

Be Still and Know ... that you are being deceived.

by Brian Flynn

There is nothing more devious than a lie told with subtlety. Last week, I purchased the Be Still and Know That I am God DVD produced by 20th Century Fox. The cover boasts of such contemplatives as Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, Calvin Miller and Priscilla Shirer, along with some names that may surprise you; Max Lucado, Beth Moore. An acknowledgement list at the end includes Brennan Manning and Dr. Charles Stanley.

The advertisement for the video states:

Eight hundred people gathered at Mariner's church in Newport Beach, California for this amazing event that was broadcast live to over 2000 churches nationwide. Richard Foster and Dallas Willard kicked off the evening with an introduction and dialogue on the history of Contemplative Prayer. Priscilla Shirer shared passionately about the vital need to spend time listening to God and Dr. Henry Cloud challenged everyone with practical steps to help incorporate this type of prayer into busy, everyday life. Kendall Payne's soulful "Be Thou My Vision" set apart the close of the evening with Richard Foster leading the group in a time of silent, listening prayer based on a scripture reading from Luke. As one woman shared afterward, "I loved learning about this new kind of prayer that is actually so old from so many different views. There really was something for everyone..."

I tried to watch this DVD as if I were a person that knew little about contemplative prayer but had a fair knowledge of Scripture. By the advertisement, I am told that I'm going to be introduced to a new and different way to pray. The video begins by telling me that we all live in a frenzied chaotic world and that Christians are not immune to it. It suggests that we need to spend more time in prayer. Gosh! What a revelation! I spent \$15.98 to be told that?

Richard Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline*, begins by describing contemplative prayer this way:

Contemplative prayer is "listening prayer." It is attentiveness ... It is being all ears to what the Father has to say to us.

The DVD shows people reading their Bibles, while similar descriptions progress. Okay, so I am to listen to God while reading the Bible? I do that already. God informs me through His word. What's new about that? As I am watching this, I am wondering, "Did Fox put all this money into this project just to tell people to read their Bibles and think about what they have read?"

The narrator suggests finding some quiet time to be alone. Certainly all of us need that, but I already have my morning devotional. Perhaps many Christians don't do this and this DVD is a reminder.

The film describes contemplative prayer in many ways. Spending time in God's word and contemplating its meaning. I already do that. Get away from the world and all the noise and distractions by finding a quiet place to pray. That's nothing new. Meditating on a phrase from the Bible that has meaning to me. I do that often. However, they are suggesting a unique specific prayer. They could have called it the spend-time-contemplating-in-a-quiet-place-prayer. Perhaps they decided that name was too long and called it contemplative prayer.

Priscilla Shirer, author of *He Speaks to Me, Preparing to Hear the Voice of God*, shares her views. She states: "Most of my prayer time is filled up with what I am saying to Him as opposed to just being quiet, actually giving Him an opportunity to speak to me". It never occurred to me that I needed to consciously go into his presence with my mouth closed giving him an opportunity to get a word in edgewise.

Does she mean that God starts talking in my mind during the time of prayer? Now this is confusing to me. The premise of the Be Still DVD is suggesting that we need to spend more time alone in solitude to read the Bible, but then the meaning is switched to now mean silencing, or stilling, one's thoughts. Which silent solitude do they mean? Finding quiet time or finding quiet time to quiet and still the mind?

I was curious as to why Beth Moore had been a part of this production. Although I am not greatly familiar with her work, I have been told by many that she is well thought of within the Christian community, and she has created reputable Bible study programs. When she was questioned as to her participation in Be Still that promotes a mystical prayer movement she **released a statement** distancing herself from the project. What has really sparked my curiosity is what is she distancing herself from? After all, she seems to be the most quoted person in the film. If this practice is a biblical one, why has she denounced this project? Does she too see a problem with contemplative prayer?

The phrase contemplative prayer sounds like a suggestion that we are to contemplate God's word or contemplate its meaning by thinking. However, that is not its real meaning or how it is practiced.

Those on the DVD who promote the silence teach that this state of mind is reached through a repetitive practice (i.e., a mantra). Listed in the acknowledgements of *Be Still* is **Brennan Manning**. He describes the method in his book *Signature of Jesus* this way:

[T]he first step in faith is to stop thinking about God at the time of prayer. The second step, without moving your lips, repeat the sacred word [or phrase] inwardly, slowly, and often.

The third step concerns what to do when inevitable distractions come. The answer is to simply return to listening to your sacred word. Gently return your mind to your sacred word.

This is the only way that one can truly silence the mind. It is like putting the mind in neutral. Without repetition your own thoughts simply get in the way. We are beings that simply cannot shut off our thoughts, but you can through repetition, by going into an altered state. Hindus have practiced this type of meditation for centuries.

During this practice, contemplatives believe that you can hear God speaking in your mind. This is not a biblical practice. God has spoken to many individuals throughout the Bible but never by a meditative practice initiated by man. It is a dangerous practice and the results are detrimental.

Richard Foster admits to this danger in his book *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*:

I also want to give a word of precaution. In the silent contemplation of God we are entering deeply into the spiritual realm, and there is such a thing as a supernatural guidance. While the Bible does not give us a lot of information on that, there are various orders of spiritual beings, and some of them are definitely not in cooperation with God and his way! But for now I want to encourage you to learn and practice prayers of protection.

Foster also states: At the outset I need to give a word of warning, a little like the warning labels on medicine bottles. Contemplative prayer is not for the novice. I do not say this about any other form of prayer.

Sadly, this warning label is not listed on the DVD.

Foster describes the method of contemplative prayer quite differently in the *Be Still* film. It is a rather watered-down version of **Lectio Divina**. He instructs the listener to read a page of scripture several times looking for the important passages. He then reads it again focusing on one passage that he feels is relevant to him at that moment in his life. If that was all there was to contemplative prayer, I would not have written a book condemning it. I propose to you that Mr. Foster is not being upfront and honest in the DVD.

Max Lucado, also in the film, states there are two ways to read the Bible: for inspiration and for information. Certainly the Bible inspires me but it is by its information. Throughout this film, there is an underlying theme that the Bible is to be used, not just as a resource for knowledge, but rather as a mystical device. So in essence, the Bible is being recommended as a tool to practice our meditation techniques!

In later sections of the DVD under *Cloud of Witnesses*, Foster praises the early mystics such as Madame Guyon, but how does she describe reading the Bible? From Foster's book *Devotional Classics*, Madame Guyon states:

[M]ake use of scripture to quiet your mind. First read a passage of scripture. Once you sense the Lord's presence, the content of what you read is no longer important. The scripture has served its purpose; it has quieted your mind; it has brought you to him. You should always remember that you are not there to gain an understanding of what you have read; rather you are reading to turn your mind from the outward things to the deep parts of your being. You are not there to learn or to read, but you are there to experience the presence of your Lord!

The Lord is already present! He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. I already have the assurance through his word without "practicing the presence."

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:19-21)

In truth, those supporting the practice of contemplative prayer are demonstrating a tragic failure of faith. Is Christ's finished work on the Cross not enough for them, and are they not now sharing their doubt with all of us?

Although there are demonstrations of honest love for God from some of the individuals in this DVD, there is too much misleading information that will take listeners from knowing the word of God to an inward journey of deception waiting for God to speak to them in their minds. In fact, their use of the title Be Still and Know That I Am God, demonstrates their lack of biblical knowledge.

There are two commands in this verse:

1. BE STILL (don't worry or panic) and
2. KNOW THAT I AM GOD (a recognition of God's sovereignty).

The Achilles heal of contemplative prayer has always been its lack of biblical support . The choice is clear, we either come to God on his terms or any way man sees fit. Coming to God through a practice taught by mystics during the Dark Ages which they borrowed from eastern religions is not coming to God on His terms.

I left the New Age to escape practices like these, because I knew they lead to deception. I am not going to stand by and watch while my brothers and sisters in Christ fall into the same trap. The participants in this DVD are in scriptural error and must be confronted. No matter how much these modern day mystics try to attain the silence they will never receive silence from me.

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