

PRAYER

Session 6

Contemplative Prayer

This is the sixth of six sessions on prayer. In this session we will look at Centering and Contemplative Prayer. Contemplative prayer is about making oneself aware of the presence of God who is always there. Our relationship with God takes time - just like our relationships with people take time. We must devote time to those we love - including God. Through Contemplative Prayer we are able to shed our judgements and fears and open ourselves to love just as we are. At the same time, we must face not just God, but the reality of ourselves. Denial is our enemy. God sees us as we truly are so we cannot come before him with phoniness.

Leader Prep Before You Meet:

This week will explore some creativity. Bring play-dough, crayons/markers, pencils - or other art supplies as you see appropriate for the Group Exercise.

Opening Activities



Centering Moment

Light a candle and observe 30 seconds of silence as a reminder of God's presence among us.



Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."



Reflect

Why do you think Jesus calls what Mary is doing "the better part"? In what ways does Christ enter your awareness of life? How are you welcoming Christ in daily life and what practices do you find most helpful? What interrupts your presence to God in prayer or in daily life?



Opening Prayer:

For your opening prayer today, simply sit in silence for a minute or two, listening for God in the silence and stillness. Amen.



Music (optional)

Sing or listen to “How Great Thou Art.”



Share

Share with one another any thoughts from last weeks’ exercises or session.



Watch: Contemplative Prayer



Discuss

Do you consider yourself a “contemplative” person? Why or why not?



Group Exercise - Contemplative Prayer

Choose a sacred word as a symbol that expresses our intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. (Love, God, Jesus, Guidance, etc)

Sit quietly, and when your mind begins to wander, the sacred word is said and helps us come back to an awareness of God’s presence with us. It is not to be used repetitively. It is to be spoken quietly within to gently turn us towards God.

Close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within you. Legs and arms need to be set comfortably as straight as possible to rest for the full 20 minutes.

Introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.

Avoid analyzing your experience, holding expectations, or aiming at any goal such as: having no thoughts, making the mind a blank, feeling peaceful, repeating the sacred word continuously, or achieving a spiritual experience.

You may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in parts of our body, or a generalized restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body. You may notice heaviness or lightness in your extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness. When you realize you are noticing these, gently return to the sacred word and to focus on God.

When the 20 minutes is up, return to the group.

Today’s leader should distribute the play dough, etc. For the next fifteen minutes shape a representation of what you feel is the promise of God’s presence in you and how you feel about receiving it. Draw it, write it, shape it with the play dough.

Share with the group what you made and set it in the center of the table or area you are meeting as an offering to God.



Closing Prayer

This week sing the doxology, (Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow)



Exercises To Do At Home

1. SOLITARY PRAYER *(Each of these you should spend about 15 minutes on)*

Read Luke 1:26-38

In this story, Mary is utterly receptive to God. She joins Moses, Isaiah, and later, Ananias in placing herself totally at the disposal of God in receptivity and love. Note that Mary still has questions and hesitations, but in faith ventures to trust God.

Find a quiet place where you can be receptive to God.

Start by saying “Here I am, doing nothing” for about 5 minutes. Notice your own bodily presence.

Then, “Here I am in the presence of _____” (wherever you are at.) Be aware of the furniture, walls, and anything else present in the room or area with you. Relax more. (5 mins)

Now say to yourself, “Here I am in the presence of God. Let it be with me according to your word.” Repeat this over and over for five more minutes.

Now fill out the reflection sheet (Comp. in Christ - pg. 119)

2. PRAYER OF REPETITION:

Read Philippians 2:12-13 Reflect on your role and God’s role in your ongoing transformation in Christ. Devote several minutes to praying the phrase “For it is God who is at work in you.” Record expressions of your awareness in your journal.

3. JESUS PRAYER

Repeat: “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.” When you feel your mind wandering, repeat this phrase.

4. VISUAL FOCUS

Use an image or icon of some sort to focus your attention. This can be a painting, an object (like the cross), a stained glass window, etc. Gaze upon the visual focus without analyzing or evaluating what you see. Reach for God through your eyes and let God reach for you through the “eyes” of the visual focus. Seek to be seen and known by God, rather than seeking insights about God. When distracted, return your attention to the visual focus.

5. Record your experience in your journal, and remember that you can also see the image of God in the people around you as you go about your day.

Reflection Sheet following Solitary Prayer Exercise

BASED ON LUKE 1:26-38

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. . . . And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.” *How are you noticing God’s presence in you? What do you feel is the promise in God’s presence or prompting?*

“But she was much perplexed . . . and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. . . . ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’” *What hesitations, fears, questions prevent you from being utterly receptive to God’s presence and promise?*

What assurance do you need?

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”
When you say, “Here am I,” what are you saying yes to or accepting? What are you saying no to or giving up?

What do you need in order to live your “Here am I” and give yourself in joy to the promise of Christ in you?