

Anything taken to the extreme is dangerous. The very best things in the world can be bad for you if you take them too far. We need water to live, yet can drown. We need compassion for others, yet can become doormats so easily. This is important as we continue our look at the Contemplative, Prayer-filled life. Because like with anything, there are dangers to taking our dedication to this particular stream of Christianity too far.

The first danger is pride. We can so quickly become overly-proud of our new prayer life, our ponderings, and our insights. We begin to think that this stream of the 6 is the most important, and even that the other 5 streams don't really matter. And worst of all, we can begin to look down on others who are not as Christ-like as we are in our meditations. This was the great crime of the Pharisees, their pride and arrogance, and the reason they became one of the only groups Jesus treated like enemies.

Another danger of the Contemplative life is that we can begin to discount the importance of Christian community. As we approach the half-way point of our Year of Community at LCC, this is an important one. Given that the earliest practitioners of this Contemplative lifestyle were hermits and monks, neither known for their love of community, it is very easy to try to "go it alone". Who needs church when you can spend hours alone with God and grow more quickly? Who needs Christian friends who don't understand prayer the way you do? Who needs any community when prayer is meant to be a one-on-one, "hide in my closet" exercise? The short answer is, we all do. One of the most important things Christian community does for us is to keep us grounded in reality. That is one of the dangers we face during this pandemic – solitude. Because a little solitude is important. Constant aloneness can warp our thinking, our faith, and our growth in Christ-likeness.

More dangers? How about those who become obsessed with being different, alone, and "not of this world"? Like a person who begins to work out only to find themselves addicted to the endorphins of lifting, running, or exercising, beginners in the Contemplative path can find themselves addicted to its allures. There are stories of people who sat on top of a pillar 18 hours a day to meditate, of those who tried to distance themselves from earthly, physical pleasures by hurting themselves, and of those who left society all together to live alone with God, some of whom died in their solitude.

As with all things in life, the Prayer-Filled life must be taken in moderation. We need humility to keep us from becoming insufferable. We need each other to remain grounded in the reality of community. And we need moderation to keep us from taking this new lifestyle to dangerous extremes.

We in the Covenant have been accused of being "raging moderates", and I'm very comfortable with that. Not because it means I never have to take a stand as is often the accusation, but because the true Contemplative can see the good in every person, in every argument, and in all things that bear the image of God. So even as I encourage you to explore a more Prayer-Filled Life, hear these warnings, and don't go this journey alone. Find a Spiritual Director and a community to walk with you. You'll be much happier – and holier – if you do.