

14

RECOLLECTION: CONNECTING YOUR OUTWARD AND INWARD CENTERS

In this chapter lies the key to the peddler's treasure chest.

You now have a basic understanding of some of the characters and experiences you might meet as you interact with symbols of your soul. You understand soul structure. Further, you are aware of the broad outline of the spiritual journey known as the Three Ways or the Spiral Path, the chief phases of which are:

- The Awakening of the Soul
- The Purgative Way
- The Illuminative Way
- The Unitive Way

You now also understand the parallels between the Three Ways and the Jungian ideas of:

- Life crisis
- Facing and integrating the Shadow
- Experiencing and integrating the Anima/Animus
- Manifestation of Wholeness or the Its-Self

Now we will begin to look at technique. As previously, a story is our best introduction.

A directee once described to me a new experience in prayer. She explained that she first went to prayer as she typically does. Then...

It was during one of my three or four a.m. awakenings. I went to my office and turned on the ceiling fan and my desk light. I read a few lines of scripture and a devotional. I then prayed a very intimate prayer—nothing like I would say out loud. At that point, I slid into my meditation. I find that Psalms 46:10 works perfectly for me. “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” I often sing it to God in His honor one time. That night, I repeated the verse several times in my mind, and without any effort of my own, it changed to, “Be still and know.” Then it changed to, “Be still.” Finally, the word came simply as, “Be...” At this time, I listened for the voice of God.

The new experience that came was this. First, I became aware of feeling cool from the air (wind) of the fan. Deep from inside I heard the gentle whisper, “Be.” Exactly at that moment, there was a profound silence. No voice, no thoughts. There was nothing, and yet to my amazement, there was everything. If I can explain it, it is as if the window of my soul opened. It is nothing I tried to obtain. It was a gift from God. What is contemplation? Don’t ask me. I didn’t find it. It found me.

The prayer experience described above was an utter surprise for this lady. She had been accustomed to times of stillness, but before, it had always seemed that she had initiated and maintained it mostly by herself. This time was different. A force like a wind carried her into a deeper, more profound sense of wonder. It was a little frightening at first, since no one had previously described such a thing to her. Yet it certainly felt blessed. So she went with it and she *was* blessed.

Prayer Research

Possibly the first scientific research on prayer was conducted in 1950 in conjunction with the University of Redlands psychology department. It was published in the book, *Prayer Can Change Your Life*. (Parker and Dare 1957). This was an academic study that satisfied criteria as a controlled experiment.

Forty-five volunteers were interviewed and divided into three equal groups of fifteen. Each went through a pretreatment battery of standardized psychological tests. The groups were:

Group I = Standard Psychotherapy

Group II = Random Prayers

Group III = Prayer Therapy

Group I was offered the best psychotherapy available in weekly individual counseling sessions to bring to light and remove emotional disorders. No mention of religion was made, and the fifteen selected for this category expressed either a definite preference for psychotherapy or had been recommended to this type of treatment by their doctor.

Group II were all schooled in a denomination and were faithful, practicing Christians. Each expressed a confidence in prayer as a definite solution to his or her emotional and physical ills and believed psychology an unnecessary adjunct. They agreed to pray every night before retiring for nine months, using their present concept of prayer, with the specific objective of overcoming the problem at hand. No psychological insight into internal disharmonies that needed help was offered, and no techniques in prayer were suggested. These fifteen were called the Random Prayer group

Group III was the Prayer Therapy group. It met weekly for a two-hour session. After an extensive series of standardized psychological tests, researchers passed out to each member every week a sealed envelope containing a slip of paper on which was written one detrimental personality aspect as revealed by the individual’s tests. The participants’ homework, then, was the elimination or improvement of this specific issue by prayer—but a *definite type of prayer*.

The experimenters suggested no public soul baring. However, as the experiment progressed and the participants found no condemnation in their fellow classmates, they voluntarily began discussing the content of their private slips and sharing their own experiences and progress.

Inhibitions and barriers crumbled as they recognized that each of them needed help and healing, and that each had something to share with the other.

After nine months of running the experiment, impartial (blinded) scorers administered and scored the post-experiment psychological tests. The results were as follows:

Group I 65 percent improvement (Psychotherapy)

Group II No improvement (Random Pray-ers)

Group III 72 percent improvement (Prayer Therapy)

What strong evidence of something amiss with prayer as typically understood and practiced by the Random Prayer group! The Prayer Therapy students had “asked and received.” Those more random in their technique received none of the inner transformation provided to the Group III members. The difference was striking.

Prayer Therapy as practiced by Group III offered something additional to standard psychotherapy, as well. Don’t you wonder what this powerful addition might be? Here is how the experimenters described the prayer that was so successful in Group III.

The Prayer Therapy Method

The prayer therapy method was to start with one facet of need suggested by the psychological testing and to stay with it for a week. Each week, Group III members moved to the next item of need provided by the experimenters. Regardless of the disharmony that was being focused upon, the technique of prayer taught and practiced was the same, as follows:

The Prayer

1. We recognize a God of Love *within* us as the healing and directing power of our lives.
2. We consciously surrender any negative quality (motive, drive, thought, feeling) we do not want.
3. We invite God’s power to fill the void our surrender has created.
4. In specific times of prayer and throughout our day we hold positive, healthful, wholesome thoughts and images, certain that these alone are in line with God’s will for his offspring.
5. When we pray, we believe that we have received the specific help we have requested, and we act *as though* we had received it.
6. We meditate on God as Love, on Jesus’ commandments to love, and *seek entrance to that Circle of Perfection* in the love of God, of self as God’s child, of neighbor as self.⁵⁸
7. *We listen, and wait for a sense of victory, a feeling of Presence*, that tells us, “I AM here. All is well.”
8. When it is reached. We give thanks!

This may seem like a lot to remember, but it is easy enough to keep it in front of you at prayer time and systematically go through the steps.

⁵⁸ This “*Circle of Perfection* in the love of God, of self as God’s child, of neighbor as self” is what spiritual theology and we in the book call “The still point.”

How the above Prayer Relates to Soulmaking

Let us look more carefully at how some of the steps here relate to what we have learned so far from our soulmaking quest.

First, let us look at numbers 1, 6, and 7, together. Notice that all three points are encouraging you to pray from a deeper place than your head. First, it focuses your attention inward, which is where the loving Source you pray to *is* located—within you, not outside you. “We recognize a God of Love *within* us.” The focus is the heart, not the head. The heart is the source of the energies of love, not the thoughts. God is love.⁵⁹ So, to focus on love in the heart is akin to focusing upon God, the source of all love.

And the kind of focus suggested is a meditative one. “We meditate on God as Love.” This means that the consciousness is given time to move deeper toward the heart and does not hurry away from the object of meditation. You are to “chew the cud.” This means to ponder the love of God over and over.

To pray in such a way is to move from your outward center and ego and into your inward center. It is praying from your heart. It is praying from your *still point*.

Recollection

That the effective prayer came from a deeper, meditative place in the soul is in keeping with a spiritual formation teaching called *Recollection*. Listen to how the Catholic Encyclopedia describes this activity. (Devine 1911)

Recollection, [in] the spiritual life, means attention to the presence of God *in the soul*. It includes the withdrawal of the mind from external and earthly affairs in order to attend to God and Divine things. It is the same as interior solitude in which the soul is alone with God.

This recollection is twofold:

Active recollection may be acquired by our own efforts aided by the ordinary grace of God. Thus any devout soul can acquire the habit of thinking of God’s presence and of fixing attention upon Him and his Divine perfections.

Passive recollection does not depend upon our own efforts, but is an extraordinary grace infused by God, by which He summons together the faculties of the soul and manifests His presence and His perfections; this kind of recollection is classed by mystical writers as the first degree of infused contemplation.

The first kind of recollection belongs to ascetical devotion and practice. It is necessary for all who wish to attain Christian [maturity]. *Without it, it is most difficult to make progress in virtue.* Therefore, it is necessary to observe the means by which it may be acquired. These are:

⁵⁹ 1Jo 4:8: “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.” 1Jo 4:16: “So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

1. Silence and solitude, according to our state of life, keeping in mind, at the same time, that one may be recollected amidst the duties of an active life;

2. The avoidance of distracting and dissipating occupations not dictated by reason or required by necessity. *Multiplicity of occupations is an obstacle to recollection.* Father Faber says that the man who undertakes too much is a foolish man, if not a guilty one.

3. The frequent exercise of the presence of God. As recollection is itself an application of the mind to *the Divine presence within us*, it is evident that the shortest way to its acquisition is frequently to call to mind that our souls are the temples of God.

In the effective Prayer Therapy Group, participants listened and waited for a sense of victory, a feeling of divine presence that told them, “I AM here. All is well.” This is what you feel when you reach the inwardness of your still point. It is the peace of God. Or at least, it is the human state of mind that has its gates open wide to let the peace of God come. As item 7 in the Prayer Therapy method suggests, you may have to wait a bit. You also need to use the technique of gentle refocus of attention to get past your inevitable distractions. But God is faithful. If you are unable to feel the peace at a given time, perhaps you are in a purgative dry spell. But recollect, anyway. It is still to your spiritual benefit, even if it is something of a struggle. It prepares you for the time when the spring rains begin to flow once again. It carves out a channel for the living water.

Twila Paris wonderfully expresses this experience in her song, “Sweet Victory.” Take a moment to listen to it at: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/for-every-heart/id45551385> (Accessed March 17, 2015).

Here is Father Miguel de Molinas’ description of recollection from 1685. I added this quote for you after a dream pointed me to Father Molinas. (Molinos 1685, 44-45)

Internal Recollection is Faith, and Silence in the Presence of God. Hence thou oughtest to be accustomed to recollect thyself in his Presence, with an affectionate attention, as one that is given up to God, and united unto him, with Reverence, Humility and Submission, beholding him in the most inward recess of thine own Soul, without Form, Likeness, Manner, or Figure; in the view and general nature of a loving and obscure Faith, without any distinction of Perfection or Attribute.

There thou art to be with attention, and a sincere regard, with a sedate heedfulness, and full of Love towards the same Lord, resigning and delivering thy self up into his hands, to the end he may dispose of thee (i.e., mold and use you), according to his good Will and Pleasure; without reflecting on thy self; nay, nor on Perfection itself. Here thou art to shut up the Senses, trusting God with all the care of thy Welfare, and minding nothing of the affairs this Life. Finally, thy Faith ought to be pure, without Representations or Likeness: Simple without Reasonings, and Universal without Distinctions.

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The Prayer of Internal Recollection may be well typified by that Wrestling, which the holy Scripture says, the Patriarch *Jacob* had all Night with God, until Day broke, and he Blessed him. Wherefore the Soul is to persevere, and wrestle with the difficulties that it will find in internal Recollection, without desisting, until the Son of internal Light begin to appear, and the Lord give it his Blessing.

No sooner wilt thou have given thy self up to thy Lord in this inward Way, but all Hell will conspire against thee, seeing one single Soul inwardly retired to its own Presence, makes greater War against the Enemy, than a thousand others that walk externally...

In the time of the recollection, Peace and Resignation of thy Soul, God will more esteem the various impertinent, troublesome and ugly thoughts that thou hast, than the good purposes, and high sentiments. Know that the effort, which thou thyself mayest make to resist Thoughts, is an impediment, and will leave thy Soul in greater anxiety. The best thing that is to be done, is sweetly to despise (i.e., ignore) them, to know thine own [weakness], and peacefully make an Offering to God of the Trouble.

Recollection is spoken of in several places in scripture.

My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night; for thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy (Psalms 63: 5-7).

Here we see a person having a quiet, private time with God and finding it a pleasant place. The soul, when recollected, can find rest. When we center our thoughts inward using one of numerous tools to bring our thoughts from outer life, beyond the middle unconscious and *monkey mind*, and to the *still point* in the soul⁶⁰, we leave the fight-flight energies of our soul, and turn on the parasympathetic, relaxation response. (Benson, M.D. 1975) It matters that we come to this place. It is one of the factors that made Group III successful. They were entering their still point when they prayed.

This entering the still point and lingering there is part of what Jesus meant when he said,

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
(John 15:4, 5, RSV)

After you have rested in the still point, soaking up the nutrients from the ground of being wherein is Christ, you can go forth into your day in a continuing state of receptiveness and love. That way, you can trust the forces greater than your ego to empower you and give you wisdom in your daily affairs.

⁶⁰ Refer to Diagram of the Soul. Note that the still point is the very center, a place of great importance.

“*Be still*, and know that I am God.” (Psalms 46:10) It is in stillness of soul that we can most consistently experience the transformative energies of God.

The still point is such an important place for the praying person to reside that I have placed it in the very center of the Soul diagram. It is also the place where a person seeking psychological healing must go for change to take place most efficiently. That is the message prayer research gave us. It is for that reason, in most of my therapeutic stories that I mention first entering a state of relaxation.

Any Twelve-Step program of recovery, such as AA, also urges this practice. Here are the twelve steps with my comments following.

How the Twelve Steps Relate to Soulmaking

1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.* This prompts the ego to yield its ego centrism.

2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.* This introduces the idea of a higher unconscious/nous being present as a resource for change.

3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.* Here is further letting go by the ego. This links the higher unconscious to God, but it allows those not yet theistic to participate. If one cannot believe in God yet, at least they can still activate the higher unconscious.

4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

In these next steps, we see that purgation is necessary for deeper illumination:

5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

7. *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*

8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*

9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.* This follows Jesus’ instruction: “So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23, 24, RSV).”

10. *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.* Here we see the main point I am making at this time—acknowledgement that meditation is an important, necessary step. Taking the issues raised in the above steps to the still point and offering them to God for healing aids transformation.

12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

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In church services and when we individually are struggling with a life challenge, prayers that cry out to God in distress are most natural. This we call *petition*. For some souls, petition is the only prayer they have ever known.

However, the kind of prayer from the *still point* is not about requests or petitions. It is focused upon satisfying the chief purpose of our existence and the deepest longing of our soul. The chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.⁶¹ It is this experiential knowing and enjoyment of God that praying from the still point achieves. This kind of prayer is about opening the heart to God. It is about coming in contact with the deep wellspring of living water that rises up from the deepest layers of our soul to nourish us with the energies of God. We then glorify God when we radiate these energies to everyone we meet, not necessarily with words, but with deeds of kindness and joy.

For those uninitiated into this place of the soul, this may not sound like a very big deal. Yet, those who find this place testify that it is the very presence of God. There, we are nourished by His energies to fulfillment. About this place, C.S. Lewis wrote that it left him “surprised by joy.” (C.S. Lewis 1955) Further, as stated in the encyclopedia article above, “It is necessary for all who wish to attain Christian [maturity]. Without it, it is most difficult to make progress in virtue.” This is a Roman Catholic way of saying that in order to grow to be like Christ, connecting to the energies of God in this “secret garden” is a necessity. It cannot be skipped.

Isaiah urges, in Chapter 55:

Come, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in [the richest fare].
Incline your ear, and come to me;
 hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
 my steadfast, sure love for David.

In T.S. Elliot’s famous poem, “The Four Quartets,” the still point is pictured as a cosmic axis. The cosmos and planet of our being are seen rotating around it, while the axis, itself, remains still.

From “The Four Quartets,” by T.S. Elliot:

At the *still point* of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the *dance* is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,

⁶¹ Westminster Catechism <http://www.opc.org/sc.html> (Accessed March 19, 2015)

There would be no dance, and there is only the **dance**.
 I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.
 And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.
 The inner freedom from the practical desire,
 The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
 And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
 By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
*Erhebung*⁶² without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror...
 At the *still point* of the turning world.

My teachers instructed me to think of recollection as re-collecting, or “collecting again” all the scattered fragments of life and identity, and focusing my attention on my *true identity* found in union with God. The outer ego is not the true you. The true you arises from this deep interior center. The spiritual quest, therefore, can be spoken of as giving up the false self in favor of the true self. It is the pearl of great price. It is the treasure hidden in a field. It is that for which you as ego “die” in order that the greater Self, our *nous* and inward spirit, might live.

I hope you will make time in your schedule for this practice in one form or another.

Techniques of Recollection

To quote again the Catholic Encyclopedia, “The frequent exercise of the presence of God, as recollection, is itself an application of the mind to the Divine presence within us... *The shortest way to its acquisition is frequently to call to mind that our souls are the temples of God.*”

This appreciation underpins all of the techniques. It teaches that you are not the bad names the children called you on the playground. You are not who your angry parents said you were. You are not the materialistic machine suggested by secular culture. You are, instead, who God says you are. You are a beloved soul who is loved, not because of what you do, but because you *are*—and because God is a lover of souls. You belong to Him; you are His *temple*. That means He is “hanging out” in your inner holy of holies. He invites your outer ego to hang out with Him.

In fact, your true identity is many things that you may have forgotten. That is why you must “recollect” as a foundation of your growth. If you are someone who often slips into negative thoughts about yourself, I recommend the following as a meditation/recollection technique to correct your thoughts and open your soul. Do it for at least a month, if not for nine months. Repeat it until you are confident in who you are. Confidence in these truths will grow the more you take them to the still point, for God will affirm them with His energies and presence.

Who Does God Say I Am?

The following biblical affirmations about our identity in Jesus Christ are derived from a few selected passages in the New Testament. These passages teach a portion of the many truths

⁶² The condition of being in an uplifted state, risen.

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about who we have become through faith in God's Son. Please spend time meditating on each one and letting its truth sink deep into your soul.

- *I am a child of God.*
But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God. Even to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)
- *I am a branch of the true vine and a conduit of Christ's life.*
"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.... I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:1, 5)
- *I am a friend of Jesus.*
"No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)
- *I have been justified and redeemed.*
Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:24)
- *My old self was crucified with Christ, and I am no longer a slave to sin and sarx.*
Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. (Romans 6:6)
- *I will not be condemned by God.*
Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)
- *I have been set free from the law of sin and death.*
For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8:2)
- *As a child of God, I am a fellow heir with Christ.*
And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17)
- *I have been accepted by Christ.*
Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)
- *I have been called to be a saint.*
To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2)
- *In Christ Jesus, I have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.*
But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- *My body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in me.*
Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

There are more such statements upon which you can profitably meditate. To expand this activity, search “Identity in Christ” and “scripture” on the internet. You will find many more exhaustive lists.

Techniques for Meditating on the List of Scriptures

There are numerous ways a person could meditate upon a list like this. One option is to write out each phrase and scripture on a small card and carry it with you through the day. In a thoughtful manner, while relaxed, breathe in and repeat one to three of the phrases for two or three minutes every couple of hours. In addition to meditating, you will be memorizing the verse. In doing so, you may find that the memorized truth pops into your head right when you need it in the future.

When I was a passionate, yet unmarried, man in college, I fretted about my uncertain future. Who should I marry? Would I get into medical school? And so on. Sitting out front of the university library in the shade, I suddenly heard in my mind the hymn and scripture that says, “For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto him against that day (2 Timothy 1:12).” It seemed as if the word *whom* was emphasized in the song I was hearing. It was a needed reminder that I was not trusting in the outcome of life events. I was trusting in a *Whom*—the *person* of God. Thus, I could safely let go of my worries and give them to God. The *nous* and Spirit like to prod us in these ways when we have done our part in learning the truth. The song and scripture were in my head. The Spirit brought them to mind and heart to give me a personalized message.

In addition to the meditation practice above, you could say the phrase in time with your walking as you move from place to place. You could even make a little song or chant out of it. We remember things more easily when they can be paired with music. Music is a tool that often takes us deeper toward a recollected state of mind, as well. Continually refocusing your attention on the phrase moves the consciousness beyond the monkey mind of the middle unconscious to a more peaceful and open frame of mind. As you open your heart through meditation and relaxation, you become more reprogrammable. You will also be following Paul’s suggestion: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).”

As a general principle, scripture focus and scripture memory are tools that are especially important during the Purgative Way and early Illuminative Way. In the Purgative way you are disciplining your mind like an athlete in training. You may find that, although you can experience an emotional dryness during purgation, the focus on scripture and truth lifts your spirit. It is like an oasis in the desert. In the Illuminative Way, the recalling of scripture can retrigger the joy and enthusiasm lying just beneath the surface of a busy day. It can also give us confidence in discernment.

To remind us of the definition of recollection once again, here is the earlier quote from *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

Active recollection may be acquired by our own efforts aided by the ordinary grace of God. Thus any devout soul can acquire the habit of thinking of God’s presence and of fixing attention upon Him and his Divine perfections.

The use of scripture in the way described is a form of active recollection. Trust the promise that if you do it, it will aid your growth “in virtue.”

The Jesus Prayer

The second technique of recollection I wish to encourage is the Jesus prayer. It goes:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” Or...

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Or simply...

“Jesus.”

Though unfamiliar to many in the West, the Jesus Prayer has a long and venerated history in Christianity. It is central to spiritual practice in Eastern Orthodoxy and is enjoying a growth in influence in the West. As a means of relaxation, it has been discovered by Western science to be one of the most powerful tools available for turning off the fight/flight/fear mechanisms of the body (sympathetic nervous system) and turning on the relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system). (Benson, 1975) Below is some teaching on how to use this prayer that may help you enhance your experience of God’s peace.

To do this prayer in its simplest form, repeat the phrase silently or out loud *with each exhalation of breath*. “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me.” Do this while you are relaxing for a few minutes. Those making it their major form of spiritual discipline are encouraged to practice it for twenty minutes twice a day. Research of relaxation training suggests twice a day as optimal for developing relaxation as a skill. *When a distraction from the repeated prayer phrase occurs*, merely notice the distraction, then, without any strenuous effort, gently return your attention to the prayer phrase.

Use the Jesus Prayer when you are going from place to place on foot. You will find that praying with the cadence of your walk brings your heart and thoughts back to God repeatedly throughout the day. Other refinements like those below are taught in various traditions.

Hesychasm

Hesychastic prayer is prayer that transcends images and discursive thought. It is promoted by the Jesus Prayer. It is apophatic (i.e., it does not use imagery). It is not exclusive of kataphatic prayer (i.e., uses imagery) where full use of the imagination, poetry, music, symbols, ritual gestures, and art (icons) are used. Rather, each rather deepens the other. The term Hesychasm specifically denotes the practice of the Jesus Prayer and, in particular, the “physical technique” that links the prayer to the following breathing technique.

Bodily posture

Sit with head bowed, resting your chin toward your chest and your bodily eye along with your *nous* or spiritual mind directed towards the middle of your abdomen. Alternatively, you can fix your inner gaze upon the heart. Some sit on a low stool about nine inches high. The shoulders are bowed and the back is bent.

Slowed breathing

Breathe through the nose, and consciously slow your rate of breathing. This evokes calm and concentration before the actual invocation of the Holy Name.

The search for the heart

Search inwardly for the place of the heart. Imagine the breath entering through the nostrils and then passing down within the lungs until it reaches the heart. In this way, the energies of *nous* descend with the breath, and the mind and heart are united. This creates the effect of a joyful homecoming, like a husband returning to his family. Once the thoughts are there, each time you

exhale, pray, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” *Some later sources of teaching suggest saying the first phrase on inhalation, and the last phrase on exhalation* and repeating this with each breath. Some say the longer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Practicing the Jesus Prayer in this way is sometimes called “the prayer of the heart” because the energies of the mind and *nous* are imagined and ultimately felt to pass through the heart region and from there pass, as love, back to God and/or out to the needful world. Once centered in the heart, you can direct the energies to intercession by holding an image of the needful person or situation in your mind for fifteen or twenty seconds while continuing the prayer. No words other than the Jesus Prayer need be generated. You are simply directing the energies of God to the situation and offering the situation to His ministrations. As a rule, we are not all-knowing enough to know what is best for any particular situation.

With practice, the *nous* or spiritual consciousness beholds itself totally luminous—filled with love and light. Notice distracting thoughts without frustration and let them pass behind or beneath you, and then gently re-center your mind on Christ and the prayer. Combining the physical technique with the Jesus Prayer phrase keeps guard over the heart. *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life* (Proverbs 4:23). It creates inner simplicity, free from images and rambling thoughts. The heart here signifies the deep center of the person as a whole, the point where the human personality is most directly open to uncreated love. It is felt in the physical heart. The prayer promotes integration of mind and heart—exterior with interior. It is a total identification with and absorption in the prayer.

The Jesus prayer itself derives from the Bible. It was uttered by blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10, as follows:

And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

From this arose the tradition that Jesus stops what he is doing when he hears this prayer, however distracted he may be, and listens to the petitioner. Similarly, in Matthew 15:22, the Canaanite woman received Jesus’ undivided attention when she voiced the same prayer.

And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.”

But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

And he answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

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She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Finally, Jesus, himself, suggests this attitude of prayer to us in the following parable. (Luke 18:10-14)

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.”

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “*God, be merciful to me a sinner!*”

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Hesychia—or *Hesuchia*—is the aim of disciplined spiritual life, according to Basil Pennington. (Pennington 1982) The aim is to keep the mind tranquil. The way to attain this is to avoid distraction by detaching from the world and its opinions and stimuli. This requires the soul to let go of extraneous thoughts and develop a readiness to receive in one’s heart the impressions engendered there by divine instructions, either through scripture or intuition. To this end, solitude is the greatest help, since it calms your passions and gives your mind leisure to separate the soul completely from this distraction. Through this practice of tranquility, the soul is purified and, withdrawing into itself, ascends to the contemplation of God. Ravished by the divine beauty, the soul applies itself through reading and meditating on scripture to holding God continually in the memory, and we become temples of God. (Jones, C.; et. al. 1986)

“You know, brother, how we breathe: We breathe the air in and out. On this [is] based the life of the body and on this depends its warmth. So, sitting down in your cell, collect your mind, lead it into the path of the breath along which the air enters in, constrain it to enter the heart together with the inhaled air, and keep it there. Keep it there, but do not leave it silent and idle; instead give it the following prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me’ (St. Nikodimus and St. Makarios).

Breathing exercises are the only practice that some ever use to achieve centering and are especially well suited for our Western way of life. We are all too busy. It is very hard for us to find a quiet place for devotional time. And then to sit down and actually try to quiet the mind is very difficult for many. Practicing the breathing exercises gives the mind something active to focus on; you can practice them with almost any kind of noise going on in the house. Also, in the beginning or whenever you cannot get your mind to quiet down while practicing the breathing exercises, it can be helpful to play some devotional music quietly in the background. Something that moves you emotionally is best. If your mind is overly active and you cannot get it to quiet down, try this.

Says orthodox monk and spiritual leader, Father Maximos of Cyprus:

At the early stages of spiritual practice you must not be concerned with the quality of the Prayer, whether your mind is focused on the words or not. Whatever you do at this stage, your mind will be wandering. There is no way to avoid that. But the Prayer has its own power and energy. As you repeat it in your mind or aloud, it will have a gradual impact within your psychospiritual world. Believe me, it will work like a bulldozer which opens up the road, gradually demolishing rocks and pushing the dirt away. It opens the road for Grace to visit the heart. And when that happens, then the heart works by itself independently of whatever else you do. It enters into an ongoing relationship with God.

Just fill up your idle time with the Prayer.

Look. You drive a car, don't you? Use that time to recite the Prayer. Or, while you cook, wash the floor, wait at a bus stop, recite the Prayer. If you get into the habit of filling up these empty time slots with the Jesus Prayer, you will experience extraordinary benefits in your heart, truly extraordinary, believe me. (Markides 2001)

This is the promise for those who frequently set their mind on God. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you; because he trusts in you." (Isaiah 26:3 WEB)

The Cloud of Unknowing Prayer

The techniques of meditating on scripture and the Jesus Prayer form a foundation for Christian practice of recollection and centering. The Cloud of Unknowing prayer may seem like a small variance from the Jesus Prayer, but the practiced soul may find it a more profound experience even than the other two techniques. That is because as the soul moves closer to the Unitive Way, there is a natural tendency for prayer to become more simple and imageless. The Cloud of Unknowing prayer uses the simplest of imagery focus.

Imageless prayer is called *contemplation* rather than *meditation*. At first, when we get serious about the transformation of our soul, our soul transforms best with imagery while in a recollected state of mind. Recollection is like a *reprogram* mode for our inner self while the imagery is the content of the reprogramming.

As our souls become more healed and holy, we find it more attractive and powerful to let go of imagery and just rest in the presence of God. Resting in the presence of God that takes place without images is *contemplation*.

I mention this because at earlier places on the journey, contemplation and resting in the deep soul may come less naturally than at other times. You should not lose heart, however. Three minutes twice a day of focused attention with the Jesus prayer will make a difference. Then, gradually, God will deepen your abilities, as you prove faithful. Be active with the disciplines that you *can* do more readily, but still devote a degree of attention to recollection. The mere intention to do so, even if you don't have obvious or easy success, will make a difference if you persist. I suggest that you start your quiet time with the centering technique of your choice. Then move to the prayer, study, journaling, or other activities you have planned for your devotion.

The best visual representation of the experience of contemplation that I have ever seen is in the chapel of the University of Dallas. It was there I attended and taught at the Anglican School of Theology. Notice the round fount at the bottom left of the picture. The fount is so perfectly in

balance that the surface of the water around its perimeter is exactly at the top edge of its inner basin. The surface is as smooth as glass, except at the very center. There, from an unseen source, arises a central flowing column of water. It breaks the surface in a silent, small turbulence. From



this center, water is continually flowing outward over the edge of the basin. Here is depicted eloquently the living (flowing) water at the heart of the God found in the gentle, but glorious, center of our soul.

The Cloud of Unknowing Prayer Technique

The Cloud of Unknowing is a beloved manual written by an anonymous English monk

during or before 1677. When I read it, I was ready for its message. It affected me deeply. The monk counsels his protégé about the prayer form he calls “the cloud of unknowing.” He urges him back to it repeatedly. Though this prayer may seem a small thing, our author assures his original reader as well as us today that the cloud of unknowing prayer brings to us the very energies of God.

The cloud of unknowing prayer is *apophatic* and very simple.

- Imagine a cloud above you. Place your sense of conscious awareness in a location floating just below the cloud. The cloud represents God. It is called the cloud of unknowing because we acknowledge that no image is sufficient to depict God. Since you cannot know God fully through image or reason, you undertake the opposite—unknowing. All things pale in comparison to God’s infinite reality. For that reason, you give yourself a diffuse object to which to direct your attention—a cloud.
- Then, knowing that distractions inevitably will come, you are counseled to imagine a “cloud of forgetting” hovering beneath you. Whenever you notice that you are distracted, gently, without struggle, see the distraction drift beneath the cloud of forgetting. Then, return your attention back to the cloud of unknowing.
- But there is one more thing: You do not pay attention just to the cloud. In addition, you “direct your naked longing” to the cloud above you. As you direct your naked (unabashed, unhidden, vulnerable, humble, unhindered, unashamed) longing and need, you will feel a humbling and an opening of your heart. Eventually, you may begin to feel the radiance that is recognized as the energy of God. When you do, rest there and fill up your being with the rivers of living water.⁶³ It truly satisfies. Notice

⁶³ John 7:38: “He who believes in me (Jesus), as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

that this is like the Prayer Therapy group in the study, *Prayer Can Change Your Life*. They reported, “We listen and wait for a sense of victory, a feeling of Presence that tells us, ‘I AM here. All is well.’”

When I first began feeling the pull to contemplation, I would spend perhaps forty-five minutes, working with kataphatic techniques, such as scripture reading, dream analysis, and inner healing prayer. In doing so, I was clearing a path to something deeper and more profound. I found that toward the very end of my allotted time, I entered into that deeper place of “naked longing,” directed to God. Then would come the rush of living water. I was amazed to discover that spending as little as thirty seconds awash in that stream would fill me up for the rest of the day. I could not wait until it was time to go back and know God with this new kind of intimacy the next day. Glory abounded!

Speaking of the parable of the treasure hidden in a field, Amis describes the Eastern Orthodox experience:

The deepest interpretation of this parable describes noetic prayer, in which we sacrifice or sell all our mental possessions, leaving the field of our *nous* clear and without image, and in this empty field we then discover the joy of the Lord, the bliss that is the food of the Spirit. When we discover this bliss, all other pleasures pale by comparison, so that from this moment we will begin to set aside every other desire until only one desire remains to us. At this point we will understand the idea of the one thing needful not only with the head, but with the heart. ...as this process continues and we have further glimpses of this treasure, we will perhaps find that at its most intense it becomes a light like an inner sun—the uncreated light. (Amis 1995, 159)

Now, as I move beyond the headiness of first illuminations, I find I can reach that same spot of contemplative union with God and His radiant energies in about thirty seconds. It is like Twila Paris sings in “Bonded Together.” Take a moment to listen: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/same-girl/id45551241> (Accessed March 15, 2015)

For Those Who Lack the Desire

For those who find themselves in the quandary of not really wanting to do recollection or quiet times but are convinced they *should*, there is a principle of the spiritual life that is quite heartening. It is from the Bible. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; *for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure* (Philippians 2:12, 13, RSV).”

The Living Bible paraphrases it: “For God is at work within you helping you to want to obey him, then helping you to do what he wants.” This means that when you do not want to do what God calls you to do, if you will merely commit to Him your “wanting to want to,” that is enough. God will take that small offering and grow it until you find that you have the desire itself. I suggest confessing to God that you really do not want to have quiet or devotional times. Then tell Him that you “want to want” to have quiet times, and see yourself offering that to Him with open hands and heart. Then wait for the Holy Spirit to work a change in your inner life to accomplish the prayer. Repeat the prayer daily for a period of time.

Another tool is this simple prayer to say at the start of each day. From a recollected state—or not if you cannot get there—say to God, “I commit my heart, mind, and soul to your

guidance today.” The spiritual direction lore about this is that after six months of continuing the prayer, you will notice a difference. Then, after nine months of practice, others will also be able to tell a difference, as well. I personally found this to be true.

The Big Three

There are other techniques of moving beyond the surface mind and entering the still point of prayer. However, for our purposes, let us consider these the big three—scriptural meditation on one’s true identity, the Jesus prayer, plus the Cloud of Unknowing prayer.

Do these things, and “you will live.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Luke 10:25-28: And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered right; *do this, and you will live.*”