

DAY 4: UNITING YOUR WORRIES, WOUNDS AND TRIALS WITH CHRIST THROUGH MEDITATION



Let's open with prayer:

*In the name of the Father, of
the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only say
the word and my soul shall be
healed.*

Amen.

OUR FOURTH VACCINATION session provides an approach that gets to the heart of how we overcome worry and wounds, and how we respond to actual trials and crises in our life. We're going to probe deeply into why genuine interior harmony and peace is found through Christian meditation.

First, let's recap vaccination days 1 through 3.

In Day 1 we discussed that God is always in charge – in good times and bad. That should be very comforting. God permits trials and tribulations, but no matter what happens God is working through it so that “all things work for good for those who love God.” God desires to give us His peace, to sustain us through all trials (which is why Christ gives the “peace that the world cannot give”). Ideally, this should be the end of it – we should go forth secure in this knowledge and inoculated against all of life’s challenges. But it’s not that simple.

In Day 2 we came face to face with the problem. Us. What goes

wrong is us. First – we want to be in control. It’s very hard for us to give up control. What we want to control not only what we do, but the outcome. And we want to control the outcome because we think that will bring us happiness. We fool ourselves into thinking our plan, our desired outcome and our definition of happiness is better than God’s. The response to this is to cultivate complete trust in God and in His plan for our life and our happiness – “Trust the past to God’s mercy, the present to God’s love, and the future to God’s providence.” Trust is how we demonstrate our love for God – by letting Him love us.

In Day 3 we looked at reigning in our disordered emotions by taking custody of them. Our emotions are disordered because they attract us to the wrong things (attachments) and they overwhelm our intellect and our will. We tame and reorder our emotions and associated thoughts and imagination by taking custody of them: we remain aware of our emotional responses, we assess them, and we take action - if they are appropriate, we sanction them, if not we disavow them.

A second way we tame and reorder our emotions is by uniting them to Christ in Christian meditation. This method builds on the approach of taking custody of our emotions – along with taking custody we will see how we bring them to Christ for healing, to deepen our self-knowledge, and also as a point at which to grow in our relationship with Him.

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Christian meditation is the heart of our relationship with God. Through Christian meditation we come to know God and speak with Him, which includes listening to Him. We come to know God, above all, by meditating on Him as He has revealed Himself through scripture. We spend time in silent prayer reflecting on a specific passage of scripture; inviting the Holy Spirit to illuminate our minds

to better know God. And, in sacred silence, we learn to speak from our heart to God and to listen to Him.

Our relationship with God, cultivated through Christian meditation, is indispensable to every aspect of our being; our personal aspirations, our relationships with others and our activities in the world.

In terms of dealing with worries, wounds and trials, Christian meditation provides a powerful way to know and follow God's will for our life (so that we can accept the trials we face) and redeem our disordered emotions (to heal wounds and dispel worries).

THE SILVER LINING OF WORRIES, WOUNDS AND TRIALS

The silver lining of worries, wounds and trials is that they reveal our vulnerabilities. Through them, God brings into the light the hidden places of our interior life that need attention.

We can appreciate this from other spheres of life. What happens with our house when there is a problem? We go right to that issue. If your roof is leaking you go after the leak. Maybe the entire roof needs replacing, in which case the leak was actually a helpful early warning system. It is the same with health issues. When you have a pain, you go to the doctor for that pain. There is likely a deeper underlying issue, but the immediate pain serves the important role of getting your attention and motivating you to take action so that the process of diagnosis, treatment and healing can begin.

This same dynamic is at work with worries, wounds and trials. God is showing us where He wants to heal us right then and there in our life. This is what Christ always does. Where does He come to people? He comes to them where they're hurting most. He comes to the blind man in his blindness. To the lepers in their leprosy. To the adulterer in the adultery. He addresses their immediate pain and suffering.

And then Christ goes deeper.

“Go and sin no more.” “Go, pick up your cross and follow Me.” “Your faith has saved you.” Where there is faith, Christ’s ministration penetrates to the soul and provides not just healing but salvation. And with salvation comes a bonus – mission.

“Go and sin no more.” “Go, pick up your cross and follow Me.” “Your faith has saved you.” Where there is faith, Christ’s ministration penetrates to the soul and provides not just healing but salvation. And with salvation comes a bonus – mission. We’re sent forth to bring Christ to the world in a new way.

Maybe we’ve learned something about how we can forgive others through Christ. Maybe we’ve learned how to offer up our sufferings. Maybe we’ve grown in letting go of the stress and anxiety of trying to control the future. Any of those is a great blessing – but not just for us – we bring that new found peace, wisdom and self-control into the world.

It all starts with turning to Christ in our woundedness.

When fear or anger well up, or whenever the next crisis befalls you - that is where Christ wants to break into your life to work something new in you.

Let Him.

Here is one way to do just that...

UNITING OUR WORRIES, WOUNDS AND TRIALS TO CHRIST

Uniting our worries, wounds and trials to Christ - so we can prevail through His strength - is deceptively simple. Start here:

1. Make note of what is most troubling to you in the form of wounds, worries or trials.
2. Bring that to Christ in prayer with related scripture.

Let's say that our discernment practice (be aware, assess, take action) shows we have a recurring struggle with envy. If we weren't already familiar with the spiritual aspects of envy we would do a little homework and discover that envy is actually disordered sorrow when something good happens to someone else. There may also be resentment and indignation layered in. We would then seek scripture that relates to envy. For example the parable of workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16), wherein all of the workers were paid the same wage regardless of how long they worked. We might hear Christ tell us how much he loves us and that we shouldn't be comparing ourselves to others. Or we might be led to the passage from His passion where the people choose to release the criminal Barabbas over Jesus. And we might hear Christ empathize with the injustices that we experience in life.

We can also go to Christ to sanction healthy emotions. Continuing the example of envy, the Holy Spirit might lead us to the parable of prodigal son, showing us that we are the older brother, and we should rejoice at the good fortune of others. Or, if we are experiencing extreme grief and sorrow at the loss of a loved one, we could visit with Christ at the tomb of Lazarus and share in Christ's grief and sorrow at the death of his friend.

By connecting with Christ and His emotions, actions and teaching in the Gospels, not only do we invite Him to guide us and heal our emotions, we also grow in relationship with Him by uniting our life experiences with His.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

If you're not certain how to get started with Christian meditation, here's what you do. Find a quiet place and pray this one verse – Isaiah Chapter 53, verse 5. This is a passage that described how Christ heals us through His suffering (I'm not going to reproduce it here, it is far better that you sit with it from your own bible). Take that verse to God. Ask Jesus what that verse means for you. Tell him what is

troubling you. Tell Him what it is that you want to be healed. If you're not certain you can name it yourself, then ask Him. Ask Him what He desires for you. Then spend time in silence. Let Him answer. Will you get distracted? Probably. Will you literally "hear" an answer – maybe not. Trust that whether or not you "hear" something, God is doing His good work in your soul and in time you will come to recognize the fruit. Repeat this for 15 minutes each day.

The Interior Life mobile app has an introduction to Christian meditation as well as the 30 Days to Christian Meditation retreat that teach how to overcome distraction, how to be confident in "hearing God's voice," and answers the many other questions that are likely arise.

SPIRITUAL TAKE-AWAYS FOR DAY 4

Our disordered emotions can also be reharmonized with other interior faculties (especially intellect and will) by uniting them with Christ through meditation.

The silver lining of worries, wounds and trials is that they reveal our vulnerabilities. Through them, God brings into the light the hidden places of our interior life that need attention.

When we become aware of vulnerabilities, we should meditate with a related scripture passage. Through that meditation the Holy Spirit works with us at both our conscious and subconscious levels, to reorder our interior.

Let's close in prayer-

Heavenly Father, thank you for your love for me and your plan for my life. Please raise up in my mind and heart what you desire for me from this day of the retreat. Amen.

DAY 4 POSTSCRIPT

The following are suggested scripture passages as a starting point for prayer. The list is based on pairs of emotions from classical philosophy and Christian anthropology. Note that any of these emotions (other than despair) can be either healthy or disordered, depending on context. For example, a person could feel a disordered delight when something bad happens to someone else, in which case the antidote is to practice sorrow on their behalf. The point is to enter into scripture to focus our prayer for an increase in healthy emotions and to dispel unhealthy emotions.

Love and Hate

Love – the Gospels are one entire love story. But John has particularly powerful passages, such as this - “As the father has loved me, so I have loved you...” (Jn 15:9-17)

Hate – Jesus hated evil in all its forms. Scripture records His particular loathing for lies and hypocrisy. See, for example, Matthew Chapter 23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites...”

Desire and Aversion

Desire – here are two examples: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...” (Mt 5:6), and, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you...” (Lk 22:15)

Aversion – in His humanity Jesus experienced aversion in the form of a certain type of frustration and fatigue. For example, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you?” (Mt 17:17) And, as with “hate”, Jesus had a thorough-going aversion to evil in all its forms, such as, “Get behind me satan,” and “Father, if it be your will, may this cup pass”.

Delight and Sorrow

Delight – true delight is joy in doing our Father’s will: “These

things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full..." (Jn 15:11)

Sorrow – Jesus at Lazarus' tomb: "And Jesus wept." (Jn 11:35)

Courage and Fear

Courage – most every event of Christ's Passion demonstrates Jesus' supernatural courage (the scourging at the pillar, crowning with thorns, being humiliated in the courts of Herod and Pilate, carrying the cross and on and on).

Fear – we can unite our fears with Jesus, during His agony in the garden, anticipating the trials He was to undertake. "He was in such agony and He prayed so fervently that His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground." (Luke 22:44) Note that Jesus' agony was akin to our healthy emotion of fear, and it never banished His faith in the Father. In fact, He prayed to the Father even more fervently. Authentic fear stirs up our faith rather than dispells it. It is in response to that sort of faith-killing fear that Jesus' encourages us to "be not afraid!"

Hope and Despair

Hope – Jesus counsels us to have complete dependence on God and trust in His goodness. For example, "Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink..." (Mt 6:25) Our greatest hope is found in Jesus' promise of salvation and eternal life, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (Jn 4:13-14)

Despair – Jesus never experienced true spiritual despair, as despair is to doubt in God's omnipotence and goodness. In times of despair you should pray with examples of hope to oppose that despair. That said, in Jesus' humanity, and out of His tireless effort to reach out to all peoples, Venerable Fulton Sheen teaches that Jesus allowed himself

to experience the pain, isolation and helplessness of the atheist when he cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:45-50)

Anger

Anger is our response to injustice, and Christ demonstrates righteous anger as He cleanses the temple. (Mt 21:12 and Jn 2:13)

Many times, when we are faced with injustice, we are actually called to bear it with heroic patience. In those instances, you can again look to the examples of Christ heroically bearing His Passion (as in the examples for “courage”).

And we are called to temper anger with mercy. For example, “blessed are the merciful...” (Mt 5:7)

We can also meditate with the virtues that vanquish the deadly sins:

Pride	Humility “Do not be called ‘Master’; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Mt 23:10-12)
Greed (Avarice)	Generosity and Trust in God “Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.” (Mt 5:41,42)
Lust	Chastity “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mt 5:27,28)

Anger	Meekness “But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic.” (Lk 6:27-29)
Gluttony	Temperance (e.g. discipline, moderation, sobriety) “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour.” (1Peter 5:8)
Envy	Kindness “But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.” (Lk 6:35)
Sloth	Diligence and Magnanimity “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Mt 7:21)