

Second session: Prayer as nurturing the inner child of God



This session will focus on how prayer helps us in keeping the image of God in the heart alive. In the first part I will introduce the Jesus-prayer or the prayer of the heart to you. This prayer helps the inner child of God to grow. In the second part I will demonstrate a way in which to pray with others, helping them to experience the freedom of being a child of God.

The Jesus-prayer, also called Prayer of the Heart

Throughout history the Christian Church has developed many different forms of personal prayer and meditation that will strengthen the experience of *Christ living in me*. From the Orthodox Church comes the Jesus-prayer, which is also named the unceasing prayer of the heart. In full this prayer goes like this:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!

But shorter forms are also used, e.g. *Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!* Or you may even just call on the Lord praying: *Jesus!*

This prayer is rich in content and encompasses three secrets: the secret of the Word or Name, the secret of the heart, and the secret of breath.

- *The secret of the Word or Name*

The Word is the innermost secret of life. That is why the gospel of John begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The characteristics of God are: God IS, and God LOVES. The Word reveals that God is a communicating God, a God who reveals Godself. God speaks to call that, which does not yet have any existence, forth into being. God creates through God’s word, and God is fully present in the Word through which God creates the universe. The Word gives life to creation, calling every creature by its name. God who IS shares God’s being with God’s creation, because God LOVES.

The word reaches us in a special way in the name. God’s name is I AM WHO I AM, which in abbreviated form becomes JHVH (Yahweh). This name expresses God’s being as one, which owes its existence to none than itself and has no other origin than Godself. But this name of God is hidden in another name, a human name, the name of Jesus. Jesus means “Yahweh saves”. Just as God’s name is contained in Jesus’ name, so God is close to us in Jesus, the Son of Man. This is another expression of the fact that God LOVES. God is close to us in Jesus to save us and to make us free of everything that binds our life in illusions and egoism, and thus hinders our fellowship with God and prevents us from loving God, our fellow humans and fellow creatures.

Praying the Jesus-prayer is calling out for Jesus, the God, who is present, and who wants to heal broken hearts and broken relations.

- *The secret of the heart*

The heart is the centre of our being. The heart is the deepest level of a person, and in Christian spirituality it is synonymous with a person’s spirit. It is in the heart that we can open up both to the spiritual world and to the world around us. We’ll find our spiritual heart where our vertical and horizontal orientations meet. The heart was created to mirror God. As God created us to be in communion with God, he created with an open space in the centre of our being. This is our heart, our human spirit. In our communion with God, God recognizes God’s image in us, and that is Christ, because Christ is the true image of God.

When the heart is open towards God, it is reflecting God’s love in relation to humanity and creation, and our own likeness to the image of God is experienced as intact. But when that contact is broken our heart is split in two. The mirror of the heart is dimmed by our self-interest. It needs to be cleansed, and our brokenness to be healed.

When we meet God in Christ Jesus and are moved by God’s love in him, our hearts begin to heal in relation to God, and we begin to find our true selves, who we really are. And then our relation to the surrounding world can be repaired. It is this healing of the heart that the Jesus prayer asks for, by calling on God through Jesus.

- *The secret of Breath*

In most spiritual traditions our breath is important for meditation and prayer. Also, the Jesus-prayer is linked up with breathing. This corresponds to the fact that breathing is essential to being alive.

Without breath we are dead. Breath is the physical or created expression of the working of God's Spirit in creation and in every single human person. The Holy Spirit is the life-giving person of the triune God, and life is the energy of The Holy Spirit as it unfolds in creation and flows through it. The Holy Spirit cannot be controlled. The Spirit is like the wind, Jesus says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases, You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John Ch 3.v 8). The Holy Spirit is at work in creation, but also in the renewal and restoration of life, leading us into a renewed relationship with God such as God meets us in Jesus Christ. The new relationship may be experienced as a new birth.

It is worth pondering on the fact that in many languages the same word is used for Spirit, wind and breath: Ruach (Hebrew), Pneuma (Greek).

Meditation following our breathing in and out helps us breathing in the breath of God.

How to pray the Jesus-prayer?

The Jesus prayer is linked to breathing, whilst your attention centres on the heart, but the most important thing is not a technique or a body posture, but simply to concentrate on Jesus, think on him or "speak" his name or even better "hear" his name.

Alternatively you can pray whilst breathing in, "*(Lord) Jesus Christ (, Son of God)*" and whilst breathing out, "*have mercy on me (, a sinner)*" or "*help me*" or "*be with me*". In this way your breathing can support the words of the prayer: Where Jesus becomes the Lord, sin and all our mental blockings flee. I die from myself so that he will be my life. When at the same time attention is focused on the heart, the prayer helps receiving Jesus in our personal centre, to make room for him to grow in us; thus, our heart is cleansed for whatever has covered it with grime and filth. The mirror is cleansed, and God's image is clearly reflected.

The main strength of the Jesus-prayer is its simplicity, which means it can be prayed anywhere and in all situations, letting the one praying live out Christ's presence in their heart.

But when we start praying the Jesus-prayer it may be beneficial to take some specific time out for it, e.g. morning, noon, evening or night. It may also be useful to find a preferred place for the prayer whether it is in a church, in nature or in an undisturbed corner at home. The best bodily posture is the one which offers the best physical and mental collection to you, and this may differ a lot from person to person. It may be good for you to sit in a chair with both feet on the floor, with a straight back and your hands in your lap. Or you may like kneeling or sitting cross-legged. Or you'll find it easier to collect yourself walking at a steady pace.

Ask the Holy Spirit to be present and to guide you all the way through. Then become grounded, feeling the contact between your feet and the ground. Be aware of your breath and find a natural rhythm. As I said, as you breath in, pray "Jesus Christ", as you breath out, pray "have mercy on Me". Do not expect special feelings or any spiritual uplifting. Only stamina and perseverance in using the prayer in a longer period, maybe months or years, will lead you to a place where God graciously fills and saturates you with Christ's presence in the Spirit. You shouldn't practice the prayer as a kind of mantra-jap but consider it as a calling upon Jesus and his presence. When you sense calm and peace, then stop calling, just relax for some seconds or minutes in full attentive awareness. When we are together with Jesus there is no need of calling. Just be with him, resting in

your inner self, in your heart. When your attention fades away, and thoughts are popping up, just recognize they are there, and call upon the name of Jesus, affirming his presence. When you get tired or sleepy, do not be frustrated using the time to fight against it, but know that we are in Christ and he is in us whether we are awake or sleeping. When your time of prayer has finished, you may make the sign of the cross on your forehead, mouth, and heart, thank God for this time in the presence of Jesus Christ, and eventually conclude the prayer time with the Lord's Prayer.

The Jesus-prayer is a good companion in daily life. Praying the Jesus-prayer is practicing the presence of Jesus as we meet other people, as we are working, walking in nature or resting. The Jesus-prayer may help us being aware of the presence of God. Praying it we become Christ-carriers, because he lives by faith in our hearts, and at the same time this presence makes us aware of his presence in our neighbours and helps us seeing his mark on creation, that everything is created through him and to him.

Healing of the heart

As God's image is restored in you as Christ dwells in your heart, disturbing thoughts, feelings, and conceptions are cleansed away. You may begin to experience the inner freedom of being a God's child. You may lay aside any judgment spoken over you by others or by yourself. You begin to be who you are: I am a child of God. I am loved, and I am appreciated. This realization may be yours as you call upon Jesus.

Jesus, come in
Jesus, come in
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus
Come in to day
Come in to stay.
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus

How can you help others to rest in their hearts knowing that they are God's children, created in God's image so that Jesus may dwell in their heart.

For many years I have used a form of praying with people, that I call Healing of the heart. To give you an idea of how to pray with people, I will guide **a meditation, praying for the healing of the heart:**

Relaxation:

"Sit comfortably. Feel your body's contact with the floor and the chair back. Let your feet rest on the floor if possible - imagine they have roots, going deep into the ground. Relax your shoulders - your jaw - let your face relax - you don't need to think about anything right now. Sense your breathing - don't change it - just relax in it - feel Gods' presence. When you breathe out, release the tension and restlessness. Listen to the sounds around you - and just let them be."

Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, and guide us in our meditation.

Healing meditation:

See / imagine the heart of God, and how love flows like streams of water from God's heart and through the heart of Christ towards you.

Open your heart, allow it to be an open vessel or cup to receive the flow of love from God through the heart of Christ.

As you receive this love, listen to the words of God in your heart.

You are my child, be beloved one

You are precious to me; none of the riches of the world compares to how precious you are.

Feel the joy in my heart that you are who you are

Now let this recognition of being loved, of being precious, and of being a child of God be rooted in your heart, the core of your being (person).

Holy Spirit, let this realisation of God's love overflow into the mind and soul even into the unconscious levels of the psyche, and let it bring healing to our inner person

Let the Holy Spirit bring this love of God into contact with unhealed or neglected experiences of not being appreciated for whom you are or where you feel judged or not understood or hurt, and allow the Holy Spirit to lay a new and healing foundation for your relationship with other people and for the courage to be who you are, reminding you that you are loved, appreciated and that you are a child of God.

[Let this process go on for some time (the next 15 minutes) while we listen to some music.]

[Meditative music]

I am a child of God.
I am loved,
and I am appreciated.
God, I thank you!

Or:

No power on earth
can separate me from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus.
God, I thank you!

Or:

By focussing on the light of Christ and the creating Word of God
I rediscover my true self, created in God's image,
and break out of my captivity in my false conceptions,
created in the image of my desires.

Take some deep breaths, in and out, and when you are ready you may open your eyes, and move your limbs.

Blessing

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding keep your heart and your mind in the love of Christ Jesus.

The steps we follow in this prayer for the healing of the heart may be used praying with others on other matters.

- a) Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal God's love in Christ for the person you pray for.
- b) Ask the Holy Spirit witness to the person that he or she is loved by God.
- c) Pray for the actual needs to be met.
- d) Conclude with a blessing.

There will be a handout on the Jesus-prayer and one on praying with others for the healing of the heart.

We will conclude this session with the Jesus-prayer as body prayer

Jesus

Christ

Have mercy

On me