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CHRISTIAN MEDITATION: 5 DIFFERENT WAYS TO PRAY

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over three evenings in February 2015
at St David's Anglican Church, Palm Beach

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SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS TO BEGIN WITH

Please note: This booklet is designed to be a helpful accompaniment to the DVD's by outlining a few points. You will find it most useful if used in conjunction with the DVD's as it is not intended to be comprehensive or used on its own.

1. Scripture offers us not simply passages or books to 'get through'. Rather, a scripture passage is a place of encounter with our God: *Heb 4: 12 For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*
2. Prayer begins when we simply place ourselves intentionally in God's presence. Just being present to God who is always present to us, changes us.
3. There is no 'right' or 'better' way to pray – this is your own unique relationship with the Living God. We pray as we can, not as we can't!
4. Prayer is dialogical – but we often forget (or haven't developed the ability to know how) to listen to or receive God's responses. And God's responses to us are not only in words, but in the full range of possible forms of communication – subtle nudging of the Spirit, nuanced shifts in the sensing of Presence.
5. We need to cultivate the art of listening and an interior way of knowing. God's identity is that of a self-revealing God, One who wants to be known.

God is not elusive or capricious; the God who created us has not abandoned us but desires to be in an ongoing vital relationship with us. God loves us passionately and promises over and over again, 'I will be your God; you will be my people...' Recognizing that we are created in God's image and for fellowship with God, we believe we have an ability to hear, sense and respond to God.

Meditation as a form of prayer

Unlike vocal prayer, meditation is a form of silent prayer. In most western cultures and the subcultures of our own churches, silence is often not embraced. People rush in to fill silences in conversations, prayer, and in our daily lives. There are very important reasons for this.

Why Silence?

We basically fear silence. This is because it is in silence that all the things that we have been running away from slowly begin to pop up. Yet it is these things that sit in the depth of our inner beings which affect us when we are stressed – the sudden burst of anger that is out of proportion to what was said or done; the emergence of impatience and frustration towards other drivers on the road or when we are kept waiting in a queue; or when we suddenly 'lose it' and it takes us by surprise. These are all clues for us to notice that we need to spend some time with God in silent prayer, waiting on God, and letting the Word of God mould us from the inside out.

Below are some quotes which give further perspective on this:

► *In silence all of our usual patterns assault us ... That is why most people give up rather quickly. When Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, the first things to show up were the wild beasts. (Richard Rohr)*

► *Our spiritual journey must lead through the desert or else our healing will be the product of our own will and wisdom. It is in the silence of the desert that we hear our dependence on noise. It is in the poverty of the desert that we see clearly our attachments to the trinkets and baubles we cling to for security and pleasure. The desert shatters the soul's arrogance and leaves body and soul crying out in thirst and hunger. In the desert we trust God or die. (Dan Allender)*

► *Silence and solitude is the furnace of transformation ... [It] is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter – the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers God's very self as the substance of our new self. (Henri Nouwen)*

► *In solitude I make the frustrating discovery that often my mind keeps me flailing around rather than settling into rest with God. I begin to notice all the*

ways my mind distracts me from the very thing my soul is longing for; the experience of rest, union and communion with God. Oh, how our minds need to learn how to rest in the way the psalmist describes! (Ruth Haley Barton)

► *Be still and know that I am God ... Psalm 46: 10 This shows there is a kind of knowing that comes in silence and not in words – but first we must be still. The Hebrew word for "Be still" literally means "Let go of your grip". Let go of our own understanding. Cease striving at the level of human effort, and in so doing open our self to a whole new kind of knowing.*

► *As we allow ourselves to be made known in solitude, we discover that we are known by Love. Beyond the pain of self-discovery there is a love that does not condemn us but calls us to itself. This love receives us as we are. (Parker Palmer)*

► *God is infinitely patient. He will not push himself into our lives... We can fill ourselves with our own thoughts, ideas, images and feelings. He will not interfere. But if we invite him with attention, opening the inner space with silence, he will speak to our souls [not only] in words or concepts, but in the mysterious way that love expresses itself – by presence. (M Basil Pennington)*

Why Meditation?

Our culture is used to reading for *information*. And this is essential. But it is only a starting point. We need to cultivate the capacity to read for *transformation*. So when we read scripture, it is not just information that we seek, but transformation. This is what happens when we use scripture with one or other of the forms of meditation.

Meditation also reminds us that we can pray with more than just the top 5 centimetres of our heads. We can pray with our whole being – our minds, imaginations, senses, bodies, hearts. *Ps 19: 14 "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight..."* The meditations of our hearts need to be engaged in prayer. Meditation helps us move from talking at God, through talking to God and talking with God towards listening to God and being with God, thus opening the eyes of our hearts.

Ephesians 1: 17-18 "I pray that the God of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the God of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, to bring you to a rich knowledge of the Creator. I pray that God will enlighten the eyes of your heart so you can see the hope this call holds for you..."

Following are some quotes which give further perspective on this question of "why meditate?":

➤ *What deadens us most to God's presence within, I think, is the inner dialogue that we are engaged in within ourselves, the endless chatter of human thought. I suspect that there is nothing more crucial to true spiritual comfort than being able from time to time to stop that chatter, including the chatter of spoken prayer. (Frederick Buechner)*

➤ *Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is in God that we live and move and have our whole being. Therefore, to pray with one's whole body is an honouring of this gift of the indwelling God. And so I suddenly find my whole being is swept up in a dialogical presencing between God and me. This is holy ground indeed!*

➤ *To meditate on a passage is not to ask oneself, How does this apply to me?... Meditation is different. You stop thinking so hard and wait for God to speak... You let go of being in control of the answers and you listen, and let the Spirit take initiative. It is more of a right brain engagement. (Jan Johnson)*

➤ *Luke 10:38-42 "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need on only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her"*

Christian Meditation Session I



First Meditation: Praying Scripture

Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God"

Praying Scripture is a way of pondering on the word of God. It allows a well known truth to settle ever more deeply within your being. As you practice this, some of the God-given fruits may include: allowing the word of God to not just inform your mind, but transform your whole being; a deeper and more automatic resting in God when taken off guard or stressed in day-to-day life; a deepening awareness that God has everything in hand.

Second Meditation: A Breath Prayer

One version of the 'Jesus Prayer' is "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, a sinner", (a combination of Luke 18: 39 and Luke 18: 13). This is a form of prayer linked with our breathing. Some of the God-given fruit of such a practice of prayer can include: a way of praying without ceasing; praying out of the desire of your heart.

You can choose your own breath prayer following the pattern below.

..... (Name for God),

..... (your deep desire right now,
or a phrase from scripture that resonates with
you right now)

Some examples might be:

- Abba, draw me closer to you
- Healer , touch me and make me whole
- Lord Jesus, I surrender my life to you
- Holy God, keep me on your path of truth

Third Meditation: Imaginative Prayer

This is a way of stepping into scripture and letting it come alive. We engage our five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing) as we imagine the whole scene. We then enter the scene ourselves.

Heb 4: 12 "For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Jesus expected us to use our imaginations eg the parables; the re-enactment of the Passover uses the imagination. Some of the God-given fruit of such a practice: our images of ourselves, God and our relationship with God are able to be transformed.

Scripture for Imaginative Prayer

Mark 10: 13-16

¹³"People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them."¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them"

Closing Prayer

***Take, Lord, and receive
all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding,
and my entire will;
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.***

***Everything is yours;
do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is
enough
for me.***

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Christian Meditation Session II



Fourth Meditation: Prayer of the Imagination and Senses

This is a repeat of the form of the third meditation, this time using a different passage of Scripture.

Scripture for Prayer of the Imagination and Senses:

Mark 10:46-52

"Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging.⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you."⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

Fifth Meditation: Lectio Divina (Literally – ‘holy reading’)

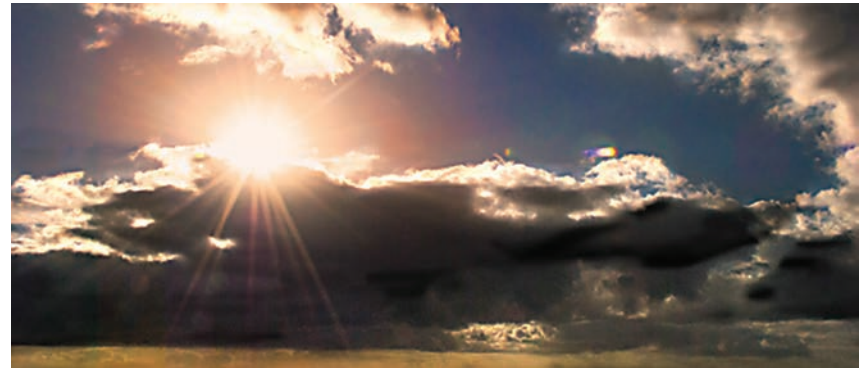
From early in the 6th Century, this has been a practice used by many Christians. The approach is very different from that of reading a novel, newspaper or textbook. In Lectio Divina we don't read for entertainment or even for knowledge, but for deep transformation. In order to enter into Lectio Divina we need to trust the integrity of the text – the Bible. We hear and see the text with the eyes of our hearts being enlightened. Lectio Divina can also be done in a group.

In the DVD an example is given from Michael's experience with the widow of Nain – being seen by God when in pain, not only noticed when competent achiever (Jesus sees; heart goes out; speaks to the person; acts; restores).

Lectio Divina

1. The passage is read out loud three times, slowly and thoughtfully.
2. After the first reading, allow yourself to wander over the text with your mind, your own commentary, if you like. At this point we are often speaking to the text. Then slowly let the 'study' approach to the text recede, and let a word or phrase emerge. During this time there is silence as we listen to the Word speaking to us.

3. We then identify one word or phrase that stands out for us, or we simply find ourselves coming back to that word, or it may even seem to "shimmer" as it were. Allow the words that are full of meaning for you to sink in and expand and nourish your heart.



4. The passage is read aloud a second time. There is silence again as you ponder this word or phrase. Let it go deep; it may disrupt or cause you some discomfort; or it may comfort and assure ... or something else. Notice what happens within your body as you savour this word or phrase. Don't try to understand it or analyse it, just let it 'ferment' within you.

5. The passage is then read a third time. At this stage, imagine it pervading the whole of your being, like an aroma. Simply surrender to the Spirit of God who will enable the gentle process of transformation to happen in God's own way and God's own time. Don't look for results. Let this be a "sabbath time" in God's presence. Rest in God's arms as a weaned child rests in her mother's arms (Psalm 131:2). Trust and surrender are central to the process here.



6. Lastly, write in your journal what has happened, writing it as a conversational dialogue with God. This begins to create your own 'florilegium'.

Some Quotes to Elaborate:

► *Lectio divina is one concrete means of opening ourselves to the action of grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This means that we have to stop trying to control the process. We have to take the risk of reading what is before us, allowing it to speak to our hearts and consciences and to cause us to look in a direction we have previously ignored. (Michael Casey – "Sacred Reading: the ancient art of Lectio Divina")*

► *It is like going with Elijah into the cave – it takes a while for our eyes to adjust, for our ears to notice the more subtle sounds, for our interior senses to be alerted to how we are REALLY feeling. Then we can hear a dialogue opening up between my true self and the One True God in this stillness and quietness.*

► *Psalm 130:5 "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in God's word I put my hope."*

► *Life isn't a race to the end but rather a gift given moment by moment. If we want to experience the abundant life God offers, we have to release our controlling, productivity-oriented approach to engaging faith and Scripture. So how do we give Scripture a spacious place to work in our lives? The answer lies in the ancient Christian practice of Lectio Divina. (Brian Hardin)*

► *Lectio Divina involves accepting the incredible truth that God speaks to me only as I am. (Michael Casey)*

Scripture for Lectio Divina:

Genesis 21: 14-20

¹⁴ *Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.*

¹⁵ *When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.*

¹⁷ *God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."*

¹⁹ *Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.*

²⁰ *God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer."*

Closing Prayer

***Take, Lord, and receive
all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding,
and my entire will;***

***All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.***

***Everything is yours;
do with it what you will.***

***Give me only your love and your grace,
that is
enough
for me.***

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Christian Meditation Session III



Sixth Meditation: Lectio Divina

We begin tonight with a repeat of this particular form of prayer that we did in session II. Please refer to the notes from session II for more details.

The simple process is as follows –

- I will read the passage once. In the silence that follows, let a phrase or word emerge for you. It may seem puzzling, irrelevant, or even insignificant. Just let it be.
- I will read the passage a second time. Again, in the silence that follows, let a word or phrase emerge – it may be the same as last time or a different one. “Taste” it, savour it, let your whole self ‘feel’ it. Notice what it touches within you.
- I will read the passage a last time. Allow yourself to simply rest into what has touched you. Let the Word of God do its work in you – you don’t need to do anything – simply ‘be’.

- At the end of the time of prayer, and when you have a chance, write down what happened. Have a conversation with Jesus about the time spent with him.

Scripture for Lectio Divina

Luke 5¹⁻³

Once when he was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon’s and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Sitting there, using the boat for a pulpit, he taught the crowd.

⁴ When he finished teaching, he said to Simon, “Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch.”

⁵⁻⁷ Simon said, “Master, we’ve been fishing hard all night and haven’t caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I’ll let out the nets.” It was no sooner said than done—a huge haul of fish, straining the nets past capacity. They waved to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They filled both boats, nearly swamping them with the catch.”

Seventh Meditation: Centering Prayer

In this form of prayer, we do not first and foremost seek peace, healing, enlightenment or tranquillity. These may well end up being the fruits, but this time is where we give ourselves to God with no transactional expectations. It is an offering of ourselves to God, without wanting something in return. We therefore do not analyse this time, nor do we try to measure its effectiveness. It is an utter surrender into God's presence.

It is a resting in God alone.

- Begin with becoming aware of your body, and gathering your whole self together (mind, body, feelings and experiences) to be fully where your feet are!
- We tend not to use a passage for this type of prayer.
- Rather, identify a word, image or sense of presence which touches you right now. Each time you drift away into other thoughts, simply return to this word, image or sense. You will drift away many times. This is normal.
- We rest in and receive the gaze of God.
- We desire to be present to this God who is always present to us.
- We let go of all the thinking and processing that we use to try to gain control of what is happening in our lives.
- You can do this in a group or on your own.

If on your own, always start with a short time, such as 5 or 7 minutes. Set your phone or alarm so you don't find yourself wondering if time is up.

Slowly extend your time as you are ready.

Remember, any time doing this is better than no time. So do not despise the smallness of beginnings.

Some passages:

- ▶ *Acts 17:28 "For in God we live and move and have our being."*
- ▶ *John 14:23 "If anyone loves me they will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."*
- ▶ *Song of Songs 5:2 "I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking."*
- ▶ *Psalms 62:1 "My soul finds rest in God alone."*

Some of the fruits of regular times of centering prayer which seem to emerge after some months, can include deep shifts in our ability to be patient where we would otherwise not have been; less anxious than we would have expected in certain circumstances; slower to become angry; more trusting of God's sovereignty...

You may find you are quicker to turn to God for help rather than to yourself. And you may find yourself more sensitive to the nuanced presencing of God in different situations.

- The types of transformation are often surprising and come as a result of spending regular, extended and intentional times in God's presence. Just placing ourselves intentionally in God's presence changes us!

Some Quotes to Elaborate

- *"Centering Prayer is an opening, a response, a putting aside of all the debris that stands in the way of our being totally present to the present Lord, so that He can be present to us. It is a laying aside of thoughts, so that the heart can attend immediately to Him. All prayer is a response. The Lord first knocks, beckons, calls to us." (M. Basil Pennington)*
- *"Another way to think about Centering Prayer is training the mind to become free from distractions so it can rest in God." (Amos Smith)*
- *"The Alexandrian Mystics' emphasis on silent prayer gave their teachings interior depth missing from Western theology today." (Amos Smith)*

Developing an Ongoing Rhythm of Prayer



This section includes some practical pointers for times of extended prayer in silence and solitude. These are listed below to help develop a rhythm of regular prayer and meditation to get started, if this is a new practice for you.

1. It takes practice

It is important to remember that just as starting a new physical exercise regime can be difficult and sometimes disheartening, so too can be the experience of beginning a new spiritual practice. The wonderful thing is that once a regular rhythm is established, you will find your whole being begins to long for it, just as a runner who jogs regularly can get to the point where they will run regardless of the weather! So expect to feel some resistance to persevering at the start, but if you do persist, the rewards will be great!

1 Timothy 4: 7-8 "...train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

- ▶ *Ps 46:1 "Be still and know that I am God."*
- ▶ *Isaiah 55:1 "Come to me all you who are thirsty, and drink..."*
- ▶ *Matt 11.28 "Come to me all you who are weary, and I will give you rest..."*

2. Start small

Start with what is very reasonable and eminently possible! Anything small is better than nothing. So 5 or 10 minutes once or twice a week, building up over time to a regular 20 or 30 minutes would be one possibility. Everyone is different, so sense what works best for you.

3. Book the time into your diary

We are in charge of our diaries, so choose what time of day (mornings, lunch breaks, evenings) is best and which days work well for you. Book it into your diary otherwise it won't happen, and choose not to accept other invitations or appointments at that time. Don't double book your appointment with God.

4. Make a regular place to pray

Some folk need to walk or run while they pray, others need to be outdoors, whilst others need a quiet corner in their office or home. Decide what works best for

you, and then make it regular. This means that even when you don't feel like meditating, which will indeed happen, then at the appointed time you still go to that place to intentionally be with God, and you can tell God that this is not what you feel like but you are being faithful! You then stay there for the pre-decided time, and only when the time is up do you leave. This way, we put ourselves in a place where God can reach us when we don't want to be reached! We may not 'feel any benefit' during this time and may feel it is a waste of time – but to turn up when everything in you cries out against doing so, shows God (who always shows up, by the way) and yourself just how serious you are about being with this mysterious, great, intimate and yet undomesticated God.

5. What passage will you focus on?

Remember, this time is not the time for studying the Bible or trying to master its meaning – that is another time. This time is for stepping into the Scripture; a time for letting the Word master you! So your interior posture to the Word is one of surrender and receptivity; it is the stance of listening deeply to the still, small voice. Decide the night before what passage you will meditate upon, and read it last thing at night.

6. What type of meditation will you use?

Choose the method that most resonates with you now. Experimenting with what works is also a way ahead. Remember this is your unique relationship with God, and God will be relating to you in a way that is different from the way God may relate to others. There is no 'right' or 'better' way. It is a relationship based on unconditional love and so comparisons have no place.

7. Distractions?

Whenever we step out of a busy lifestyle, our minds seem to find it hard to become still, and somehow produce a multitude of distractions when we try to focus on God and God's love for us. You may find it helpful to have a notebook or journal at hand, and write down in it any distractions (such as the email that wasn't sent; the call that needs to be made; the jarring conversation yesterday...). Simply jotting them down can help you take them out of your mind as it were, and put them aside. Simply writing them down can help shift them aside so you can focus on listening more attentively to God. If in a half hour of prayer you get distracted 20 times, but each time you just gently come back to God, then you have said "Yes" to God 20 times in half an hour. That is good praying! So don't judge your progress, simply notice you have drifted off, and gently come back to this God who is always welcoming.

8. The role of silence

a) When you are silent toward God

Worshipping God in silence may occur because your heart is so full that words cannot express your love for God. At other times you may feel just the opposite, so passionless that any words seem hypocritical. Or maybe words just don't cut it for you anymore. Regardless of the state of your emotions, there is always a place for wordless worship.

Habakkuk 2:20: "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him,"

Zephaniah 1:7: "Be silent before the Lord God!", and

Zechariah 2:13, "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord."

b) When God seems to be silent toward you

It may mean it is a time for you to wait. We are so used to quick responses from technology and our western lifestyle, that we haven't learnt well the art of waiting.

In *Psalms 62* David displays this kind of waiting. In verses 1-2 (and again in v5-6) he affirms, "My soul waits in silence for God only; from God only is my salvation. God alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken."

c) Silence as a context for prayer

It may help to think of silence and solitude as complementary disciplines to fellowship and acts of mercy. Without silence and solitude we remain in the illusion that we are in control; without fellowship and action in the community we don't challenge those who are in control.

Jesus practiced silence and solitude.

Matthew 4: 1, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." The Holy Spirit led Jesus into this lengthy period of fasting and solitude. In Luke's account of this experience, it's interesting to observe that he says Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4: 1) when He was led into this, but that afterward He returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4: 14).

9. Keeping a Journal, or a florilegium

A journal is not a diary, but rather a place you write down important conversations you have with God, or reflections after a time of prayer. A florilegium (literally a collection of flowers) is the ancient practice of collecting short excerpts of significant texts, passages or writings. You may rather choose this format rather than a journal, selecting the passages through which God speaks deeply to you. Reviewing your journal or florilegium each New Year can bring profound insights!

**May you be blessed as you seek
greater intimacy with God**



Notes

Bible Verses have been taken from:

*The Inclusive Bible Publ by Sheed and Ward, Plymouth, UK ,2007
NIV Bible, Publ by Zondervan, Michigan USA, 1995.*