

Week 1: Introduction – Action and Contemplation

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings US nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.

where is the Life we have lost in living?

where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

I have given you hands which you turn from worship,
I have given you speech, for endless palaver,
I have given you my Law, and you set up commissions,
I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,
I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.
**I have given you power of choice, and you only alternate
Between futile speculation and unconsidered action.**

A Cry from the North, from the West and from the South
Whence thousands travel daily to the timekept City;
Where My Word is unspoken,
In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,
The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,
**And the wind shall say: 'Here were decent godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls'.**

**When the Stranger says: 'What is the meaning of this city?
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?'**
**What will you answer? 'We all dwell together
To make money from each other'? or 'This is a community'?**
And the Stranger will depart and return to the desert.
O my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger,
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.

They constantly try to escape
From the darkness outside and within
By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.
But the man that is will shadow
The man that pretends to be.

Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face of the deep.
Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the Church?
When the Church is no longer regarded, not even opposed, **and men
have forgotten
All gods except Usury, Lust and Power.**

Remember the faith that took men from home
At the call of a wandering preacher.
**Our age is an age of moderate virtue
And of moderate vice**
When men will not lay down the Cross
Because they will never assume it.
Yet nothing is impossible, nothing,
To men of faith and conviction.
Let US therefore make perfect our will.
O GOD, help US.

TS Elliot – Choruses from The Rock

Welcome : Course Outline

What makes Prayer difficult for you? What do you find hard about prayer?

The Problem of Superficiality

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people or gifted people, but for deep people.”
Richard Foster

Eugene Peterson:

“The puzzle is why people live so badly. Not so wickedly, but so inanely. Not so cruelly, but so stupidly. There is little to admire and less to imitate in the people who are prominent in our culture. We have celebrities but not saints. Famous entertainers amuse a nation of bored insomniacs. Infamous criminals act out the aggressions of timid conformists. Petulant and spoiled athletes play games vicariously for lazy and apathetic spectators. People, aimless and bored, amuse themselves with trivia and trash. Neither the adventure of goodness nor the pursuit of righteousness gets headlines.

...This condition has produced an odd phenomenon: individuals who live trivial lives and then engage in evil acts in order to establish significance for themselves...Often they are successful. The mass media report their words and display their actions. Writers vie with one another in analysing their motives and providing psychological profiles on them. No other culture has been as eager to reward either nonsense or wickedness. If, on the other hand, we look around for what it means to be a mature, whole, blessed person, we don't find much. These people are around ... but they aren't easy to pick out. No journalist interviews them. No talk show features them. They are not admired. They are not looked up to. They do not set trends. There is no cash value in them. No Oscars are given out for integrity. At year's end no one compiles a list of the ten best-lived lives.”

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness

Neil Postman (1985)

Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with [distractions]. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "*failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.*" In 1984, Orwell added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we fear will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we desire will ruin us.

This book is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right."

How deep is your love? (The BeeGees)

Consequences of Superficiality

It makes us of the world but not *in* the world

Mark 10:21 "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, You lack one thing..."

Matthew 8:2-3 "Behold a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean."

Luke 8:44-45 "She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?"

Superficiality causes us to miss the real world unfolding in front of our very eyes. We live vicariously instead of being involved ourselves.

Eg. AirBnB Germany / Taking photos at rock concerts

It distracts us from both Depth and Detail

Luke 12:7 "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered."

Psalm 121:8 "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in."

Jeremiah 43:1 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine."

Superficiality causes us to think in general terms rather than specifics. We think depth means working out the "Big Ideas", but more often it means paying attention to the little details.

In terms of our prayer lives, this often means we gloss over the day-to-day real life, expecting prayer to be exclusively heavenly and grandiose.

Eg. Praying in the bath.

It inhibits both Action and Contemplation

James 2:15-17 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled." Without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Luke 5:15-16 Great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places to pray.

Mark 1:35, 39 Rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went to a desolate place, and there he prayed....And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Neil Postman – Information Action Ratio

A low **information-action ratio**, therefore, refers to the helplessness people confront when faced with decontextualized information. Information consumers are "faced with the problem of a diminished social and political potency."

Sunday's Sermon: Jesus' take on Professional Football and the Yemeni Crisis.

"We become aware of both these issues through the medium of entertainment.

News is part of our entertainment – squeezed in neatly between the Great British Bake-off and the latest detective whodunnit.

Richard Rohr: Centre for Action and Contemplation

Effective social action only springs from a contemplative heart.

Worthwhile spiritual contemplation is action-based.

Hence the title of this study: Pray. Think. Act.

How do you pray?

An Invitation to Prayer – Richard Foster

Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation.

He mourns that we do not draw near to him. He grieves that we have forgotten him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He longs for our presence.

And he is inviting you – and me – to come home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created. His arms are stretched out wide to receive us. His heart is enlarged to take us in.

For too long we have been in a far country: a country of noise and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation. And he welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.

The key to this home, this heart of God, is prayer.

If the is prayer, the door is Jesus Christ. No longer do we have to stand outside, barred from nearness to God by our rebellion. We may now enter through the door of God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

One day a friend of mine was walking through a shopping mall with his two-year-old son. The child was in a particularly cantankerous mood, fussing and fuming. The frustrated father tried everything to quiet his son but nothing seemed to help. The child simply would not obey. Then, under some special inspiration, the father scooped up his son and, holding him close to his chest, began singing an impromptu love song. None of the words rhymed. He sang off key. And yet, as best he could, this father began sharing his heart. "I love you," he sang. "I'm so glad you're my boy. You make me happy. I like the way you laugh." On they went from one store to the next. Quietly the father continued singing off key and making up words that did not rhyme. The child relaxed and became still, listening to the strange and wonderful song. Finally, they finished shopping and went to the car. As the father opened the door and prepared to buckle his son into the car seat, the child lifted his head and said simply, "Sing it to me again, Daddy! Sing it to me again!"

Prayer is a little like that. With simplicity of heart we allow ourselves to be gathered up into the arms of the Father and let him sing his love song over us.