tradition. Simplicity is also a classic feature of the Contemplative Tradition. Read this passage together, then pare it down to its simplest skeleton and read it one or two words per person.

Come - Tired  
Stressed – Rest  
Yoke – Learn  
Considerate – Humble  
Find – Rest  
Yoke – Easy  
Burden – Light

### NEW and OLD

Matthew 13:52

So he told them, “Every student of the Scriptures who becomes a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like someone who brings out new and old treasures from the storeroom.”

Write some old prayers (from the Psalms for example) on old ‘tea bagged’ paper and print some ‘new prayers’ that you write yourself, perhaps in txt msg lngwg (text message language).

### Prayer Sprouts

Matthew 13:1-9

Later that day Jesus left the house and sat by the sea shore. Crowds gathered around him, so he climbed into a boat while the crowd stood on the beach. He taught them using parables, “A farmer went out to plant seeds. As he scattered the seeds, some fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them. Others fell on rocky ground, with shallow soil, and they sprouted quickly, but they were scorched and withered away when the sun rose, because they had no root. Other seeds fell among thorns, which grew up and choked them. Others fell on good soil, and thrived: some yielding one hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times as much grain as had been sown. Whoever has ears to hear should hear this.”

Buy some large lima beans and put them in a bowl in a prominent place in your living space. Also provide a fine tip marker and a dish of moist cotton wool. As a household read this passage together, then write on the beans a word or name to indicate something you are praying for. Plant these beans in the dish of cotton wool. Keep quite damp with regular watering, Keep praying as you water, and watch your seed prayers sprout and grow.



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