

PRAYER and DISCERNMENT
at
LEASIDE UNITED CHURCH
Winter Project 2010



WEEK TWO: January 24
A dwelling place for God

Intentional Silent Prayer Practice

(Contemplative Prayer)

Most of us realize that the life which contains space and time for prayer is a rich and full one. At the same time, we are afraid that we might lose control, or we might not like the message we hear in our prayer. Or we just don't know how.

Contemplative prayer is mindful prayer. It is more demanding and challenging than simple talking prayer; it is also more rewarding. It requires that we slow down the thought generating process of the mind, that we learn to enter and stay with silence, and befriend this unusual state.

Anthony de Mello

(Song of the Bird)

"A talkative man tried unsuccessfully for many months to gain the attention of a woman he fancied. He suffered painful rejection and scorn. Finally, she yielded and agreed to meet with him. "Meet me under the palm trees on the shore as the sun rises", she said. At that time and place, the man finally found himself seated beside the object of his affection! He reached into his pocket and pulled out a sheaf of love poems and letters that he had written to her over the past months. They were passionate letters, expressing the pain he felt and his burning desire to experience the delights of love and union. He began to read them to his beloved. The hours went by and still he read on and on. Finally the woman turned to him and said: "You silly fool! These letters are all about me and your longing for me! Well, here I am sitting with you at last, and you are lost in your stupid letters!"

There comes a time when we have to stop reading and talking about God, thinking and reflecting about spiritual life, and simply enter into appreciation for and the presence of the Beloved. This is contemplative prayer.

EXERCISE: "Centering Prayer"

(Adapted from An Invitation to Centering Prayer, Basil Pennington)

The goal: to make space for God in your heart and soul

The practice: suggest 20 minutes per day, at beginning or end of day

You need to know: Most people find this very challenging, but God will honour your intention. Most of the benefits of this prayer are often reaped LATER in insight, revelation, well-being, and commitment to action. These tend to come when you are NOT in prayer! Be patient and non-judgmental; be gentle with yourself. Embrace the freedom of this prayer.

The Prayer: Start with 10 minutes, then work to 20. Set a gentle timer to let you know the time has passed. Choose a quiet time! Sit comfortably in a chair, no fancy positions needed.

- **Choose a word or image for God. (Remember the slide show on God: was there a word that spoke to you?) Any word or image will do as long as it means something to you. Write it down on a piece of paper.**
- **Focus your attention on the intent of your prayer: "I am the dwelling place of the living presence of God". Do this for a few moments. (You can use Christ, or Love, or the Beloved, or Light, etc.)**
- **Say your sacred word to yourself silently. Allow this word to be the only thought in your mind. As other thoughts come, gently notice them and let them go, always returning to your one word. You can make your to-do lists later!**
- **When time is over, end the prayer by thanking God for the gift of silence and presence. You might want to pray in words now, for thoughts you had earlier.**

I promise you that if you do this every day, you will feel your heart and spirit literally expand. You will feel peace, joy, and contentment. Who wouldn't want that???

The Lord's Prayer:

Perhaps the best known prayer in the world, the Lord's prayer is actually a non-sectarian prayer which can be used in many settings. When asked by his disciples how to pray, Jesus gave some words to them. The phrases now roll off our tongues because of English translations, but in the Aramaic language (the dialect Jesus spoke) the phrases are breathy and evocative, prophetic and mystical all at once. It is a masterful prayer, rich with layers of meaning, many of which are likely lost to us. The following translation, by Neil Douglas-Klotz reflects a modern "literal" translation of Jesus' words. It is based on current understandings of the interpretation of Aramaic. Enjoy!

THE LORD'S PRAYER (from the Aramaic)

O Birth-Giver of the Cosmos!

Focus your light within us! Make it useful!

Create your reign of unity now;

May your one desire act with ours

as in all light, in all forms.

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

Loosen the cords of mistakes which bind us,

as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.

Don't let surface things delude us,

but free us from what holds us back.

From you is born all ruling will,

the power and the life to do,

the song that beautifies all,

from age to age it renews!

Truly - power to these statements -

may they be the ground from which all

my actions grow: Amen.