

Hallowing the Name: The Jesus Prayer as A Sacramental Practice for Prayer and Daily Life

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This presentation was originally a four week Lenten Series given in March, 2017.¹ Revisions and additions have been incorporated and footnotes added, but the original oral form has been retained for the most part.

TALK 1 – INTRODUCING THE JESUS PRAYER AND ITS BIBLICAL GROUNDING

Welcome to this series of teachings on the Jesus Prayer. This is an ancient form of prayer that centers around the simple recitation of the name of Jesus in faith and love. In this series I want to share some of the material that I've found helpful for understanding and practicing this form of prayer and its connection to a life of Christian discipleship.

What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God? How can we experience what Paul talks about when he says it is no longer he that lives but Christ who lives in him? Scripture reveals to us amazing good news about God and the salvation He offers us. Sometimes, however, it all may seem abstract, or beyond our own experience. Many of us need help in experiencing the reality of God and His salvation.

In this workshop we'll focus on one particular way to make contact with God. Some of you may be led to add this practice to your current forms of prayer. Others of you may not be so led, but may perhaps find something that contributes to your other forms of prayer. I pray that this time will be helpful to each of you, in one way or another.

We'll start with a quick summary of some of the major themes in the gospel's vision of reality to provide a framework for understanding the Jesus Prayer.

The Gospel's Vision of Reality: Some Highlights

The vision is indeed glorious. God is revealed to be infinitely loving, good, beautiful, powerful, wise, holy, just, righteous, pure, merciful—the list could go on.

He creates all things, sustains all things, redeems all things, and is in the process of bringing all things into union in Christ. This is not only true in general, but for each one of us individually. As Paul said, "Christ loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

All of this creation and redemption is the work of the Father in the Son through the Spirit. Through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus sin has been forgiven,

¹ The series was given at Grace Anglican Church, Edgeworth, PA. It began with a two hour session which included an introductory talk, a session of the prayer, another short talk, and a second session of the prayer. The next three weeks were one hour sessions, each with a talk and a session of the prayer. Elements of these talks go back to pamphlets I wrote for the Contemplative Prayer Group at Trinity School for Ministry beginning in the 1990s.

the way to the Father has been opened, and the Spirit has been poured out. God's glory has always filled the whole earth, His power and Presence is always present, sustaining us in life. We were created to share in that glory, but sin derailed us. Now Christ has taken on our human nature and restored us to the image God and to a right relationship with God so we can share in God's glory as we were created to do.

As members of Christ's body we share in His own righteousness and His life with the Father. In Christ we share in the love that flows eternally between the Father and the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit has been poured into our hearts crying, "Abba, Father."

So we have peace with God and have been reborn into a new form of life, the eternal life of God Himself. We are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies, even while we still live in the midst of a fallen world that remains in rebellion against God. We ourselves continue to wrestle with the trials and temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil as we await the redemption of our bodies. At the same time, our bodies are already temples of the Holy Spirit.

We have already come to share in the glory of God, and we are continuing to grow in that experience. We are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. By the grace of God we are able to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. We are able to no longer be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind. In these ways and others the Kingdom has already be inaugurated, but not yet in its fulness. The life of discipleship is a pilgrimage with ups and downs and failures and a continuing need for repentance, but we have confidence in God who is at work to bring us to completion.

In this way, both as individuals and as the Church, though we are earthenware vessels we can be a place, a medium, through which God's glory is manifest on earth. We can bear witness in our words and in our lives to God and to the Kingdom He is establishing under Christ that is characterized by justice, peace, harmony, and love. As one author put it, "Whether it be in nature or grace, in time or eternity, all things exist only for God as the medium through which He can show forth His power and goodness, and so be glorified in the beauty and happiness of His creatures."²

The Role of Faith in the Experience of the Reality of this Vision

This brief overview of some key elements in a Christian view of reality is beautiful, but how do we actually live into it? We often hear wonderful truths about God and the life He offers, but how do we get from where we are to the reality revealed in that vision? We need an intermediate

² Andrew Murray, *Wholly for God: A Series of Extracts from the Writings of William Law* (London: James Nisbet, 1894), xxiii.

step,³ a way to connect to the reality of God, who is Himself the one seeking us more than we are Him.⁴

I think we would all agree that faith plays a major role in how we live into this reality. In Scripture the word faith (πίστις, *pistis*) has four senses. First, it refers to our believing that something is true. Second, it refers to trust. On one level it is trusting that something is true. That is, we not only accept it intellectually, but also embrace it and guide our actions as if it were really true. We not only believe the ice is thick enough to hold us, we actually step onto it. On a deeper level it is trusting a person, in particular, our trust in God.

Such trust, in turn, is related to a third facet of faith, namely, being faithful, which is one of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). And fourth, faith sometimes refers to a form of spiritual perception. It is like an eye that perceives what our physical eyes do not see. For example, in Hebrews 11 the author says, “By faith Moses left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27).⁵

Further Points of Contact for Experiencing the Reality of this Vision

So faith is essential, and God has given us focal points for our faith. The special revelation in Scripture, and the general revelation in nature, can shape our understanding of reality and thus the content of our belief as we interpret both Scripture and nature in the light of Christ, who is the ultimate revelation. In the two chief sacraments of baptism and Holy Eucharist God uses physical matter to make contact with us, giving and nourishing eternal life in the midst of this world, and Scripture itself is sacramental as well.

The fellowship of believers as the body of Christ is another focal point for faith and a means of contact with God in this world. God dwells in each of us, and as we bear one another’s burdens within the Church and extend God’s care to those outside the Church, we live into the reality of who God is and what He is up to, becoming, as mentioned above, “the medium through which He can show forth His power and goodness.” When we come together to worship God we are offered a rich exposure to God in the midst of His people and a rehearsal of many of the truths

³ “One of the greatest reasons that our religion is so powerless, is that it is too much a thing of reason and sense. We place our dependence on the intellectual apprehensions of truth, and the influence these exert in stirring the feelings, the desires, and the will. But they cannot reach to the life, to the reality of God, both because they are in their nature unfitted for receiving God, and are darkened under the power of sin. Mysticism insists upon this—and presses unceasingly the cultivation of the spiritual faculty which retires within itself, and seeks in patient waiting for God by faith to open the deepest recesses of its being to His Presence” (Murray, *Wholly for God*, xxiv-xxv). The Jesus Prayer is one of the practical means of grace for doing what Murray describes.

⁴ “An ‘impersonal God’—well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads—better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap—best of all. But God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, king, husband—that is quite another matter. There comes a moment when the children who have been playing at burglars hush suddenly: was that a *real* footstep in the hall? There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion (‘Man’s search for God!’) suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to *that!* Worse still, supposing He had found us?” C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947), 114.

⁵ St. Isaac the Syrian (died around 700) says, “Faith is the door to mysteries. What the bodily eyes are to sensory objects, the same is faith to the eyes of the intellect that gaze at hidden treasures.” *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, tran. Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 223. See Appendix 1 below for Andrew Murray’s comments on Hebrews 11 regarding this fourth sense of faith.

about Reality to refresh our faith and clear our filters that have been clogged from hearing the fallen world’s views of reality throughout the week.

Yet another key point of contact with God and the Reality of His Kingdom is conversational prayer. In faith we can express our praise and thanksgiving, our confession of sin, and let God know of needs and concerns and cares, both our own and those of others. We can walk through the day sharing life with God. Such prayer gives expression to our relationship with God and so is of the essence. For relationship is at the heart of reality, as we see in the Holy Trinity, and it is at the heart of the eternal life God offers us as seen in the incarnation. The God who is utterly transcendent and also immanent in all times and places now relates to us as one who became incarnate among us.

Indeed, there are many forms of prayer, and I trust that each of us has found ways that help us each make contact with the Presence of God. While this workshop focuses on the ancient form known as the Jesus Prayer, we also will draw upon several other forms of prayer that have a long history in the Church.

We will begin with three biblical themes that provide a grounding for this approach to prayer.

First Biblical Theme: The Role of the Body

In the sacraments God uses physical matter as a point of contact with His Presence and power, instilling life and nourishing life in us through “effectual signs,” as the Prayer Book puts it.⁶ But such encounter with God through our bodies is not limited to these two chief sacraments. Our own bodies have a vital role to play as part of our life in the Son through the Spirit, for, as St. Paul tells us, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). In the form of prayer I will describe we take seriously the role of our body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, dedicated to Him and His service, a place where His Presence can be encountered. We usually think of prayer as something our mind or our spirit does, which is true. But our bodies also play an important role since all parts of a human being are inter-related and part of a whole.

Second Biblical Theme: The Role of the Heart

The second biblical theme for understanding this form of prayer is the heart. In Scripture the heart is not just a means of rational thought, nor is it simply our emotions.⁷ It is a deeper place at

⁶ “Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men’s profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God’s good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.” Article XXV of the *Articles of Religion*.

⁷ In our culture the heart is usually associated with our emotions. The emotions are great gifts from God and play a vital role in our lives, but are not the deepest part of us. “Emotional intensity is in itself no proof of spiritual depth. If we pray in terror we shall pray earnestly; it only proves that terror is an earnest emotion.” C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963), 82.

The Charismatic/Pentecostal traditions often focus on the emotions, but at least some people’s experience of tongues, for example, may be a form of prayer of the heart and not just the emotions. George T. Montague, S.M., a highly respected Catholic biblical scholar, wrote several helpful biblical studies on the Spirit informed by his experience of Charismatic renewal in the church. In one of his short books he notes that the, “advantage for personal prayer” of the gift of tongues, “seems to be precisely in the rest it gives to the phrenetic activity of the mind—a value appreciated by the spiritual masters of all traditions....” *The Spirit and His Gifts: The Biblical Background of*

our core that incorporates our rational, intuitive, emotional and volitional powers, but is also deeper than any of them. The heart is the meeting point between the seen and the unseen, “the point of encounter between each created person and the uncreated God.”⁸

We often talk about opening our hearts to God, but how do we do that? Because the heart is the source of our thoughts and feelings we cannot get at the heart itself through thought or feeling. They are products of the heart, not the heart itself. Instead, we can open our heart through an attitude of faith and love as we turn our attention in silence and stillness to the living Presence of God.

As we’ll see, we can make use of the body and its sensations as a way to open the heart, the very core of our being. Since this attention to our body is part of our intention to meet with God it does not just prepare us to pray, but is itself a form of prayer. This whole practice is prayer from beginning to end.

Third Biblical Theme: The Role of the Name

The third biblical theme we need to think about briefly is the divine Name. As you perhaps know, in Scripture a person’s name represents their character and often reflects their role in the unfolding of God’s plan. The names of Abram and Sarai are changed to Abraham and Sarah as their roles shift, and in the New Testament Simon and Saul are changed to Peter and Paul. So a name carries great significance in the Bible.

Furthermore, in ancient cultures a person’s name is an actual point of contact with that person in a way that is foreign to our thinking and counter-intuitive for us. This characteristic is not only true of human names, but also of God’s names. This is a crucial point. The form of prayer we are exploring draws upon the ancient notion, found in the Bible as well as elsewhere, that the name of God is itself a point of contact with God, like a sacrament. The most recent and authoritative lexicon for the Greek New Testament offers the following succinct explanation.

The belief in the efficacy of the name is extremely old; its origin goes back to the most ancient times and the most primitive forms of intellectual and religious life. It has exhibited an extraordinary vitality. The period of our literature also sees—within as well as without the new community of believers—in the name something real, a piece of the very nature of the personality whom it designates, expressing the person’s qualities and powers.... The Judeo-Christians revere and use the name of God and, of course, the name of Jesus.⁹

After citing a number of New Testament passages, the author continues, “Although in the preceding examples *the name is often practically inseparable from the being that bears it*, this is perhaps even more true of the following cases, in which *the name appears almost as the representation of the Godhead, as a tangible manifestation of the divine nature.*”¹⁰

Spirit-Baptism, Tongue-Speaking, and Prophecy (New York: Paulist, 1974), 22. In a footnote he adds, “Prayer in tongues has many similarities, I think, with the Jesus-prayer of the Hesychast tradition” (ibid., 59).

⁸ Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Jesus Prayer* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2014), 36.

⁹ Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University Press, 2000), p. 712.

¹⁰ Ibid. Italics and underlining added.

This same point is made by Kallistos Ware in his very valuable introduction to the Jesus Prayer. After noting biblical material on the Name he says,

The power and glory of God are present and active in His Name. The Name of God is *numen praesens*, God with us, *Emmanuel*. Attentively and deliberately to invoke God's Name is to place oneself in His presence, to open oneself to His energy, to offer oneself as an instrument and a living sacrifice in His hands... It is this biblical reverence for the Name that forms the basis and foundation of the Jesus Prayer. God's Name is essentially linked with His Person, and so the Invocation of the divine Name possesses a genuinely sacramental character, serving as an effective sign of His invisible presence and action.¹¹

We can see this view of the Name illustrated when Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8). He prayed that God would cause His Name to dwell in the temple, so that when people pray towards the temple God would hear them. Earlier in his prayer Solomon is quite clear that God's Presence is utterly transcendent, yet now it is present in a special way in the temple, manifested as Glory, and referred to as His Name. By causing His Name to dwell in the temple, God is making Himself accessible to people. Knowing a person's name means one is able to call that person and get their attention, and establish contact with them. The utterly transcendent God who dwells in unapproachable Light has given us a handle by which we can get hold of Him.

In keeping with such ideas, this form of prayer treats the divine Name as a very real way of making contact with God Himself. Unfortunately, some people have taken such biblical ideas and treated the Name as a magic formula for gaining power or control, or they have practiced a mere mechanical repetition. There are many ways to take the Name of the Lord in vain.

In contrast, the form of prayer I am talking about recognizes the Name as a focal point of attention in the context of faith, love and alignment. Instead of trying to control God or ourselves or anything else, it is a way to enter into the self-emptying life of Jesus (Phil. 2:5-11), who in love abandons Himself to the Father. It is related to the meekness and lowliness of heart that Jesus says is the lesson we need to learn from Him, "Come unto me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, that I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-30).¹² At the heart of discipleship is a sharing in Jesus's own life, walking as He walked, who prayed "not my will but thine be done."

Combining These Three Biblical Themes in the Jesus Prayer

So how does all of this fit together in this form of prayer? Since our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit we can begin a time of prayer by paying attention to our bodies. We can "come to

¹¹ Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, *The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*, Fairacres Publications 43, rev. ed. (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG Press, 1977), 10-11. See also Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 10-13. Note the second century Christian text, Shepherd of Hermas, *Similitudes* 9, 14, 5: "The name of the Son of God is great and uncontainable and supports the whole world."

¹² This verse is often translated "for I am meek/gentle and humble/lowly in heart," as if Jesus is explaining why we should learn from Him. But the Greek can just as well be expressing the lesson we are to learn from Him, that He is meek/gentle and humble/lowly in heart, which is similar to His teaching about childlikeness and humility.

our senses,” as it were, that we may be in our right mind. So we can begin with a brief time of observing what we are sensing through our bodies from the environment around us, and what we are sensing within our bodies. For example, after settling into a comfortable position that enables us to be alert we can close our eyes and turn our attention to what we are hearing, just noting any sounds without thinking about them. Then we can turn our attention to what we are feeling through our sense of touch, for example, the floor, the chair and our hands in our lap (if this fits the posture we have chosen), our clothes, and so forth. Then we can survey any sensations within our bodies, doing a scan from our toes to the top of our head, simply noting areas of calm and areas where there is some particular sensation. In all of this we are just observing, not analyzing or trying to respond to anything we note. This attention to our physical sensations can help our minds become more calm and attentive in the present moment, which in turn allows our hearts to open. Like Abram, we are building an altar to call upon the Name of the Lord (Gen. 12:8).

After becoming aware of our physical environment and our body through our senses we then can pay attention to what our body is doing. Here the focus is on our breathing, since out of the thousands of things going on in our bodies at any given moment this is perhaps the easiest process to observe. Just notice the physical sensation of breathing, either the rising and falling of the abdomen or chest, or the sensation of air as it passes through the nostrils.¹³

This focusing on the physical sensations is not the same as thinking about them or feeling emotions about them. In place of the usual melodrama going on in our heads we can use our minds to notice where we are located right this minute in time and space by attention to the physical. This is spiritually important since the only place we can meet God, actually encounter His Presence, is in the present moment. The meeting point between reality on the level we experience it and ultimate Reality is only in the here and now, this singular moment in time at this precise set of GPS coordinates. So in this prayer we will focus on the present, one moment at a time, breath by breath.

As we observe our body and its physical sensations we are like priests preparing the temple for worship. Our attention to our physical senses helps prepare us to exercise our faith, activate that organ of spiritual perception, to be attentive to God’s Presence. We are unifying our hearts to revere His Name (Ps. 86:11).¹⁴ So our next stage in this prayer is to focus on our spiritual environment and the Reality of the Presence of the One who fills all in all.

It is at this point that we see the amazing gift of the divine Name. We hallow the Name as we receive the revelation of the character of God and reverence His Name, acknowledging God as the ultimate Reality and therefore our chief concern and point of reference. It is taking him as our

¹³ The way attention to physical sensations can help us be alert and focused in the present moment is discussed helpfully in books on mindfulness such as Andy Puddicombe, *The Headspace Guide to Meditation and Mindfulness* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2011, reprint edition 2016). There are many such resources available. They are not about prayer and they often have elements from Hindu, Buddhist, or secular worldviews that are not always congruent with a Christian worldview. But they are very valuable for understanding the mind and growing in watchfulness, alertness, and other such aspects of Christian discipleship we are exploring in these talks.

¹⁴ Many English translations have “fear your name,” but the word translated “fear” also can mean “to revere,” “to consider worthy of great honor and admiration,” “to stand in astonishment and awe of.” Such senses are similar to “hallow.” We desire a united heart in order to hallow the Name, and the hallowing of the Name is itself a means of unifying our heart.

center and ground, our fixed point and highest good, our contact with ultimate reality and our guide for how we live our lives. The God who is utterly transcendent has given us a point to contact with Himself. By reciting the divine Name out of reverence and love we take hold of the handle God has given us to be in contact with His actual Presence.

Forms of the Jesus Prayer

There are many names of God revealed in Scripture that we might use, but our primary focus here is on the Jesus Prayer which centers on the name of Jesus, the One who is both divine and human.¹⁵ There is much to commend using the Name of Jesus, since He is the one mediator between us and God (1 Tim. 2:5). He is the one through whom we were created, are sustained, were redeemed, and the whole creation is being restored to unity with the Father (Col. 1:15-20; 1 Cor. 15:20-28). John tells us that, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18 ESV). In John’s Gospel the Spirit is pointing to the Son and the Son is pointing to the Father. In Jesus’s final teachings He says the believer is in the Son who is Himself in the Father (John 14:20), and the Father is in the Son who is in the believers (John 17:23). But He never says the Father is in the believer, nor that the believer is in the Father. Thus Jesus is the great intermediate point of contact between us and the Father.

There are several variations of the Jesus Prayer. The most common full form is “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” which is modeled after the prayer of the tax collector in Jesus’s parable (Luke 18:13).¹⁶ The emphasis on penitence could come across as morbid or expressing false guilt, but instead it should be taken as a realistic view of our condition. We have a deadly illness. Our sin has cut us off from God and continues to inhibit our union with Him, and, if we love God, this is a source of sorrow. In acknowledging our sin we are recognizing our need for life and transformation. Our focus on our own sin and our need for mercy is like the instructions at the beginning of a flight: in the event of a loss of cabin pressure we are to put on our own oxygen mask before assisting others.

Some find that this prayer becomes intercession for the whole world. “Soon I find that I am no longer praying just for myself, but when I say, ‘on me, a sinner’ all the situations of grief and terror, of pain and suffering begin to be drawn into me and I into them. I begin to pray as a fragment of this wounded creation longing for its release into fulfillment.”¹⁷ We will explore the relation between the Jesus Prayer and intercession more in a later session.

In saying the Jesus Prayer in this form we are not trying to coax Jesus to be merciful. God’s mercy is clearly revealed throughout the Bible, and in the crucifixion and resurrection we have learned, as the Prayer Book puts it, that His “property is always to have mercy.” In a sense, asking God to show mercy is like asking the sun to shine. But God is not impersonal like the sun,

¹⁵ Later we will look at the use of other names.

¹⁶ Compare also the cry of blind Bartemaues, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47; Luke 18:38) and of the ten lepers, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (Luke 17:13). In these passages the verb is *ἐλεέω* (*eleeō*), which means “to be greatly concerned about someone in need” (Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 315), while the tax collector uses a more precise term, *ἰλάσκομαι* (*hilaskomai*), which means, “to cause to be favorably inclined or disposed” (ibid., 473). The tax collector’s need is more focused, namely, reconciliation in the face of his sin. In English “mercy” can include all sorts of need.

¹⁷ Simon Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus Prayer: A Way to Contemplation* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2011), 85.

so while “he delights to show mercy,” (Book of Common Prayer), He does not force Himself on us. Our part is to acknowledge our need and express our desire and turn to Him. Even such a desire for God is itself evidence of His action in our lives. So we are not asking Him to become merciful, but to manifest His mercy in our lives, enabling us to receive Him and His love and mercy and thus His salvation in the face of our sin and all the necessities of life. We can ask for His mercy in utter confidence based on His love and goodness. Our sorrow is not morbid, but rather a “joy-producing sorrow,”¹⁸ for it leads to repentance, a turning towards God, the Father who Himself runs to meet the prodigal.¹⁹

The Jesus Prayer is obviously focused on Jesus, but in this fuller form of the Prayer we can also see that it is trinitarian. Referring to Jesus as “Son of God” implies the Father, and Paul says, “No one can say ‘Lord Jesus’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Accordingly,

the Holy Spirit is the ‘atmosphere’ in which the Prayer is said. Reciting the Jesus Prayer, then, we are praying *in* the Spirit *to* Christ, and *through* Christ *to* the Father. All three persons in the Trinity are included. The Jesus Prayer draws us into the *perichoresis* of the Trinity, the interchange or unceasing movement of mutual love that passes between the Eternal Three.²⁰

So in this full form there are two movements to the prayer:

doxology, the ‘moment’ of gazing upwards towards God’s glory; and compunction, the ‘moment’, both sorrowful and yet joyful, when we acknowledge that we are sinners who have been forgiven. As Bishop Simon Barrington-Ward has put it, ‘What matters is this holding together of rejoicing and yearning.’²¹

Thus, in the first part of the Prayer we acknowledge the divine Presence and in the second we ask for God’s loving, saving action. Since God is always present and active, in a deeper sense we’re simply opening to His Presence and consenting to His work.²²

Various shortened versions are often used such as “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me,” or simply, “Lord Jesus,” the form of the Jesus Prayer in the earliest reference we have to it.²³

¹⁸ St. John Climacus (c. 570-649), *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 7.

¹⁹ “We should see repentance as a way of turning away from ourselves and recentering ourselves on God. Conversion means waking up to the true reality of our condition before God and responding to this grace by returning—not just once, but again and again—to the path of holiness.” Irma Zaleski, *Living the Jesus Prayer*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Novalis, 2011), 33-34.

²⁰ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 40, italics original. In a footnote Ware explains, “*Perichoresis*: a Greek word meaning literally ‘circular movement’. It is applied to the interaction of the two natures, divine and human, within the incarnate Christ, and also to the ‘round dance’ of mutual love between the three persons of the Trinity” (*ibid.*, 50).

²¹ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 40, citing Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus Prayer*, 25.

²² C. S. Lewis, in describing his life before his conversion, said, “Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about ‘man’s search for God.’ To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse’s search for the cat.” *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955), 227. Taking Lewis’s image beyond the point he is making we could note that the cat is far more interested in finding the mouse, than the mouse in finding the cat! This idea of consent to the divine Presence and action is foundational in Centering Prayer. See footnote 25.

²³ St. Diadochus of Photike (died before 486), “On Spiritual Knowledge,” 59, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, translated and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 270. See

Indeed, the Prayer can simply be the name “Jesus.”²⁴ Some people use a full form during a session of prayer and then a short form during the day.

Yet another option is to use the name of Jesus in a form you do not usually use in your prayers.²⁵ If you use the usual form then your mind may think it is supposed to start talking. But in this form of prayer we are going below the surface to our roots, our heart, deeper than our thoughts and emotions. So you might use the form of the Name of Jesus in a language that you usually do not use. For example, the Greek form of Jesus, Ἰησοῦ,²⁶ in Modern Greek is pronounced “eee – sou.”

Now you may be wondering, how do we call upon God with our heart instead of our mind? The key is to listen to the sound of the name, but not just as a meaningless point of attention, but rather as an invocation, attentive to the Lord’s Presence in an attitude of love and receptivity. Thus, “while turning aside from images, we are to concentrate our full attention upon, or rather within, the words. The Jesus Prayer is not just a hypnotic incantation but a meaningful phrase, an invocation addressed to another Person.”²⁷

Just as we begin this time of prayer by focusing briefly on our physical sensations, now we add a focus on the sounds of the Name. It may seem counterintuitive, but even when we simply listen to the sounds we are actually engaging the meaning of a word as well, even though we’re not

Kallistos Ware in his Forward to *The Jesus Prayer* by A Monk of the Eastern Church, Archimandrite Lev Gillet, rev. ed. (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2018), 18. Barrington-Ward provides a very helpful overview of the historical development of the Jesus Prayer in *The Jesus Prayer*, chs. 5-8. He provides revisions to the earlier detailed study by Irénée Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus: The Names of Jesus Used by Early Christians; The Development of the ‘Jesus Prayer’* CS44 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1978), which Ware has indicated needs to be updated (Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 51). Ware also provides some revisions to Hausherr in his introduction to John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1982), 43-54.

²⁴ The simple name is Gillet’s preference, *The Jesus Prayer*, 93. In the Forward to Gillet’s book Kallistos Ware notes that the use of the name of Jesus by itself is not common in the Eastern Church (17-18), but says, “In this, as in all aspects of the life of prayer, personal diversity may exist” (18).

²⁵ This approach to the Name highlights similarities and differences with two other valuable approaches to prayer, namely, Centering Prayer (associated with Fr. Thomas Keating), and Christian Meditation (associated with Fr. John Main). John Main recommends the use of “maranatha” and notes that its meaning is not important. For Keating, the “sacred word” is a symbol of our intention to be open to God’s presence and action. He gives as examples, “God, Jesus, Spirit, Abba, amen, peace, silence, open, glory, love, presence, trust, etc.” (*Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* [New York: Continuum, 2006], 32 n. 1). Then, however, he says, “In one sense, the less the word means to you, the better off you are” (*ibid.*, 40), which is striking given some of the examples he listed! One of the teachers of Centering Prayer associated with Contemplative Outreach, David Frenette, explores several possible symbols of intention that are more subtle than a word in *The Path of Centering Prayer: Deepening Your Experience of God* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2012). In his introduction to this book, Keating says, “This book in my view is the best, most comprehensive and most practical book on centering prayer” (xvii).

In contrast, in the Jesus Prayer the meaning and power of the Name are of the essence, the Name being a sacrament of the Presence. Nevertheless, there is much in the teachings of Centering Prayer and Christian Meditation that is helpful not only in itself but also for the Jesus Prayer. And if we use a form of the name of Jesus which we do not otherwise use then the Jesus Prayer is particularly close to some aspects of the approaches found in Centering Prayer and Christian Meditation.

²⁶ Nouns take different forms in Greek depending on their function. The form given here is the one used when you address a person, so the very form itself indicates invocation.

²⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2018), 171.

processing it through our thinking in the usual way.²⁸ We may coordinate our breathing and the Name and thus our body and our mind unite in the invocation of the Name. Such attention to the breath, however, is not necessary during the Prayer and some may find it too distracting or mechanical.²⁹

It is best to find one form to use and then use it consistently. It is very important to use a form that you do not find complicated. Otherwise you tend to focus on the prayer instead of saying the words with simplicity in the Presence of God. Indeed, as we recite the Jesus Prayer by repeating it in whichever form we are led, we may find that it drops away for a time. We are left with a simple inner orientation towards God in love and receptivity and silence. Ultimately, the prayer is not about attention to the breath or the sounds of the prayer, but a simple awareness of God.³⁰ When this happens we simply return to the words of the prayer when we notice we've begun attending to thoughts or sensations. Fr. Lev Gillet expresses this action beautifully:

Little by little we are to concentrate our whole being around the name, allowing it like a drop of oil silently to penetrate and impregnate our soul. When invoking the name, it is not necessary to repeat it continually. Once spoken, the name then may be “prolonged” for several minutes of repose, of silence, of purely interior attention, much as a bird alternates between the flapping of its wings and gliding flight.³¹

So the divine Name is an amazing gift. We hallow the Name as we receive the revelation of the character of God and reverence His Name, taking God as the ultimate Reality and therefore our chief concern and point of reference. The God who is utterly transcendent has given us a point to contact with Himself. By reciting the divine Name we take hold of the handle God has given us to connect with His actual Presence.

Using a form of the Name that we don't usually use may help us step back from thoughts and feelings and attend to the Presence. For some people, however, this form is too abstract and impersonal, and so one of the other forms of the Jesus Prayer is better. Yet other people use a fuller form of the Prayer for years and then find their prayer simplifies. In any case, this prayer is not a mere technique for producing an effect. Rather, it is a form of prayer in which we become still and have, as the 14th century text *The Cloud of Unknowing* puts it, a “naked intent toward

²⁸ “When you concentrate on the sounds of each word, you will also be concentrating on the meaning of the passage.” Eknath Easwaran, *Passage Meditation: Bringing the Deep Wisdom of the Heart into Daily Life*, 3rd ed. (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri, 2008), 43. See the comments on this book in the list of resources below.

²⁹ In monastic texts there is instruction on such a use of the breath. For example, St. John Climacus says, “Let the remembrance of Jesus be united with your breathing.” *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 27, page 270 in the Paulist Press edition. See page 49 of that edition for this translation. Later St. Hesychios the Priest echoes this point several times in “On Watchfulness and Holiness,” (*Philokalia*, vol. 1, 162-98). Such writings are valuable for disciples in general, but they are intended for monks and include elements that can do more harm than good to others. Indeed, in the later Hesychastic tradition there was elaborate instruction regarding such physical aspects of the Prayer, always with the warning not to engage in these more intense practices without the help of an experienced guide.

³⁰ The relation between attention and awareness is discussed by Daniel J. Siegel in *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2018). This book contains information from research in neuroscience that has fascinating connections to prayer.

³¹ Gillet, *The Jesus Prayer*, 94.

God.”³² The *Cloud* is not discussing the Jesus Prayer, but the Prayer corresponds with the instruction: “Let this little word represent to you God in all his fullness and nothing less than the fullness of God. Let nothing except God hold sway in your mind and heart.”³³

Combining the Mind and the Heart in this Hallowing of the Name

By focusing on the sound of the Name we are focusing on God’s real Presence, God Himself, and not our limited ideas about God. The Jesus Prayer is thus a “non-iconic” form of prayer. “When using the Prayer, we seek to still our imagination. Instead of calling to mind incidents from the life of Christ, we dwell upon his total and immediate presence. When visual images occur, we set them aside. We do not engage in chains of reasoning or a string of resolutions. We think solely of Jesus himself.”³⁴ That is, we think of Him, not about Him.

Nevertheless, our understanding of God is important. During this prayer we are not reflecting on truths about God and the gospel, but rather we are praying on their basis. That is, the gospel vision of reality provides the context for this prayer, rather than its focus. Accordingly, many find it helpful to begin by rehearsing some truths about God and a few verses of Scripture to help orient themselves to Reality as revealed in Scripture.³⁵ In this way one begins by exercising faith in the first two senses I mentioned earlier, namely, belief and trust.³⁶

Putting All the Pieces Together

To pray the Jesus Prayer you can begin by becoming still through a deep breath or two and then gently and calmly invoking the Name through the Prayer. However, you may find it helpful to ease into it with a bit more preparation. The following steps are one way of doing so.

1. **Settle** Find a relaxed but alert position and close your eyes.
2. **Reality** Very briefly set this time of prayer in the context of the revelation of God in Christ by recalling truths about God .
3. **Body** Prepare your body as the temple of God by coming to your senses. Briefly locate your body in time and space through what you sense in the environment around you through hearing and touch, and what you sense within your body.

³² *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. 3, in *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counseling*, William Johnston, ed. (New York: Image Doubleday, 1973).

³³ *Ibid.* ch. 40.

³⁴ Ware, *The Jesus Prayer*, 10.

³⁵ Along these lines some find it helpful to have a session praying the Jesus Prayer in combination with Bible reading and reflection or a more developed form of prayer, such as Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. See Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus Prayer*, 86.

³⁶ It is common to distinguish kataphatic prayer, which makes use of images, from apophatic (non-iconic) prayer, which does not. The relation between apophatic and kataphatic prayer has many complexities, but in important ways they are combined in the Jesus Prayer, as well as in Centering Prayer and Christian Meditation (see footnote 23). Thus while the Jesus Prayer is associated with apophatic prayer it is often practiced before icons. Regarding Christian Meditation, John Main combines the approaches through his reflections before each session of Christian meditation, which always includes material from the scriptures. Keating expresses the connection nicely. He says Centering Prayer is a form of apophatic prayer (*Intimacy with God*, 3rd ed. [New York: Crossroad, 2009], 126), but then says that, “Apophatic/Kataphatic Contemplation” is a “misleading distinction suggesting opposition between the two. In fact a proper preparation of the faculties through kataphatic practice leads to apophatic contemplation, which in turn is sustained through appropriate kataphatic practices” (*ibid.* 161). This statement describes well the approach to the Jesus Prayer represented in this workshop.

4. **Breath** Briefly focus on the physical sensation of your breathing as a gift from God.
5. **The Name** Leave self behind. Align yourself to the Presence of God and open yourself to Him through the gift of His Name. Attend to the presence of Jesus through the sound of His Name with an underlying attitude of love and dedication.
6. **Prayer** Conclude with a brief prayer of thanksgiving and dedication.

If you do use these steps you should do so in a very simple way, without making the Prayer complicated. The first four sections can be done very briefly in roughly a minute total, though at times you may find it helpful to spend a bit longer. In any case, the rest of the time you have set aside for this prayer, whether ten or twenty or thirty minutes, can then be given to the invocation of the Name.

Some people find it helpful to use a prayer rope. The feel of each knot in your fingers can help ground you in the present moment, and you can organize a session of prayer by a given number of knots.³⁷ Others, however, find the use of a prayer rope distracting.

When Our Attention Wanders

During the time of prayer our minds will wander. When that happens we return our attention to Jesus through the sound of the His Name and, if helpful, the physical sensation of our breathing. In this way we turn our attention back towards the divine Presence, like Abram watching over the sacrifice and shooing the birds away, Moses in the cloud on the mountain, Elijah in the cave on the mountain, Zacchaeus in the tree looking towards Jesus, or the disciples in a home in Galilee sitting in a circle around Jesus, attentive to Jesus in their midst. This form of prayer has connections with a great many images and themes in Scripture.

Leaving Self Behind

This focus on our physical body and the sound of the divine Name is an act of love for God. It is a way of seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is a way of answering Jesus's call to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). One modern translation renders "deny yourself" in that passage as "leave self behind."³⁸ Leaving self behind is a crucial aspect of this prayer. During this prayer we get to "take a little vacation from ourselves" (Keating). We experience something of the Sabbath rest God intends for us.

We all have many thoughts about things in our past—some pleasant and some unpleasant, and many thoughts about the future—worries, fears or perhaps even some happy expectations. In this time of prayer we don't push such thoughts away, but simply let them come and go, while we keep returning to an awareness of God's Presence, using the sound of the Name and, perhaps, the physical sensation of our breathing. We are like Moses taking off his shoes to encounter the Burning Bush. Likewise, we all have many roles and responsibilities, and again, for this time of prayer, we should give ourselves permission to step back from all of them and rest in God. We leave our nets and turn our attention fully towards Jesus. This leaving self behind is one of the hardest parts of this prayer. The practice is extremely simple, but not always easy, as we discover layers upon layers of self-preoccupation.

³⁷ This attention to the physical sense of touch is similar to the attention to the breath as an aid to alertness.

³⁸ *The New English Bible* (1970), the translation used by John Main to good effect in his teachings.

Turning to God Over and Over

Many people have tried some form of prayer like this and found they couldn't focus. Their minds kept wandering off. This experience, however, just shows that they are human! The goal of this prayer is not to have our mind completely focused and stable. It is not about having an iron will that can make the puppy stay on the paper and not wander off. Rather, at its heart is love. It is based on God's love in Christ and our hunger and thirst for God. Our intention is to seek God, and we give expression to that intention by turning our attention towards Him, using the divine Name that He has given us as our point of contact with Him, and using the breath His gives us moment by moment to help keep us conscious, learning, perhaps very slowly, to simply be aware of Him and open and responsive to His action.

After teaching Centering Prayer to a group of nuns, one of the nuns said to Thomas Keating, "Oh, Father Thomas, I'm such a failure at this prayer. In twenty minutes I've had ten thousand thoughts!" Father Keating replied, "How lovely! Ten thousand opportunities to return to God."³⁹ Some days you have ten thousand thoughts, other days not so many. It doesn't matter in the least, since either way you are expressing your love for God. In this way this prayer is an exercise of faith in the second two senses mentioned earlier, namely, faithfulness and spiritual perception. We are showing up and we are opening ourselves to God's gracious Presence which is always here. Like a flower turning towards the sun, we just continually turn towards God. You can't fail at it—it is a guilt-free, failure-proof zone of God's love. "The Prayer of Jesus is always God's work in us. We just say the prayer and stay as quiet and as open as we can."⁴⁰

³⁹ Recounted in Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder: Shambala, 2016), 14. See the comments on this book in the list of resources below. The same story is also given in her earlier book, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 2004), 23-24.

⁴⁰ Zaleski, *Living the Jesus Prayer*, 22.

TALK 2 – POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE JESUS PRAYER

Unusual Thoughts or Feelings

Sometimes people experience not just a wandering mind, like the nun who had ten thousand thoughts, but unusual thoughts or feelings seemingly arising out of nowhere. During such prayer God is at work in our hearts on a level deeper than we can be conscious of through thought or feeling. In this time of prayer we are coming to God who is the Great Physician. He doesn't just meet with us, He brings healing and wholeness to our very core. As we open our hearts to God He comes and performs open-heart surgery. So these thoughts and feelings that seem to come out of nowhere may be old memories or feelings floating to the surface as God brings wholeness to our hearts.⁴¹ If that happens, just thank God and go back to your focus on God through attention to the sound of the Name and your breathing. Similarly, if you have visions or great insights during such prayer these are just more thoughts, so simply return to God's Presence through the practice.

In this prayer we are seeking God's very Presence, not His blessings. This is a prayer of pure love for God Himself, not what He can do for us. It is about Him. He gives many graces through this prayer, but that is up to Him.

The Fruit of this Practice

If we aren't looking for wonderful experiences during this prayer then what is the fruit of our time with God in this way? The fruit of such prayer is not found so much in experiences during the time of prayer, but primarily and most profoundly in the transformation of our lives over time. After a few weeks you may notice, or someone close to you may notice, that you don't always react to things the way you used to. You will find that you are growing in the fruit of the Spirit because you are making contact with God at your roots. As you abide in the vine the fruit will grow naturally. This is God's work. We can pray, "Lord, do in me what needs to be done, that I may be what you want me to be."⁴²

Watchfulness and Alertness During the Day

Next, a few thoughts about how this prayer can be used in our daily life and not just during a time set apart for waiting upon God. One of the verses you might use at the beginning of a prayer session is from Habakkuk 2:20, "The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." This is the very first line in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, listed as the first opening sentence in the service of Morning Prayer. In the 1979 Book of Common Prayer the sentences for Advent are listed first, beginning with Mark 13:35-36, "Watch ye, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping." Then in some editions of the Book of Common Prayer, at the end of Compline, the service at the close of the day, we pray, "Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace." So the daily cycle of prayer begins and ends with silence and watchfulness.

⁴¹ Thomas Keating explores this theme in several of his books and video series. For example, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, ch. 7; *Intimacy with God*, chs. 8-9; *Invitation to Love* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1992).

⁴² Based on a prayer suggested by one of the teachers associated with Contemplative Outreach, Fr. Carl Arico, in an email sent to those on the Contemplative Outreach email list.

This theme of watchfulness and clear-eyed alertness shows up frequently in the New Testament, both in connection with Christ's return and as a call to conscious living now. The Jesus Prayer is one very practical and powerful way to do so. As we practice this form of prayer we grow in our sensitivity to thoughts and feelings when they arise. As we learn to notice them and step back from them by returning to the Name and, if helpful, our breathing we are learning a life skill. You will find that as you go about your day and a disturbing thought arises or something challenging happens to you, there will be times when you can make contact with God in the midst of the inner or outer drama by attending to your breathing and the Name. These points of contact with God's reality can cut through the swirl of thoughts and events. It is not a way of magically making everything right. Rather, it is a way of connecting with God so we can stabilize ourselves in Him and draw upon His strength and wisdom to help us respond appropriately to what we are facing, instead of just reacting out of our own stuff.

Even briefly connecting with the sounds of the Name and the physical sensation of the breath makes contact with God and a deeper part of our own selves, deeper than the thoughts that are swirling and the emotions that are flowing. For the experiences of fear, worry, lust, anger, envy and so forth are not the deepest part of us, though they certainly seem like it sometimes. But if we try resisting such thoughts and feelings we simply drive them deeper into our hearts. Instead, we can learn to just let them alone while we turn our attention to God.⁴³ In doing so the power of the dysfunctional thought is undermined. The Fathers have a lot to say on this topic, as we'll see in coming weeks.

In the summer of 1985 I did my Clinical Pastoral Education training for ordination at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh. Beginning about halfway through the program I had to do a certain thing each day that caused a lot of fear. In the evenings I was studying and practicing the Jesus Prayer and similar forms of prayer. One evening I read something that clicked about focusing on the breathing and the Name. So the next day I tried practicing God's Presence through attention to my breath in connection with the Name of Jesus. It was an amazing experience. The fear was still there in full force, but I was no longer locked into it. My attention was on Christ through attending to the physical sensation of breathing and the sound of the Name, and I was able to watch my reaction of fear and not be controlled by it. I was not looking at Christ, but rather looking with Him, from within Him, at the situation. This, in turn, enabled me to respond to the events in the environment in a more helpful way, instead of just reacting out of fear.

This is just one little example of how practical this prayer can be as we bind unto ourselves the Name of God, as we sing in the hymn "St. Patrick's Breastplate." We will explore this topic more in the following weeks, along with ways in which this prayer can enhance our other forms of prayer and other aspects of our lives.

⁴³ Theresa of Avila says we should pay no attention to the madmen in the attic!

TALK 3 – THE JESUS PRAYER IN RELATION TO THE THREE MAJOR THEMES OF THE BIBLE

The Three Themes of the Bible

In this talk I'll use a very wide-angle lens to get a general idea of how the Jesus Prayer is related to the core themes of the Bible. There are three themes that hold the whole Bible together. They are the Person of God, the Plan of God, and the Pattern of Life in keeping with God. In other words: Who is God and what is He like? What is He up to? What is the pattern of life that He gives us to live as we share in His life as those created in His image?

The Person of God and the Jesus Prayer

Of these three, the first is the primary theme. Everything flows from God and is related to God. It is because of who God is and what He is like that He has a plan to create, sustain, redeem, and restore all things to oneness with Himself. Likewise, the pattern of life in keeping with God reflects characteristics of His own life that are able to be shared by those created in His image, so we can become “partakers of the divine nature,” as we read in 2 Peter (2 Pet. 1:4).

At the beginning of a time of prayer we might recall truths about God and the good news of His Kingdom, in other words the Person of God and the Plan of God. We might recall several of His attributes such as His infinite love and goodness and power and wisdom and mercy, and then thank Him for creating, sustaining, redeeming and restoring all things. These four activities cover the whole Story, it seems to me, but you can find your own themes and verses to mention at this point in the prayer, and these may change over time.

The Person of God is the central motif of Scripture, and the divine Name is at the center of this prayer. In the Jesus Prayer we use the name of Jesus, but other names of God could be used in a similar way. Let's look at a few of them.⁴⁴

One of the main candidates is the Aramaic word “Abba,” which Jesus Himself used. It also shows up in Paul's teaching even though he is writing to Gentiles. Twice he tells us that God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). One possible drawback of using this word during the time of prayer is its familiarity, which may make it easy to slip into thinking mode. On the other hand, it is a very powerful form of the Name to use in the midst of daily life, which, Lord willing, we will explore next week.

Another option is to use the simple word “God.” This is obviously the most familiar of all terms for God and it is not a name as such. But it is recommended by the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, a 14th century classic text on a form of prayer with some similarities to the Jesus Prayer. In chapter 7 of the *Cloud* the author recommends the word “God” because it is short, simple, and it gathers into itself all that we know of God, without dwelling on any of the details. Used in this way it can serve as a focus of our intention, what the author calls “a naked intent toward God, the desire for him alone...”⁴⁵ This memorable expression pretty much sums up the

⁴⁴ A different form of prayer, the Anglican rosary, may be used to make use of multiple names of God. See Jenny Lynn Estes and Carol Raines, *God the Father: Devotions and Prayers for 33 Names of God* (Bakersfield, CA: Theophany Press, 2020). They plan to publish two further books with thirty-three names from Scripture for the Son and thirty-three names for the Holy Spirit. See <https://www.theanglicanrosary.com/>.

⁴⁵ William Johnston, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Image Doubleday, 1973), ch. 7.

essence of this practice of hallowing the Name. Later, in chapter 40, he uses the striking term “lump” for the fact that this word gathers everything together in a lump. So as we recite it we include everything, but without dwelling on any details. So, ironically, the very generality of the word “God” means we can use it when we pray with the heart without going off in thought or feeling. As with the Jesus Prayer, we might start with a fuller form and reduce it down. For example,

- Blessed be God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
and blessed be His Kingdom, now and forever. Amen.
- Blessed be God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- Blessed be God.
- God.

Yet another option is the Name God uses to name Himself when Moses encounters Him in the Burning Bush. In Exodus 3:14 God says His Name is Yahweh. We do not know how it was pronounced, and pious Jews do not pronounce this Name. But we know it is related to the Hebrew verb meaning “to be.” In the Greek translation of the OT a form of the Greek verb meaning “to be” is used for this Name, ὄν, “ōn” (pronounced like the word “own”). The expression used in the text means “the One who is,” or “the One who exists,” or “the Being,” or “Being.” So here we have another word that is a lump that contains within it the fullness of the Godhead, God as the I Am. It is a Name God gives for Himself and it is not one you probably use in your prayers otherwise.

While you may want to try using different Names of God, do not try to find the perfect form through assessing their effect on you. If we are paying attention to the effect on us then we are practicing our presence, not God’s! Indeed, some traditions provide only one form to use, which helps remove this temptation to focus on ourselves and keep trying different Names. In any case, during a particular session of prayer you should stick with just one Name and not jump around. Obviously if you are switching among names during prayer then you are on the level of thought rather than the level of the heart. Eventually you should settle on one form of the Name to use during such sessions of prayer so the Name can become a part of you.⁴⁶

Some people who find that the use of any form of the Name keeps them on the level of thinking and feeling may find just attending to the physical sensation of the breath as a way of opening to

⁴⁶ Forms of apophatic prayer seek to experience God in ways that transcend all of our categories, but the Jesus Prayer and similar use of other divine names are not focused in that way. There is no doubt that our experience of God will grow beyond all our present categories, since God as Person transcends all we know of personhood, and we ourselves, who are in His image, will continue to grow and change for all eternity. But He is not less than what we know as personhood, and our growth will be further into Jesus rather than through Him and on to something else. Frenette and Bourgeault represent a more apophatic understanding (see the bibliography), while Gillet is more in keeping with the tradition of the Jesus Prayer: “The total presence is all. The name is nothing without the Presence. He who has attained the Presence has no longer any need of the name. The name is only the support of the Presence. At the end of the road, we are to become free from the actual name, free from everything except from Jesus, from the living and ineffable contact with his person” (*The Jesus Prayer*, 106). Similarly, Zaleski says, “We may forget that the Prayer should not be seen—for it was not intended to be seen—as a way of reaching some ‘higher,’ more exalted spirituality or knowledge. Rather, it is a way of helping us to find a real personal relationship with Christ. We are saying it *to* the Person of Jesus who is right there, with us and in us, closer than we can possibly imagine. There is no higher spirituality than that” (*Living the Jesus Prayer*, 14, italics original).

God's Presence in stillness and silence during a session of pray. Then during the day they might use a form of the Jesus Prayer to practice God's Presence in the midst of their activities, which we will look at more closely in the fourth talk.

The Plan of God and the Jesus Prayer

Now let's look briefly at the relation of this form of prayer to the second fundamental theme in the Bible, the Plan of God. In this form of prayer we are seeking first the Kingdom of God, so virtually everything revealed about the Kingdom of God is connected to this prayer. Many images in Scripture related to the Kingdom resonate with this form of prayer, as we've seen with the image of the temple. The temple in Israel at an earlier stage in the plan of God is part of a larger application of this image which includes our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and the Church as God's temple, the body of Jesus as God's temple, and the whole of the cosmos as a temple of God, with heaven and earth full of His glory.

Each of us is a temple and together we form a temple as living stones, as Peter puts it (1 Pet. 2:5). Each of us contains the fullness of Christ and together we manifest His fullness in the world. A partial image of this is a hologram. If you've seen the first Star Wars movie you probably remember the 3D image of Princess Leia being projected from the robot R2D2, pleading for Obi-Wan Kenobi to come to their aid.

If you cut a normal picture in pieces each piece will contain just part of the whole picture and you have to combine them to see the whole picture. But because of the way a hologram is made every part contains the image of the whole picture. What a wonderful image for the Church! It's like a 3D image of Christ composed of individual believers who are each in the image of God, a temple composed of stones each one of which is itself a temple. So the Church is like a hologram of Jesus, but so much more than that. Instead of being a 3D image it is the actual sacramental Presence of the One who is Himself the ultimate reality that is present. The Presence of Christ actually dwells in each of us individually and unites us in one sacramental presence of His Presence in this world. The Church is not an association of individuals who join together to form a community. Rather, individuals are taken up into Christ as members of the Body of Christ.

We could meditate on many other images and themes in the Bible in a similar way. For example, a key theme in the story is how God encounters people, and that is what this prayer is all about. So we could explore the imagery of the mountain of God, reflecting on the various mountains on which God was met in the Bible, including mount Zion, which connects us back to the temple again. The image of the mountain also speaks of God's stable and abiding Presence, which in turn is picked up in other images like "rock" and "fortress." As we practice this form of prayer and meditate on such motifs in Scripture we can enter more deeply into this form of prayer and also inhabit Scripture more deeply. Lord willing we will explore this way of engaging both Scripture and the liturgy in our final session in a couple of weeks.

The Pattern of Life in Keeping with God and the Jesus Prayer

These are just a few glimpses of how this prayer is related to the Person of God and the Plan of God. What about the third theme of Biblical Theology, the Pattern of Life in keeping with God? I don't know of any aspect of discipleship that is not connected to this form of prayer. Just as

there are three large themes in the Bible as a whole, so there are three interwoven themes that are foundational in the life of discipleship.

Attachment and Detachment

We can see two of these three themes in Jesus's call to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). He is calling us to an attachment to Himself that is absolute, which includes leaving behind, in some sense, everything else. We hear the same radical call in sayings such as, "Unless you hate mother and father you cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). This does not mean we are to hate our parents, but rather it graphically expresses the depth of our attachment to God compared to even the closest of other relations. Compared to our attachment to God we sit loose to every other connection.

Do you see how this approach to prayer is essentially an exercise in such radical attachment to God and detachment from all else? During this prayer every thought and feeling is left behind as we leave self behind and turn our deepest attention to the very Presence of God through the gifts of the Name and the breath. We take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:4), dying to the world and the world to us (Gal. 6:14).

These core themes of discipleship are then worked out in many images and motifs. For example, Jesus's call to watchfulness is developed in a wonderful network of images in Scripture. Think, for example, of the call to sobriety in the New Testament. Paul says, "let us not sleep, as the rest do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). Or again, "Be sober minded and sober in prayer" (1 Pet. 4:7; see 5:8). Such biblical teaching is picked up in the Prayer Book when we pray that we might live "a godly, righteous, and sober life." I suspect many of us hear this as a call to be somber. Instead, it is a call to be bright, alert, clear-eyed, fully conscious, not dissipated or scattered by anything. It is the sort of thing various mindfulness practices try to help with which overlap with aspects of the Jesus Prayer.

Think of the related image in 1 Peter when he says, literally, "girding up the loins of your mind, be perfectly sober" (1 Pet. 1:13). Most modern translations don't use this vivid image of girding the loins of the mind. Girding refers to tucking the long robe people wore back then into one's belt to free the feet and legs for work. So the picture we have here is of our minds flapping in the breeze and tripping us up. Such girding of our minds is what we do in this form of prayer. This imagery, in turn, is related to Jesus's call to have a single eye, and that theme is a part of larger patterns that have to do with being humble and simple and childlike and sharing in the mind of Christ who emptied Himself. The list of images and themes goes on and on, and this form of prayer helps us actually experience the reality these motifs refer to.

One more example. This form of prayer gives concrete help to live into the way of life described in Romans 5-8, one of the great sections in the New Testament on the new life in Christ and living in the Spirit. By paying attention to the temple of our bodies and stepping back from all thoughts and emotions, we are enabled, by God's grace to become increasingly less enslaved to sin and able to present our bodies to righteousness. This leads right into the amazing call in Romans 12.

I urge you by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your appropriate service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

The Jesus Prayer is an exercise in doing exactly what Paul describes here. Again, we'll explore some of these connections in later sessions, Lord willing.

Loving Service

Along with attachment to God and detachment, in some sense, from everything else, the third aspect of discipleship is loving service. This radical attachment to God and detachment is the opposite of being passive or self-centered and it actually sets us free to be of service to others.

Many of us spend most of our lives living like bats. Bats flit around taking their bearings from echo soundings in their environment. We spend our lives reacting to stimuli coming at us in our environment or that arise in our hearts. In such prayer we cut through the matrix and become grounded in the reality of God and draw upon His resources for guidance and power. As we do so we have the possibility of seeing with greater clarity and love the people and situations we encounter.⁴⁷ We can be taken up into God's love as our hearts are centered on Him and are being purified from the spin which the false self and the false environment puts on life. In this way, as we practice the Presence of God, we can truly be His servants discerning the good and acceptable and perfect will of God and doing what He wants, in His way and with His power through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Two Helpful Images: Entanglement and A440

In such prayer we actually abide in the vine, and such abiding produces fruit. We have no ability to produce fruit, but God produces fruit as we abide in Him, which is at the heart of this form of prayer. In sub-atomic physics there is something called entanglement. It turns out that two particles can be brought into alignment with each other in such a way that if the spin of one particle is reversed then the other particle immediately matches it. The really mind blowing part is that this connection remains even when the two particles are moved a very great distance from each other. Since the change in one particle is replicated instantaneously it means there is no signal going between the particles in any form we know of. The universe is strange beyond our imaging! But do you see how this is a wonderful partial illustration of our union with Christ? In the Jesus Prayer we renew our entanglement with the Lord and then in daily life we are responsive to Him.

Here's one last image that I find very helpful. Recall going to a symphony and hearing all the instruments getting in tune before the concert. It's a bit chaotic until the first violinist comes out on stage, takes his or her place, and gives one particular note, known as A-440, the A note above middle C. The musicians all bring their instruments into tune with that one note, and in this way the whole orchestra is integrated and coordinated and prepared to produce beautiful music

⁴⁷ "As long as Jesus has not touched our eyes, we too see other men only vaguely, darkly; our selfishness puts a veil between them and us. It is only after being touched by Jesus that we notice the reality of each being and what is unique about it." A Monk of the Eastern Church, Fr. Lev. Gillet, *Jesus: A Dialogue with the Saviour*, tran. A Monk of the Western Church (New York: Desclee, 1963), 64.

together. Do you see how the divine Name is like a note we tune to? As we leave self behind and attend to the sound of the Name we come into tune. We come into harmony with it. We resonate with it. We become integrated and whole around our center which comes into harmony with the Lord Himself, the center of reality itself.

TALK 4 – CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE JESUS PRAYER AND DAILY LIFE

Using the Practice Throughout the Day

In addition to time set apart for the Jesus Prayer we can also practice it throughout the day. In the optional introduction to a time of prayer mentioned in the first talk we become aware of what we are sensing from our environment through hearing and touch, and during the day we can add attention to what we are seeing. You can take a few moments at points during the day to ask yourself, “What am I seeing right now.” The sense of sight is an attention hog, and it’s very easy to spin off into all sorts of reflections and concerns based on what we see. So it’s best not to use the sense of sight during your set time of prayer, but during daily life our sense of sight can play a helpful role. You can pause briefly every now and then to note your breath and invoke the Name and then simply observe what you are seeing and hearing and speak to God about it. In this way the Jesus Prayer transitions into conversational prayer in a wonderful way, perhaps leading to adoration or thanksgiving for what is happening in the present moment, or prayers of repentance or intercession. Whatever the appropriate response, this form of prayer helps us come awake, and our practice of it during the day helps us stay awake, watching with Christ, and then conversing with Christ.⁴⁸

Many teachers advise sticking to one form of the Jesus Prayer, but if you use one of the longer forms of the Jesus Prayer during your sessions of prayer you may want to use one of the shorter forms as you go through the day.

Living Life Centered in God

The Jesus Prayer can help us live faithfully whatever we are experiencing. Recall the image I used last time of bats flying by sonar. Too often we go through the day like bats. They dart about in every direction because they are feeding on insects, using sonar to sense the insect and go after it. At times we also are living by sonar, that is, living merely in reaction to stimuli in our environment. Obviously we do need to be responsive to people and situations we encounter, but often we do so without being conscious of the Presence of the Lord. This form of prayer is one simple, focused way to practice the Presence of God. As we learn to be aware of His Presence throughout the day we can respond to people and situations as Christ would have us, rather than just reactively. Instead of being on the rim of the wheel of our life being whipped around, we can live from the center, “at the still point of the turning world,” in T. S. Eliot’s memorable phrase.⁴⁹ St. Hesychios the Priest (possibly 8th or 9th century) says we should be like a spider, utterly still in our heart as the spider is in the midst of her web, able to recognize and deal with disturbances that come.⁵⁰

Such centered living is assumed in a great deal of the New Testament. For example, this practice helps us make sense out of how to actually live into the vision of the Kingdom Jesus is describing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). When Jesus says His disciple is to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), He is describing someone who is living from their center rather than

⁴⁸ “We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the Presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere *incognito*. And the *incognito* is not always hard to penetrate. The real labour is to remember, to attend. In fact, to come awake. Still more, to remain awake.” Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, 75.

⁴⁹ *Four Quartets*, “Burnt Norton,” II.

⁵⁰ “On Watchfulness and Holiness” 27, in *The Philokalia* 1:166.

simply in reaction to stimuli in the environment on the natural level of fight or flight. Similarly, when Jesus says that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5:28), He is calling His disciple to a life centered in God. In this case the stimulus in the environment is attractive, which one may want to possess and use for self-centered purposes.

A developed habit of this form of prayer gives us one way of stepping back from stimuli and responding from Christ's resources and according to His will, in step with His Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 18, 25). As we step back from thoughts and feelings that arise while practicing this form of prayer we gain skill and strength to do so in the midst of life as well.

The Jesus Prayer in Challenging Conditions

Let's look at how such prayer relates to a few of the challenging conditions we meet. We can begin with intense situations when things are happening quickly and we have little time to think. In such situations we may well not use the Prayer itself. But even if we don't consciously make use of the practice in such settings, our regular times for this form of prayer develop within us resources to live more faithfully. And even in intense situations, attention to just one breath and an invocation of the Name can help stabilize us and find Christ at our center, and make contact with Him in the unseen realm.⁵¹ "The most intense activity does not exclude a glance in the Saviour's direction, cast directly on Jesus."⁵² The Name can be a specific focus of our hope in God in the midst of this life by which we make contact with heaven itself and anchor ourselves there. As Hebrews puts it, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf" (Heb. 6:19-20 NIV).

"Lumping"

In less intense situations we have more opportunity to use the practice. I mentioned in the last talk the idea from the *Cloud of Unknowing* of the word "God" as a lump that contains everything revealed about God in a simple, single, densely packed word, without focusing on the variety of images and truths about God. In the same section of the *Cloud* the author uses this idea in relation to our sin. He says, "Let yourself experience sin as a *lump*, realizing that it is yourself, but without defining it precisely. Then cry out in your heart this one word 'sin,' 'sin,' 'sin,' or 'help,' 'help,' 'help'" (ch. 40).⁵³ He says this word should be said interiorly and without any definite thought.

In this practice of hallowing the Name we can make use of this idea of lumping in a somewhat different way. During the time of prayer when we are aware that we have begun thinking or feeling something the main response is to simply notice it and return to the breath and the sounding of the Name. Instead of resisting it, or practicing its presence by saying "sin," "sin," we simply notice it and let it go. For some people it can be helpful, however, to add one more

⁵¹ Welcoming our experiences as opportunities to "consent to the Divine Indwelling" is part of the "Welcoming Prayer," a helpful form of prayer which was developed in the context of Centering Prayer. See Pamela Begeman, Mary Dwyer, Cherry Haisten, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler and Theresa Saulnier, *Welcoming Prayer: Consent on the Go* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Contemplative Outreach Media Center, 2014). There is information on the Welcoming Prayer on the Contemplative Outreach website (see the list of resources below).

⁵² Gillet, *Jesus*, 53.

⁵³ Johnston, *Cloud*, 99, italics original.

element to this process. As soon as you notice a thought you can package it as in a lump with a single word that represents the sort of thought it is. Perhaps “fear,” or “worry,” or “anger,” or “pride,” or “boredom,” or “planning,” or whatever.

This lumping is not an invitation to analyze the thought and start thinking about it or responding to it emotionally. Rather, you mentally say a simple word that represents the whole complex thought that has arisen, or just picture it as a lump without naming it, and then return to the Name. You can sense this thought as a little package that you release to the Lord as you pronounce the Name, casting all your cares upon God because He cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7). In this way you are commending this thought and all that it represents to the Lord without going into any details. If the thought is dysfunctional or sinful then such lumping is an appeal for His forgiveness, cleansing, and healing. This packaging and presenting can be a very effective way of letting it go. It is not always easy to do, but it is a powerful way to purify the heart. However, if this lumping is too distracting then a simple return to the Name is best, which is the main point in any case.

Dealing with Temptations

Learning how to detach from particular thoughts and emotions and focus on the Lord in prayer like this is also a particularly powerful weapon against temptation during daily life. We need to be clear that temptation itself is not sin. Jesus Himself was tempted in all ways as we are yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). The Church Fathers talk about six stages of temptation.⁵⁴ We can picture these with the image of a door-to-door salesman. The temptation is like the salesman’s knock at the door. We cannot stop such activity any more than we can really avoid robo calls on our phones, it seems. There is no sin at this point in the process. But if we pay attention to the knock and then walk over to the door, open it, listen to the sales pitch and buy the goods, we are, at each stage, yielding to sin more and more deeply and developing neural pathways that become ruts down which our response to the same temptation will run more quickly in the future.

The best way to deal with temptation is to detach from the thought when it first arises. Don’t answer the door. If, through the Jesus Prayer we grow in inner stillness and awareness, we can recognize the temptation when it first appears and can detach from it in the same way we do from all thoughts during our time of this prayer.⁵⁵

This detachment from the tempting thought robs it of its power because the thought relies on our attention to stay alive. If we fuss about it or pray against it, we are focusing on it and thereby giving it energy. If we resist, it persists and it gets driven more deeply into us. But if we turn from it immediately and focus on the Lord Himself and His loving Presence, the power of the temptation subsides. This is how we do spiritual warfare.⁵⁶ It is His light that drives out the darkness, so returning our attention to His Presence is all that is needed on our part.

⁵⁴ For a popular level discussion see Jon E. Braun, *Divine Energy: The Orthodox Path to Christian Victory*, 3rd ed. (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 1995, third printing edition 2016), ch. 2. One of the classic discussions is in St. John Climacus, *Ladder*, ch. 15, and see the summary in *The Philokalia* 1:364-366.

⁵⁵ My sister-in-law put it like this. When we hear temptation knocking at the door we should respond, “Jesus, will you get that for me?”

⁵⁶ The Fathers in general and the Desert Fathers and Mothers in particular talk a lot about the demonic. Some modern discussions reduce this material to psychological states, but others more helpfully see it referring to actual spiritual entities and then explore the relation to our psychological states. Some current ministries that focus on

We can even be thankful for these opportunities to return to the Lord. We can make use of something unhealthy or even sinful as an occasion for something good, namely, an expression of our love for God and seeking of His Kingdom. St. Isaac of Syria refers to temptations as medicine!⁵⁷ Furthermore, this process of detaching from the thought and turning our attention to the Lord through the Name and the breath rewires our neural pathways as part of God's inner healing. The mirror is a favorite image in the Fathers along these lines. By such turning to the Lord in repentance our lives are like a mirror being cleansed to more clearly and brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. Or, to use another image from the Fathers, we are like the moon becoming full and shining brightly with God's light.

Sometimes temptations are stronger than at other times due to our weaknesses and in-grained habits and addictions (in either a general sense of this term or actual physical additions). Sometimes we turn from the temptation, and the power dissipates as I've described, but then it comes back quickly and gets the better of us. The power of some sins in our lives may not be broken until after long years of struggle, if they are ever completely broken in this life. But always the key factor is the grace of the Lord. In the Jesus Prayer we practice the Presence of this gracious Lord who forgives immediately and works healing and transformation according to His own schedule in each of our lives as we practice His Presence.

Transformed Vision of Life

As we grow in our attention to the divine Presence and our union with the Father in the Son, our experience of God's love can transform how we view everything that happens to us. Consider, for example, Paul's experience described in Philippians 1. He is in a prison cell. He is being opposed by Gentiles, Jews, Jewish-Christians, and even some fellow preachers who want to cause him trouble. Yet he is rejoicing that Jesus is being made known even through his imprisonment. The whole focus of His life is Jesus, who has loved him, redeemed him, and revealed Himself as the Son of God who loves all people and desires them to be saved. Paul says, "My eager expectation now as always is that Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:20-21, abbreviated). With this focus Paul can rejoice and have no ultimate worries. He has a deep abiding sense of God's fatherly, providential care. No matter what his circumstances, Christ can be magnified in his body. It may be in prison or it may be in relative comfort, it doesn't matter. As he says later in Philippians, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:11-13 NIV).

spiritual warfare can be counter-productive, resisting evil in such a way as to actually practice its presence. In addition to the discussion in Braun, *Divine Energy*, see Leanne Payne, *Restoring the Christian Soul: Overcoming Barriers to Completion in Christ through Healing Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), especially chs. 13-14; and *Listening Prayer: Learning to Hear God's Voice and Keep a Prayer Journal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 61-69.

⁵⁷ St. Isaac uses this image a number of times, for example pages 46 and 361 in *The Ascetical Homilies*. Testing and trials are simply a part of growth and learning. Josh Waitzkin was US National Chess Champion several times and then took up martial arts and became Tai Chi Push Hands World Champion. He has written a very stimulating and engaging account of both careers and the roles that challenge and testing play in learning and growth: *The Art of Learning: An Inner Journey to Optimal Performance* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

Life in the Light of God’s Love

Indeed, in a sense, adversity enables the glory of God to shine especially brightly. Let me share with you a small selection from the beginning of William Law’s book *The Spirit of Love*. His 18th century English is not as simple as modern English, but it’s well worth the effort. He focuses on love as a will to all goodness.

God, as considered in Himself, in His holy being, before any thing is brought forth by Him, or out of Him, is only an eternal will to all goodness. This is the one eternal, immutable God, that from eternity to eternity changeth not, that can be neither more nor less, nor any thing else, but an eternal will to all the goodness that is in Himself, and can come from Him.... So that as certainly as He is the Creator, so certainly is He the Blessor of every created thing, and can give nothing but blessing, goodness, and happiness from Himself because He has in Himself nothing else to give. It is much more possible for the sun to give forth darkness, than for God to do, or be, or give forth, any thing but blessing and goodness.

This is the ground and original of the spirit of love in the creature; it is, and must be, a will to all goodness, and you have not the spirit of love till you have this will to all goodness at all times, and on all occasions.... [T]he spirit of love can only love, wherever it is or goes, or whatever is done to it. As the sparks know no motion but that of flying upwards, whether it be in the darkness of the night, or in the light of the day; so the spirit of love is always in the same course; it knows no difference of time, place, or persons; but whether it gives or forgives, bears or forbears, it is equally doing its own delightful work, equally blessed from itself. For the spirit of love, wherever it is, is its own blessing and happiness, because it is the truth and reality of God in the soul; and therefore is in the same joy of life, and is the same good to itself, everywhere, and on every occasion.⁵⁸

As we encounter God through this form of prayer we encounter One who is a will to all goodness. This love, in turn inspires, guides, and empowers our own life of loving service. For, as noted last time, such prayer helps us see more clearly and with greater love the people we encounter. Truly loving deeds must proceed from a heart which is centered in God and which is being purified from the spin which the false self and the matrix in which we live put on life.⁵⁹

Attentiveness to God in Our Service to Him

In this prayer we are seeking to be utterly open and attentive to God. Whether you use the Jesus Prayer or not, some form of listening attentive prayer is vital in our service for the Lord. If when praying we only speak and never listen, then our relation with the Lord will be very limited and we even run the risk of doing things for Him which are in fact not pleasing to Him.

⁵⁸ *Wholly for God*, 3-5. William Law’s two books *The Spirit of Prayer* and *The Spirit of Love*, are quite profound. They also contain a lot of speculation that is less accessible and helpful. Andrew Murray has excerpted the best parts from these two books in *Wholly for God*. All of these resources are available in print and also free on the web. Murray includes his own comments on extracts from Law in *Freedom from a Self-Centered Life/Dying to Self: Selections from the Writings of William Law* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1977). Murray’s own books *Humility* and *Absolute Surrender* are especially relevant to the Jesus Prayer. They are available in several editions in print and on the web.

⁵⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor says, “He who has attained perfect love, and has ordered his whole life in accordance with it, is the person who says ‘Lord Jesus’ in the Holy Spirit.” “Fourth Century on Love,” 39, in *The Philokalia* 2:105. He is alluding to *kyrios Iēsous* 1 Corinthians 12:3, which English translations render, “Jesus is Lord.”

Jesus warns us about this possibility when He says there will be many who call Him “Lord” yet who do not do what He says (Matt. 7:21-23). They will say, “We prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and did many mighty works in your name,” but Jesus will respond, “I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of lawlessness.” Here we see how crucial it is that we cultivate a receptive heart that listens to God and can hear His word, and then do *His* works by His grace. This text is scary, but should not lead to despair. It is a call to humility and attentiveness to God.⁶⁰ As we leave self behind and in love and submission attend to the Presence through the Name and the breath, God has all he needs to get through to us and guide us both internally and through the various means of grace such as Scripture and fellow Christians. Through such prayer we may have ears to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

The Jesus Prayer and Intercessory Prayer

I want to conclude this talk with one further form of loving service, namely, intercessory prayer. How might the invocation of the Name be useful in our prayer for people and situations?

We can begin a time of intercession by opening ourselves to God’s Presence and becoming attentive to Him using the Jesus Prayer. Then we can bring others into that Presence by saying their name in His Presence and perhaps picturing them. In the first talk we noted the ancient insight that a name is a point of contact with a person on some level. So bringing together God’s Name and a person’s name can be a way of bringing God and that person into contact with one another on the spiritual level, entangling them, as it were. As we say the person’s name we might very briefly have an image or a sense of them, and perhaps any particular concerns in their lives we are aware of, similar to lumping. Then instead of talking with God about all of this, as we usually do, we can intercede in this simpler way, acknowledging God’s infinite love for them and asking Him to have mercy on them in His will to all goodness. Our more common practice of making our requests known, perhaps asking God to act in particular ways, are fine ways to pray and Scripture has many examples of such prayer. But obviously God alone knows what is actually best for a person.⁶¹

Because we cannot ever “see the heart” as God sees, we cannot really know what is good for us, and especially what is good for others.... But we don’t need to know. The Jesus Prayer can become for us a powerful way of intercession, of praying for others. By praying the Holy Name over them, by embracing them in our thoughts and our hearts, we surrender each one of them to God’s mercy and love and we trust that God will do what is best for them.⁶²

⁶⁰ “Grant that I may remain, or rather, become, a little child in Your hands. Grant that I may be led. For the sin of the first man was that of no longer wanting to be led, hand in hand, by the Father in Heaven. I have the weakness of childhood; grant me the docility and complete confidence of a small child.” Gillet, *Jesus*, 95.

⁶¹ In a chess game a beginner often avoids sacrificing any pieces, but an experienced player understands that a sacrifice can be part of a beautiful pattern of moves that leads to winning a game. As we practice God’s Presence and trust His fatherly providential care we can move through the day asking for His strength and guidance to play each move well. When we meet difficulties we can trust that they can glorify God and benefit us as God is working out His purpose to restore us to wholeness and union with Himself in Christ, working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

⁶² Zaleski, *Living the Jesus Prayer*, 46. Compare Gillet, *Jesus*, 77: “Invoke the name of Jesus on everything which exists and the world will be transfigured, christified, and given its true meaning.” Further developed in Gillet, *The Jesus Prayer*, 98-101.

So this simple form of intercession can be a very powerful form of prayer we might use at times. It is an expression of our love for the person or our concern for a situation, our faith in God, and our humble desire that His will be done, whose will is to all goodness.

Next week we have our final session. Lord willing, we will put this form of prayer in the context of other practices that enable us to encounter God, especially through Scripture and the liturgy.

TALK 5 – THE JESUS PRAYER AND THE SACRAMENTAL QUALITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Sacramental Quality of Scripture

Along with its use during daily life and its connection to various forms of prayer, the Jesus Prayer is also related to our engagement with the sacramental quality of Scripture. For, like the Name, Scripture is an effectual sign of His Presence, a tangible manifestation of His reality as He reveals Himself.

Your word, Lord Jesus, is not a commentary on a relationship which should exist between You and me, Your word gives birth to that relationship. It does not inform me of Christ's behaviour; it establishes my vital contact with it. It is the very irruption of the divine behaviour in my life.⁶³

In the prayer we focus our attention on the Name and, if helpful, the breath, and we can focus in a similar way on the words of the text of Scripture.

As we come to a passage of Scripture we can begin with the Jesus Prayer to connect with God's Presence before we begin to read Scripture. Such attention and openness to the divine Presence helps us have eyes to see and ears to hear the revelation we encounter as we engage Scripture. As we then read and study Scripture with this openness of heart we make use of all the knowledge and skill we have learned so we can engage the text through our thinking and emotions.⁶⁴

In addition to studying the Bible with our minds in the context of this openness of heart and alignment with God we can also encounter the word of God in Scripture in a way similar to the Jesus Prayer. In the first talk I noted that an attention to the sounds of a word is a way to engage the meaning of a word, even though we are not thinking about the meaning of the word nor responding to it emotionally. Just as we attend to the sounds of the divine Name we can attend to a passage of Scripture by repeating it a number of times focusing on the sounds of each word.

Meditation in the Bible and the Fathers

Such recitation of a passage of Scripture was a common practice in the ancient Church. The Desert Fathers and Mothers, for example, memorized the psalter and then would rehearse it like this as they did their daily work, such as sitting and weaving baskets. They would recite the text out loud, and thus their engagement with Scripture was more through their mouth and ears and muscles than their eyes. They were performing the Scripture with their bodies as they listened to the sounds and reflected on the text.

Such a practice is referred to in the Bible as meditation. Psalm 1 begins, "Blessed is the one who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:1-2). Such meditation is also part of God's instruction to Joshua as he took over when Moses died: "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night" (Josh. 1:8 NIV).

⁶³ Gillet, *Jesus*, 14.

⁶⁴ See Appendix 3 for a small sample of such engagement, using the Lord's Prayer as a focus.

The word translated “meditate” in these passages means to mutter or speak in a low voice. In the ancient world the normal way of reading to oneself was out loud in a quiet voice. So the picture in the psalm and in Joshua is not of a person studying the Bible day and night, but one who keeps the words and images and truths of Scripture in mind throughout the day by reciting verses and passages to themselves repeatedly. In those days they would literally have the words always on their lips, while today we normally rehearse them silently in our minds.

The *Telos* and the *Scopos*

One of the main texts on prayer from the Desert Fathers and Mothers is a book called *The Conferences* by St. John Cassian (c. 360-430). Cassian and a fellow monk named St. Germanus travelled from their monastery in Bethlehem to visit the monks in the desert of Egypt and they wrote down the conferences they had with the spiritual masters of the desert. In the very first conference Abba Moses teaches them the need for a *telos* and a *skopos*, that is, a goal and a mark. In an archery contest the ultimate *telos* or goal is to win the contest, and the *skopos*, the mark you aim at to attain that goal, is the bullseye in the center of the target. Abba Moses says the *telos*, the ultimate goal, is the Kingdom of God. But we need a *skopos*, a mark to aim at, which will take us to this ultimate goal. The mark we aim at, he says, is to keep the eyes of our heart fixed on God.

When we have lost sight of him even briefly, let us turn our mind’s regard back to him, directing the eyes of our heart as by a very straight line. For everything lies in the soul’s inner sanctuary. There, after the devil has been expelled and the vices no longer reign at all, the kingdom of God can be established in us, as the evangelist says: “The kingdom of God will not come with observation, nor will they say: Here it is, or there it is. For amen I say to you that the kingdom of God is within you” [Luke 17:20-21].⁶⁵

In a later conference (X.X), we hear more about how to direct the eyes of our heart in this way. There another Desert Father, Abba Isaac, says we should take a single verse of Scripture and meditate on it ceaselessly in the heart. The verse he proposes is Psalm 70:1, “Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!” (ESV). Abba Isaac explains that this verse fits any occasion. “It contains an invocation of God in the face of any crisis” and includes, “the assurance of being heard, and confidence in a protection that is always present and at hand, for whoever calls unceasingly on his protector is sure that he is always present. It contains a burning love and charity, an awareness of traps, and a fear of enemies.”⁶⁶

You can see many similarities between the Jesus Prayer and these teachings from the Desert Saints, including the focus on the heart, meditation, invocation of God, and assurance of God’s Presence. But instead of centering on the Name, as in the Jesus Prayer, Abba Isaac uses a verse of Scripture.

Lectio Divina

Such meditation is a wonderful practice for us to consider using as well. When you set aside time to engage the Scripture you might begin the time with the Jesus Prayer hallowing the Name and

⁶⁵ John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. and ed. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 1.13.1 (pp. 50–51).

⁶⁶ Cassian, *Conferences*, 10.10.3 (p. 379).

then read a section of Scripture over several times. You might use the ancient practice known as *lectio divina* in which one reads the text (*lectio*), reflects on the details of the text and their meaning through recitation, repeating the words slowly, paying attention to the sounds of the words (*meditatio*), prays in the light of the text (*oratio*), and then sits in silence in the Presence of the one whom the text has made manifest (*contemplatio*). After engaging the text in this way you might take a verse or phrase with you to repeat during the day, as Psalm 1 advises. In this way you are taking a bit of the text with you as your daily bread which nourishes your life in the Kingdom.

The Details of the Text, Not Abstractions

Note that while abstract doctrines based on the text are important, the sacramental power of the text is conveyed primarily through the specific details of the text. The characters and events of Scripture provide patterns that resonate in the life of individual Christians and in the Church. In the ancient Church it was recognized that Scripture has multiple senses. The literal sense is accompanied by several more figurative senses. We have seen, for example, the literal temple in Jerusalem is part of a network of metaphors and associations that connect the temple to individual believers, the Church, and heaven.⁶⁷

Indeed, much of the sacramental power of Scripture comes through the individual words, especially the metaphors, images, and figures of speech. This role of the metaphors of Scripture is simply a part of how all of our language works. Virtually all of our daily speech is metaphorical.⁶⁸ We live by these metaphors and they express our worldview, our fundamental sense of the way things are. Accordingly, when we become followers of Christ and encounter God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and learn something of His Plan and His Pattern, we take on a new worldview which will have some different metaphors from those we have been used to.⁶⁹ Throughout these presentations on the Jesus Prayer we have seen examples of characters, events, metaphors, and other such expressions in Scripture that can illustrate this prayer.

Recall how the practice itself may make use of this biblical material in the optional opening and closing parts of the prayer in which we rehearse truths about God to orient us to reality at the outset and then conclude the time of prayer with thanksgiving and dedication.

⁶⁷ Such engagement with Scripture is not limited to the ancient Church. For a particularly delightful example see the poetry of George Herbert (1593–1633). See my article “George Herbert and Biblical Theology,” *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 67–88, available at <https://whitacregreek.com/george-herbert-and-biblical-theology/> and <http://www.tsm.edu/category/rev-dr-rod-whitacre/>.

⁶⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). While the authors helpfully describe the extensive use of metaphor, their approach to the complex issue of the relation between language and truth and reality reflect, naturally, their secular worldview. For an example of a Christian approach see Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (London: T. and T. Clark, copyright 1988, first published 1998), ch. 2. For a brief description of a traditional Christian approach to the language of Scripture, focused on the teachings of the Fathers, see Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2017), ch. 1. On pages 6-9 Boersma points to nominalism as one of the key differences between much of ancient and modern approaches to the relation between language and reality.

⁶⁹ Gunton’s *The Actuality of Atonement* is a particularly stimulating and important example of attending to the metaphors of Scripture. This is not a popular level book, but it is very clearly written. It shows the importance of sorting out metaphors not just between the Church and the larger culture, but also within the Church as well.

Use of Biblical Imagery During the Practice

Furthermore, during the time of silence biblical imagery can be used when we find that our minds have wandered. For example, if we find ourselves thinking about work we need to do we may return to the Name and the breath with a very brief image of leaving our nets. In this way the imagery can help us reorient ourselves to what we are doing at the present moment in stepping back from all thoughts and feelings to open our hearts to the divine Presence. We are using an image to redirect ourselves back to the heart and away from images so we may focus on the reality itself through attention to the sound of the Name and the physical sensations of the breath. While this use of imagery can be helpful to some, others will find it distracts too much from the essential simplicity of the practice. It is important to keep the practice simple.

The Scriptures and Liturgy

This connection between this sacramental practice of invoking the Name and Scripture can be further developed in the context of corporate worship. Before the liturgy a time of prayer using the Jesus Prayer can help prepare us to encounter God through the liturgy.

The ancient liturgies of the Church are patterns of Scripture and prayer that grew out of and reflect the encounter our ancestors have had with God. The great truths about the Person of God, Plan of God and Pattern of life in keeping with God are interwoven through the services. As such, a service is a dense constellation of biblical imagery that unfolds like a drama in which all the people participate. The use of music adds yet another dimension to our embodied rehearsal of the words. Indeed, very many hymns and spiritual songs reflect themes related to the Jesus Prayer.⁷⁰

As we go through the liturgy our minds usually wander at times, as they do in the time of prayer. In this prayer we learn to return to the Name and, perhaps, the breath, and we can do something similar to maintain our attention to the flow of the service. One way to stay attuned is to use a focus word throughout the service, especially for the parts we ourselves are not saying out loud. For example, we can mentally repeat the word “amen” as our assent to what is being said. Or perhaps “thank you” in response to the realities being expressed through the readings and prayers.

More specifically, if we include the optional sections of the Jesus Prayer described in the first talk there is a structural parallel between the approach to the Jesus Prayer we have been considering and the liturgy of Holy Eucharist. Recall that the time of prayer may begin with a rehearsal of truths about God and His Kingdom then be followed by a reception of the divine Presence through the tangible manifestation of His Presence through the Name. Similarly, at Eucharist the first part of the liturgy is a rehearsal of truths about God and His Kingdom through Scripture and a sermon, followed by reception of the divine Presence through the tangible manifestation of His Presence in the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ through the effectual signs of the bread and the wine.

⁷⁰ For example, Charles Wesley’s, “Christ Whose Glory Fills the Skies,” or the hymn from 1890, “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus.”

So the Jesus Prayer can play a role in enabling us to be conscious of God’s Presence, with hearts open to Him and receptive towards Him as we encounter His Presence through Scripture and Eucharist. In this way we receive the daily bread we need for life in the Kingdom in this world and continue the process of being transformed by the renewal of our minds.

The Jesus Prayer and the Renewal of the Mind

Scripture plays an essential role in this renewal of the mind. In order to encounter God and be transformed we need Scripture to show us reality as God sees it and the way we are to walk. Leslie Newbigin captures this idea wonderfully.

I more and more find the precious part of each day to be the thirty or forty minutes I spend each morning before breakfast with the Bible. All the rest of the day I am bombarded with the stories that the world is telling about itself. I am more and more skeptical about these stories. As I take time to immerse myself in the story that the Bible tells, my vision is cleared and I see things in another way. I see the day that lies ahead in its place in God’s story.⁷¹

This is the renewal of the mind that Paul speaks about in Romans 12. The renewal of the mind is a matter of getting in touch with reality as revealed in Scripture. In part that includes learning the great truths about God, His Plan and the Pattern of Life in keeping with His own life. But as we’ve seen, while such knowledge includes the intellectual, it goes beyond it to an experience of these realities.

Such engagement with Scripture that encounters God and experiences transformation comes from more than just attention to the text in the ways we have been examining. We also need to have hearts that are aligned with God. In the Jesus prayer our attention is on the Name and the breath not as some mechanical technique, but as the focus of our fundamental intention to love God, align with Him, and seek His face. Thus there is a moral and ascetical dimension to this prayer, as we leave self behind and hallow the Name, taking God as the ultimate reality and our chief concern and point of reference.

Much of the traditional teaching about the Jesus Prayer and similar forms of prayer emphasizes that in order to come to union with God we must begin by turning from evil and keeping God’s commandments.⁷² This can come across as mere moralism that we have to perform in preparation for encountering God. Yet the life described by the commandments is the life of

⁷¹ Leslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 204-205.

⁷² It is common to speak of spiritual growth in terms of purgation, illumination, and union. Originally, in Pseudo-Dionysius (6th century) and other authors, the focus was on perfection and union with God, and the ways or states leading to that state. Sometimes these are taken as three stages that one progresses through from one to the next, while others recognize them as being present together to some extent throughout one’s pilgrimage. The advanced states discussed in such teachings is not part of this introduction to the Jesus Prayer. But if we shift the focus and use these three categories in the context of less exalted states we can see that progress in expelling vices is necessary for growth, but illumination and union do not await the completion of that process—they are deepened by it. Indeed, we need to be abiding in the vine if we are going to be able to expel vices, keep the commandments, or experience any other form of growth, and such abiding includes some level of illumination and union. The detachment part of the prayer—leaving self behind—promotes such expelling and cleansing, especially when used with “lumping,” while the attachment (through the Name and, perhaps, the breath) promotes the beginnings of illumination and union. All three facets (purgation, illumination and union) then continue on and deepen through this form of prayer.

Christ living within us, the fruit of abiding in Christ.⁷³ So practicing the Presence through the means of grace, including, for some people, this form of prayer, is itself the condition for growing fidelity to God and His pattern of life. As our lives come into greater alignment with God both our experience of God and our transformation deepens.

The focus on attachment to God and detachment from all else in the Jesus Prayer is an ascetical practice that leads to keeping the commandments, for it expresses our love and focusses on His love. As Paul says, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). The word translated “conscience” means “consciousness” in general and then is used sometimes more specifically for moral consciousness. On either interpretation this verse describes key aspects of what the Jesus Prayer is about.

Moral and Ascetical Context for Encountering God in Scripture

The ancient teachers of the Church were quite clear about the necessity of this moral and spiritual preparation if we are going to engage Scripture in a way that is life giving. St. Athanasius (296-373), for example, says that, “for a true searching and knowledge of Scripture are required a good life and a pure soul and virtue that is in keeping with Christ.”⁷⁴

But the Fathers were simply affirming what we find in Scripture itself. For example, in Hebrews 5 the author begins to discuss the fact that Jesus is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He pauses before doing so because his readers will have trouble understanding it. This is not because the teaching is intellectually difficult. Rather, he says,

¹¹ We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb. 5:11-14 NIV)

In other words, Scripture is not just for the sake of abstract intellectual doctrines, but spiritual transformation that is in keeping with a life in union with God and aligned with Him and His ways. The two great commandments of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves are the conditions for understanding the realities Scripture reveals and entering into them. As the psalmist said, “I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts” (Ps. 119:100 ESV).

Another glimpse of the need for such a heart in order to receive God’s word is seen in the contrast between Jesus’s disciples and His opponents in John’s Gospel. Jesus says, “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17). His disciples have such a will, for, “My sheep hear

⁷³ “O Master, how can I obey You if I do not love You? First of all convert me to Your love, then I shall know how to obey You. I am so full of human frailty that I cannot keep Your word if I am not sustained by Your love.” Gillet, *Jesus*, 87.

⁷⁴ *On the Incarnation*, 57.

my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). But Jesus says His opponents are trying to kill Him, “because my word finds no place in you” (John 8:37). Their hearts are like the rocky ground of the parable (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20). Despite thinking they are following God, their wills are not aligned with His. Leaving self behind and opening to God’s actual Presence through the Jesus Prayer can help us to avoid such delusion in our own lives, by God’s grace.

Presenting Our Bodies as Living Sacrifices

The sacramental practice of hallowing the Name promotes such receptivity to God as we leave self behind and seek His Presence, returning to Him over and over in humility. As we learn to “lump” our sins and temptations and send them to God through the Name for forgiveness, cleansing and the healing of our hearts we are changed and experience liberation. Through learning to attach to God and detach from all else we can begin to live the reality Paul talks about when he says, “count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). The Jesus Prayer and lumping gives a concrete way to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12). We experience the reality Paul holds before us when he says, “Do not present the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13). In this way we can live according to the Spirit and set our minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5) and find a new quality of life, for to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (Rom. 8:6).

God as the Ultimate Reality

So our regular practice of hallowing the Name in the Jesus Prayer is a means by which God changes our lives and brings us more and more into union and alignment with Himself. As we become silent and open before Him, leaving self behind, the Name comes into focus as the center of reference, the substantial reality. Our consciousness shifts and we see that He is the rock, the mountain, the ground of all reality. “I learn to look at Jesus in so far as I learn to be looked at by Him, that is, to submit myself to His gaze.”⁷⁵ We come to realize for ourselves that “it is not you that sustain the root, but the root that sustains you” (Rom. 11:18 NJB). We understand the distinction Paul makes when he says to the Galatians, “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God” (Gal. 4:9 NIV). We come more and more to the ultimate reality of the universe, that God is all in all.

In the end all things will be restored to unity in the Son of God and brought into subjection, that is, alignment under Him. He will then offer it all up to the Father, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:28: “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all” (ESV).

We have a chance to enter into this final ultimate reality of the universe even now. As individuals we can grow toward personal integration and wholeness through union with the Father in the Son through the Spirit, and already take our place in the final union in the fellowship of the Church, which is the sacramental Presence of the Kingdom now within this world. Hallowing the Name in the Jesus Prayer opens us to these ultimate realities. We can experience the glory of the Lord, as Paul says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18 ESV).

⁷⁵ Gillet, *Jesus*, 12.

Conclusion

Such, then, is the Jesus Prayer as a sacramental practice of hallowing the Name. In itself it is extremely simple and focused, and yet it is related to virtually every aspect of life and discipleship. Hopefully this workshop has provided some help for deepening your encounter with God. If you feel led to take up this practice you will find for yourself whether it provides a point of contact with God's real Presence that leads to encountering God and experiencing the transforming power of His infinite love and goodness.

The teachings of the traditions I have drawn upon contain descriptions of exalted states of union with God, reports from those who have ascended the mountain of God. In contrast, my goal has been to offer an approach to the Jesus Prayer that enables us beginners to get to a base camp at the foot of the mountain. As we seek first the Kingdom of God, God will deepen and change our ways of encountering Him. There is no end to our growth and change as we follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4).

APPENDIX 1

“Faith—The Sense for the Unseen”

Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1894), 421-424.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen. 2. For therein the elders had witness borne to them. 3. By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11.1-3).

The previous chapter closed with the solemn lesson: There is no alternative, believing or drawing back; there is no safety or strength for the Christian, but to be strong in faith; there is no way of pleasing God, of abiding in His Presence and favour, but by faith. “If any man draw back, My soul hath no pleasure in him.” And so, after the teaching of the Epistle as to what God hath done, we are now to see that for our enjoyment of its power and blessing but one thing is needed—the fulness of faith. It will be shown us how this is the key to the life of all God’s saints, and to all that God did for them.

The writer begins by a general statement of what faith really is in its nature and action. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.” Faith is the spiritual faculty of the soul which deals with the spiritual realities of the future and the unseen. Just as we have our senses, through which we hold communication with the physical universe, so faith is the spiritual sense or organ through which the soul comes into contact with and is affected by the spiritual world. Just as the sense of seeing or hearing is a dormant power till the objective reality, the light or the sound, strikes it, so faith in itself is a sense with no power beyond the possibility or capacity of receiving the impressions of the eternal. It is as an empty vessel which wants to be filled with its unseen contents. It is only when the eternal realities draw near and exercise their power that faith becomes and is the substance of things hoped for, the foundation which they lay in the soul, the proof or conviction of things unseen, the convincing power with which they give evidence and proof of their own supernatural existence.⁷⁶ Faith as a dormant faculty is the capacity for receiving this communication; faith as an active power is what it is in virtue of the overshadowing of the Invisible. The Invisible takes the initiative and wakens faith; faith receives the impression and seeks for ever fuller union with it.

⁷⁶ The two words *substance* and *proof* are used both in the objective and subjective sense. The word for substance properly means the foundation, and is used of the real nature of a thing as opposed to appearance. So, in chap. i.3, of the *substance* of God, the divine essence. Or it is used of the confidence which knows that it rests on a sure foundation. So, in chap. iii.14, *the beginning of our confidence*. It is of importance to hold fast the connection between the two meanings. So the word *proof*, or conviction, from the verb used in passages, as, *The Spirit shall convince of sin*, and often elsewhere of reproof, chiding, means both the conviction of guilt, or the conviction of a truth which is brought from without, and the subjective conviction which comes when one submits and allows himself to be convicted. It thus means both the means of proof and the proof itself. See 2 Tim. iii.16—*Scripture profitable for reproof*.

Faith is thus much more than trust in the word of another. That trust is of extreme importance as its initial exercise, but the word must only be the servant leading in to the divine truth it contains, the living person from whom it comes. To deal too exclusively with the word as the ground of faith will lead to a faith that is more intellectual than spiritual, a faith that, as the Church so universally shows, rests more in the wisdom of men, in the power of reason, than in the power of God. We need to be persuaded very deeply that faith is not only a dealing with certain promises, but an unceasing spiritual intercourse with the unseen world around us. Just as in breathing, our lungs, or in seeing, our eyes, hold themselves open to receive unceasingly, from the air or the light, what they without ceasing in the literal sense press upon us, so faith is the unceasing reaching out heavenward of that spiritual sense to which things future and unseen reveal themselves as near and present, as living and powerful. Faith must in the spiritual life be as natural, as unceasing, as our breathing and seeing when we are doing our ordinary work.

“For therein the elders had witness borne to them.” Of Abel we read: “He had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts.” And Enoch: “He had witness borne to him that he had been well pleasing to God.” And so it is said of all, ver. 39: “These all had witness borne to them through their faith.” Faith does not depend for its blessing on the intensity of its effort; the unseen world, the eternity that surrounds us, is all filled by the living God; and to the faith that opens itself heavenward He bears witness. Let us be sure of this; faith can grow into firm and full assurance, it finds its confidence not in itself but in God. Let us count upon it, the faith that seeks for the eternal will be met by God and have the witness borne by Himself that God counts us righteous, that we are well-pleasing in His sight.

“By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear.” This visible world is to man his great temptation to forget God. Faith is the eye with which he can see God in all, which makes every part of it the transparent revelation of the nearness and goodness of God. By faith we understand that all was framed by God; by faith we see divinity and omnipotence in all, so that what is seen is known as made out of things that do not appear. “The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, even His eternal power and Godhead.” Faith sees His superscription on every part of His handiwork, sees it all pervaded by the living God; surrounded by the things that perish and pass away, it yet stands in the midst of eternity, it knows itself allied to the unchangeable One. The world, instead of being a hindrance, becomes a help in revealing the everlasting God. And faith finds its life and its delight and its ever-increasing strength in meeting everywhere the God who delights to bear witness of Himself to them that seek after Him.

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1. Faith is mostly thought of as a power by which we grasp the heavenly things, and we weary ourselves in vain attempts to do so. No, faith is the substance, the substructure, that the divine things lay in me, the proof they give in me of their actual reality. Just as the light of the sun is its own evidence and proof, so with the light of God. The more we see this, the more confident will our hope be that they will prove themselves to us, and the more meek and patient and humble will be the spirit in which we wait for their self-revelation.
 2. The rules for the strengthening of faith are thus very simple. Regard the unseen world as an actual existing kingdom of divine truth and power, which seeks to conquer and get possession of

and bless you. Accept the measure of faith there is within you as the proof of its existence and operation, the pledge of a fuller revelation. Accept all that is revealed of it in the word as a finger-post to wake the longing and to show the way into the full possession. Set the heart open, in holy separation, from the world; in meditation and adoration and expectation the unseen world can become more real and more near than the seen.

3. Nothing can be a proof of anything but that which partakes of the nature of the thing proved. Thus it is with faith and the spiritual world.

APPENDIX 2

Excerpts from a Sermon on the Lord's Prayer

The following selections from one of my sermons are offered as an example of engaging a passage in the light of the Jesus Prayer and some of the large themes in Scripture covered in this workshop.

The Lord's Prayer provides a series of themes that speak not only to us as individuals, but also to the life of the Church, especially a local parish. Let's see how that works.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

We immediately center in on the eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hallowing the Name means to take God as the ultimate reality and therefore our chief concern and point of reference.

God's own character and His concerns ground and guide our view of reality. By faith we see that amidst all the discord and suffering in the world there is a God who is infinite love, infinite goodness, infinite purity, infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite mercy, among any number of other attributes. Jesus's revelation of God, especially through His death and resurrection, cuts through the matrix of falsehood, evil, and death, to reveal the truth about God—and this truth turns out to be the best news we could ever hear.

This first petition distinguishes the followers of Christ from other institutions in society. The Church is centered on this God, and everything in the life of the Church is to flow from who God is and what He is like.

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

If the first petition focuses on the Person of God and what He is like, the second focuses on the Plan of God and what He is up to. The Kingdom of God refers to an ordered pattern of relationships centered in God and aligned under the Lord, doing His will.

What is His will? On the largest scale it is to create, sustain, redeem and restore all things in Christ. God's will is that all of creation share in His life and light and love and reflect His beauty, goodness, and happiness. That is God's will for the whole creation, and that is His will for you personally as an individual sitting here today. When you pray for the coming of His Kingdom and the doing of His will this is one way of expressing what you are praying for.

This coming of the Kingdom works on both the level of the individual and the corporate level, all the way up to the level of the whole universe. And all the levels are directly connected.

A hologram helps illustrate this idea. If you cut a normal picture in pieces each piece will contain just part of the picture, and you have to combine them to see the whole picture. But because of the way a hologram is made every part contains the image of the whole picture.

Think about that! What a wonderful image for the Church. It's like a 3D image of Christ composed of individual believers who are each in the image of Christ. But the Church is actually more than that. It is not just an image representing Christ, but the actual presence of Christ Himself dwelling in each of us individually and uniting us in one sacramental presence of His Presence in this world. Thus, each individual is a place where the Kingdom comes and God's will is done. When we pray "thy will be done on earth," that earth includes you.

And on the largest scale, in the end all things will be restored to unity in and under the Son of God who will offer it all up to the Father. It will all be subjected to Him, that is, brought into alignment under Him. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:28: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28 ESV).

So we have a chance to enter into this final ultimate reality of the universe even now. As individuals we can grow towards personal integration and wholeness through union with the Father in the Son through the Spirit, and already take our place in the final union. As we do so we are like pieces of the ultimate hologram that is more than a hologram.

And as we are entering into this reality even now on the individual level so we are taken up into the Church which is the community that is already embodying this ultimate union with God on the corporate level.

So the Church, including each parish, is the sacramental presence of this Kingdom, an effectual sign of the reality itself. As such it is light and salt in the world, pointing the world to its ultimate destiny and calling people into this ultimate reality even now.

The word "parish" comes from a Greek word that in Classical Greek means "neighbor." So a parish is the Church in the local neighborhood. But in the NT this word takes on a new sense. It refers to those who are resident aliens. Peter says we are sojourners and resident aliens in this world, and Paul says our true homeland is in heaven. The Church consists of those who have now returned home to the Father. We are ambassadors of God calling people into the Kingdom which is their true homeland.

So we are part of God's plan to restore all things to Himself in His Kingdom, and this plan all flows from who God is and what He is like.

Give us this day our daily bread.

In order to live the life of the Kingdom in the midst of this world we need nourishment. So we pray for our daily bread.

The word translated "daily" occurs for the first time anywhere in this prayer. It was made up to translate what Jesus had said in Aramaic because Jesus is talking about a new kind of reality. It refers to the nourishment we need for life in the Kingdom.

It includes both physical nourishment for our bodies and spiritual nourishment that feeds our souls. As we gather for worship week by week we are offered through word and sacrament precisely the nourishment we need for life in the Kingdom in the midst of this world.

In asking God for this nourishment we acknowledge our complete dependence on God. He is the one source of anything good anywhere. It all flows from who God is and what He is like.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

We are praying for the coming of the Kingdom and we are already taken up into it, but the transition is a work in progress.

The King Himself has died to atone for all sin, and He offers forgiveness to absolutely every one. The Kingdom is a place of radical forgiveness and reconciliation, all grounded in the action of the Great King Himself. If we refuse to forgive others we cut ourselves off from the forgiveness that God offers us. This is not because God does not forgive us, but because we do not have space within us to receive His forgiveness.

This emphasis on forgiveness is foreign to many religions and to many people in our culture, even those who identify themselves as Christians. Forgiveness can indeed be incredibly hard, given the great evil and injustice that many people suffer.

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what happened, nor condoning it, nor saying it doesn't matter.

But from our side, we can let it go and send it to God for Him to deal with. We can seek to share in God's own forgiveness, entering into the mystery of the cross. This may take time, but God is patient as we ask and seek and knock, looking for His help in this matter. It is part of the freedom we have in Christ.

Thus we see the Church as a place of reconciliation. Given the rebellion and brokenness of the world this reconciliation is an essential part of God's plan to restore all things to union in and under the Son of God. We experience God's forgiveness of our own sins and failures, and we share in His desire that everyone find such forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father. It all flows from who God is and what He is like.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

The prayer is realistic not only about our sins and failures and need for forgiveness and reconciliation, but also about the dangers of the environment in which we live. Scripture makes it clear that God does not tempt anyone to sin, so the traditional translation of this verse is misleading. The word is better translated as "trial," or "test." We are asking God not to test us beyond what we can handle. Throughout the Bible we see God testing His people, looking for their response of trust and obedience. Such testing is an opportunity for us to bring delight to God by loving Him and choosing Him and His ways.

Often God's people fail the test, and there was one such failure that became a particular example. At a place called Massah and Meribah the people found fault with the Lord and failed the test (Exod. 17:7; Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Ps. 95:8). Instead of trusting Him they put Him to the test, even though they had seen His works and had plenty of reason to trust Him.

In the Greek translation of the OT, “Massah and Meribah” are translated as “Testing” and “Abuse.” The word “testing” is the same word used in the Lord’s Prayer. So we can see a connection between this story and this petition. On one level we are praying to be delivered from the great evil of putting God to the test as at Massah/Testing. In other words, we’re asking God to help us not lose faith in the faithfulness of God.

On another level this prayer refers to being delivered from the Evil One, the great enemy that wants to keep us enslaved in the matrix instead of entering the freedom of the Kingdom.

Thus this petition acknowledges our need and dependence upon God in the face of both the evils we face in this world and our own inner bent toward sin. We can pray this prayer in confidence because God’s love, His will to all goodness, is infinite. This deliverance all flows from who God is and what He is like.

So the Church is the embodiment of God’s reign established within a world in which an enemy power is at war with God and those who align with God. A parish should stand out against its environment as a place of love, justice, reconciliation, and peace through the presence and power of God. Entering more deeply as individuals and as a parish into the experience of God we can deepen our resistance to the spin of the culture, and we can offer an alternative way of life characterized by compassion, generosity, and care for those in need.

May everything in our life together flow from God and reflect who God is and what He is like as He is known to us in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In this way may we be true worshipers who worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.

A BRIEF LIST OF RESOURCES

The following are a very few of the many good resources on the Jesus Prayer as well as other forms of prayer and other practices that are related more or less to the Jesus Prayer as offered in this workshop. At the end of this list there is a brief explanation of how some of these resources are related to this sacramental practice of hallowing the Name.

GENERAL RESOURCES

Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* (Oxford: University Press, 2006).

Martin Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation* (Oxford: University Press, 2011).

These are exceptionally helpful books that touch on many of the traditions represented in the resources that follow in this list. Laird draws upon both ancient Christian teaching and contemporary experience in ways that clarify and inspire.

Martin Laird, *An Ocean of Light: Contemplation, Transformation, and Liberation* (Oxford: University Press, 2018).

Martin Laird and Sheelah Treflé Hidden, eds., *The Practice of the Presence of God: Theology as a Way of Life* (London: Routledge, 2017).

A stimulating set of essays which ground and explore such forms of prayer theologically. Many of the essays focus on Patristic thought and practice, giving glimpses of the profound experience and understanding the Fathers had of encountering God.

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God and The Spiritual Maxims* (Dover, 2005).

The well-known classic by a 17th century Carmelite monk. Available online and in several editions.

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2009).

A classic from the 18th century available in many editions, some under the title *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. This edition, as with most of them, is a selection from an extensive collection of letters, found in *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, E. J. Strickland, trans. (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007).

ON THE JESUS PRAYER

A Monk of the Eastern Church, Archimandrite Lev Gillet, *The Jesus Prayer*, rev. ed. (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987).

Fr. Lev discusses the history of the prayer from the Scriptures to our own time. A section of practical guidelines (pp. 93-106), contains the text of *On the Invocation of the Name of Jesus*, available separately, which is one of the most accessible introductions to the practice of the Jesus Prayer.

Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, *The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*, Fairacres Publications 43, rev. ed. (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG Press, 1977).

An excellent concise introduction which cites many significant traditional Orthodox sources.

Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Jesus Prayer* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2014).

Another brief very helpful introduction to the Jesus Prayer.

Simon Barrington-Ward, *The Jesus Prayer: A Way to Contemplation* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2011)

An engaging and accessible discussion of the Jesus Prayer by an Anglican bishop, passing on what he has learned from his Orthodox instructors and from his own experience and reflection.

Brother Ramon and Simon Barrington-Ward, *Praying the Jesus Prayer Together* (Hendrickson, 2004).

An Anglican Franciscan hermit and an Anglican bishop describe their experience of praying the Jesus Prayer together. They offer insights into the prayer and its practice in the context of their lives. Brother Ramon was dealing with a terminal illness at the time, which adds a significant dimension to the discussion.

Irma Zaleski, *Living the Jesus Prayer* (Toronto: Novalis, 2011).

One of the most concise and clear introductions to the Jesus Prayer, packed with wonderful insights very simply expressed. This is the book on the Jesus Prayer to which I return most often.

Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer: The Ancient Desert Prayer that Tunes the Heart to God* (Brewster MA: Paraclete Press, 2009).

One of the longer recent books on the Jesus Prayer, written in a lively fashion. She includes more themes found in traditional Orthodox teaching on the prayer than most of the popular introductory books.

R. M. French, tran., *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

A classic spiritual writing, recounting the travels of a homeless Russian peasant in the 19th century who seeks to learn how to pray without ceasing. He finds instruction in the Jesus Prayer through teachers who point him to the classic collection of Orthodox teaching on Hesychastic Prayer (the prayer of stillness) known as the Philokalia.

Allyne Smith, annotator, G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Bishop Kallistos Ware, translators, *Philokalia, The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts: Selections Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2006).

A very good entry into the texts of the *Philokalia*, the classic collection of Orthodox teaching on Hesychastic Prayer (the prayer of stillness) referred to in *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

Igumen Chariton, comp., *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (Faber and Faber, 1966).

A collection of mostly 19th century Russian texts on praying with the mind in the heart, including teaching about the Jesus Prayer in particular.

Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus: From the Ascetic Essays of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov*, tran. Fr. Lazarus (London: John M. Watkins, 1965).

One of the classic Orthodox introductions. He distinguishes an approach that is appropriate for beginners from higher levels of the Prayer (pages 49-70). This is an important point since much of the material in the *Philokalia*, for example, is written for monastics and includes material that is inappropriate or even harmful to others. Several resources listed here note this point as well, though in less detail than Bp. Ignatius.

Website: There are a number of websites related to the Jesus Prayer. One helpful one is http://www.monachos.net/monasticism/jesus_prayer.shtml .

“The Mysteries of the Jesus Prayer,” is a movie available on YouTube. It includes interviews with monks and nuns in Egypt, Greece, Rumania, and Russia. See <http://mysteriesofthejesusprayer.com/wp1/>.

ON CENTERING PRAYER/FR. THOMAS KEATING

Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2006).

Fr. Keating’s main introduction to Centering Prayer, both its history and its practice, including discussion of the role of the mind.

Thomas Keating, *Intimacy With God*, 3rd ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2009).

Perhaps Fr. Keating’s best concise general introduction to Centering Prayer, discussing briefly many of the themes he develops in his other writings.

Thomas Keating, *Centering Prayer: The Prayer of Consent* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Contemplative Outreach Media Center, 2011).

A part of the series “The Contemplative Life Program: 40 Day Practice” with insights into Centering Prayer for those who already begun practicing it.

David Frenette, *The Path of Centering Prayer: Deepening Your Experience of God* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2012).

Keating says, “This book in my view is the best, most comprehensive and most practical book on centering prayer” (xvii). While it is meant for both beginners and for those who have been practicing Centering Prayer for some time it is probably more helpful for the latter. He explores the relation between Centering Prayer and contemplative prayer in the sense of a unitive experience of God.

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 2004).

Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2016).

Bourgeault is associated with the Centering Prayer movement. In these books, especially the second one, she seeks to move the practice in the direction of “nondualism,” a current buzzword with many definitions, as she notes. Nondualism is often associated with the advaitic experience of Hinduism. Bourgeault commends such nondualism through extensive reference to Eastern Orthodox Hesychasm and *The Cloud of Unknowing*, as well as more esoteric sources.

Pamela Begeman, Mary Dwyer, Cherry Haisten, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler and Theresa Saulnier, *Welcoming Prayer: Consent on the Go* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: Contemplative Outreach Media Center, 2014).

A part of the series “The Contemplative Life Program: 40 Day Practice” with guidance for applying Centering Prayer to daily life.

William Johnston, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Doubleday/Image, 1973).

The classic 14th century text on the prayer of loving intent toward God, the basis of Centering Prayer. Also available in a variety of other editions.

Website for Contemplative Outreach, Ltd.: <http://www.coutreach.org/>

ON CHRISTIAN MEDITATION/FR. JOHN MAIN

John Main, *Door into Silence: An Anthology for Christian Meditation* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2006).

John Main, *Moment of Christ: Prayer as the Way to God’s Fullness* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2010).

John Main, *The Way of Unknowing: Expanding Spiritual Horizons through Meditation* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2012).

John Main, *Word into Silence: A Manual for Christian Meditation* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2006).

Fr. Main advocates as a prayer word, or mantra, the distinctly Christian word “maranatha” (see 1 Corinthians 16:22). These books consist of transcripts of brief talks Fr. Main delivered at the weekly sessions of a contemplative prayer group which he led. His teachings are especially helpful for relating such prayer to themes in Scripture. Recordings of his talks are available at the website for the World Community for Christian Meditation.

Website for the World Community for Christian Meditation: <http://www.wccm.org/>

This website contains writings of Fr. Main as well as his successor, Fr. Laurence Freeman and others. Fr. Main’s writings often contain insights from the Scriptures. Fr. Freeman generally refers less frequently to Scripture, though see his *Jesus: The Teacher Within* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2010) for his approach to Jesus and the Gospels. Much of Fr. Freeman’s focus is on setting Jesus in the context of other religions and spiritual traditions.

NON-CHRISTIAN RESOURCES

When read with discernment there is much help available in secular resources and those from other religions.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1994).

Andy Puddicombe, *The Headspace Guide to Meditation and Mindfulness* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2011, reprint edition 2016).

Daniel J. Siegel, *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2018).

Mark Williams and Danny Penman, *Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World* (New York: Rodale, 2011).

These first four books are basically secular. They represent the many books now available that draw upon both Eastern thought and current scientific research. They include both theory and practice, with Puddicombe being especially accessible and Siegel especially insightful from research in neuroscience.

Stephen Levine, *A Gradual Awakening* (Garden City: Anchor, 1979).

Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Boston: Wisdom, 1992).

Chan Master Guo Jun, *Essential Chan Buddhism: The Character and Spirit of Chinese Zen* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing Co., 2013).

These three guides to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness provide helpful insights regarding concentration and attention. Obviously there are places where their worldview differs from the Christian vision of reality. They are not speaking of prayer, but on the level of practice there are points of overlap at which they contain much helpful insight and guidance.

Eknath Easwaran, *Meditation: A simple eight-point program for translating spiritual ideals into daily life* (Nilgiri, 1991).

Easwaran attended a Catholic school in his native India. Some of his thought reflects his Hindu lineage, but much of it is congruent with the biblical vision of reality. In particular, his eight points are a part of traditional Christian teaching. His clear explanations and illuminating illustrations make this a valuable resource.

Eknath Easwaran, *Seeing With the Eyes of Love: On the Imitation of Christ* (Nilgiri, 1996).

As the subtitle suggests, this is a commentary on sections of Thomas à Kempis classic work. As such, this book is especially accessible for Christians.

Website for Eknath Easwaran: <http://www.easwaran.org/>

RELATED RESOURCES

Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 1974).

This book is by a Catholic monk who moved to India and engaged Hinduism deeply, both in theory and in practice. He discusses the truth present in Hindu experience and its place in Christianity. Then he goes on to describe the deeper truth of the Christian vision of the Holy Trinity. Unlike most of the other books in this list, this work is not so much a practical guide as it is a discussion of alternative visions of ultimate reality.

Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, new edition (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2006).

This is Abhishiktananda's classic practical guide to prayer.

Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina, CA: Valaam Books, 1999).

An appreciation of the *Tao The Ching* in the context of traditional Eastern Orthodoxy, touching on many elements in common with the Jesus Prayer.

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (1943).

T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* (1922).

Both of these poems are available in many editions. In them Eliot combines insights and themes from the non-Christian East with Christianity, expressing powerful poetic lines that have many themes relevant for the sacramental practice of hallowing the Name presented in this workshop. For a study of Eliot's relation to the non-Christian East and its expression in these poems see,

Cleo McNelly Kearns, *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions: A Study in Poetry and Belief* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987).

Tai Chi and Yoga

Yoga and Tai Chi are very helpful for becoming attentive to the body and can be used in conjunction with the Jesus Prayer. I have no suggested resources for yoga, but for Tai Chi Dr. Paul Lam has a number of DVDs that are very good. The warm up exercises he describes are easy to learn and provide a good introduction to Tai Chi. One repetition of the eight exercises takes only 3-4 minutes, depending on how quickly you move. Even doing just 1 to 3 repetitions of these gentle stretching exercises is surprisingly beneficial. He has an introductory video on YouTube that includes the warm-up exercises. Search for: lam tai chi arthritis (or go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAOuEpa01j4>). The stretching exercises are found at minutes 18:40 – 29:50. Going further and learning to coordinate the breath with the motions and how to move from the center of balance in the body (called the “dan tian”) enhance the value of Tai Chi for attending to our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

Brief Notes on the Relation of the Jesus Prayer to These Resources

The Jesus Prayer has much in common with Centering Prayer and Christian Meditation. There is, however, one crucial difference. In those practices the word used is to have no meaning, at least during the time of prayer. The non-dual approach of Cynthia Bourgeault and David Frenette takes this approach even further. In hallowing the Name, on the other hand, the content of the Name and its sacramental quality is of the essence of the prayer even though one is praying from the heart and not the mind or emotions.

The introduction to the Jesus Prayer in this workshop is much simpler than the teaching on the Jesus Prayer in the highly developed theology and practice of Hesychasm. The attention to the body is a part of Hesychasm, but the approach in this introduction draws more upon insights and practices from Buddhism and modern mindfulness material than Hesychasm. These Buddhist and mindfulness sources are more self-help practices than prayer, but they have much that is of value regarding how the mind works and how to be alert and conscious. They do not share the view of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit and the use of such practices for the sake of encountering the Presence of God. So the worldview and goals are different, but their exploration of how the mind and body actually work provide valuable insight that is congruent with natural and biblical revelation. Similarly, both yoga and tai chi can be practiced as mindfulness in motion. They offer valuable help for becoming conscious of the body, which can be interpreted and applied within the biblical vision which grounds this sacramental practice of hallowing the Name through the Jesus Prayer.

The writings of Eknath Easwaran have helpful insights on a variety of spiritual practices, but they are especially valuable regarding meditating on passages. As we’ve seen, his insights into the value of listening to the sound of the passage can be helpful in this sacramental practice of hallowing the Name. This element of the prayer is related to meditation on Scripture, especially *lectio divina*, as well as engaging the flow of words and actions in liturgy with consciousness and attention to the divine Presence.

The sacramental practice of hallowing the Name is a precise and practical way to live into the vision of life with God in daily life contained in the classic texts by Brother Lawrence and de Caussade, as well as the Welcoming Prayer practice of the Centering Prayer movement.