



QUIET REFLECTION ✝ Second Saturday • April 9, 2022

We Are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made ~ Session I • *Psalm 139:13-15* • *Ephesians 3:16-21*

During these times of quiet reflection, we're asking two basic questions: What do I want to ask of the Lord, and what does He want to say to me at this time. We then wait, listening for His response. Let these questions guide your reflections and help you identify the things you want to process with the Lord. Take time to quiet your mind. Ask the Lord to help you hear what He is saying, and to give you freedom to pour out whatever is on your heart.

Psalm 139:13-15

¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

1. Central to the message was the healing we experience in relationship with our Father, our Maker, the Lord Jesus our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and Comforter. It is their expressions of love, flowing from their unique roles and identities, that touch and transform our hearts.

In what ways do you long for a more intimate, vital relationship with your Maker, Redeemer and Comforter?

- ✧ You may want to listen for a word from the Lord, speak from your own heart, or just sit in their presence.

2. Read Psalm 139:13-15 ~ What things about yourself make you thankful for how the Lord has created you? Ask the Lord to help you see them from His point of view, and ask if He has more for you in using or developing those attributes.

Are there personal characteristics that you reject, do not value, or truly dislike? Ask the Lord to help you see these things from His point of view. Would He remove these traits, or is there a way in which He would redeem them?

3. **BARRIERS WITHIN** Part of the message was about inner barriers (vows, labels, messages, roles, assignments). Is there one that fit for you? Can you name what it is that you need to renounce, or break free of? Ask the Lord to show you what this barrier looks like to Him. Pray that He will open the way to meet you in this place and set you free.

4. **YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF** ~ Ask the Lord to help you recognize where your relationship with yourself is damaged or negative in some way. Then, ask the Lord to show you what He wants to repair, and if necessary, to help you clarify and name it in your own mind and heart.

~ Or, you may want to pray for freedom and release from the negative self-image, and for the Lord to heal you in that area. Invite Him to do whatever will bring freedom and blessing to your heart!

5. Is there someone in your life that you need to forgive? Use the handout, Steps to Forgiveness, as a tool to help you release this person, and bring peace to your heart.

The Creativity of the Holy Spirit

Quiet reflection—also called journaling, is meant to extend beyond processing of feelings and thoughts. One of its main values is in giving God time to speak to us! For example:

☞ Listen

Is He asking questions of you?
Is He providing much needed counsel—His interpretation of your inner thoughts?

☞ Dialogue

Conversation with the Lord brings much understanding and draws us closer to Him.
~ Invite Him to speak to you. Wait in the quiet. Respond. Wait again, etc.
~ Write a letter, poem or psalm to express your heart.

☞ Images that Speak

~ Draw a picture or symbol of what is on your heart.
~ Ask Him for an image that depicts how He sees you or something you're concerned about at this time.

☞ Editing Your Story

Ask Him to bring to light any assumptions or perceptions embedded in your heart and story that are not true. What is true that He would write in place of what is written there?

☞ Quiet

Invite the Lord to minister to you in the quiet. Whether with words or in the simple awareness that He is present with you, let Him "restore your soul" in whatever way you need. • You may want to journal and reflect on this time later.

DURING OUR GROUP TIME | 11:45-12:30 In our prayer groups we will pray for the one area in your life that has stood out to you during the morning.

GROWING IN PRAYER

Learning to Listen Well



Hearing from God is a training school led by the Holy Spirit. We learn to know the heart and language of the Lord, and to understand that He doesn't speak to everyone in the exact same way. He is building a deeper relationship with us individually through different phases of this training. One phase is listening for and discerning the voice of our Lord.

We may be learning or growing in the ability to:

- 1) hear in the context of our own lives, needs and relationships.
- 2) hear for someone we may not even know. We would understand that God has prompted us and will show us what to pray as we wait on Him.
- 3) hear on behalf of one another in a group. We listen together, and we listen specifically as we pray for each one. We learn to wait a moment before we launch in, honoring the Lord by making room for Him to tell us what is on His heart for our sister or brother.

Taught by the Spirit of Truth

John 14:24-26

Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

What we learn through the Holy Spirit comes through what He himself hears from the Father. We can, in turn, ask Him what we need to learn.

—ASK

- 1) that the Holy Spirit would teach you to pray.
- 2) that He would give you understanding of scriptures about the Spirit and prayer that perplex you.
- 3) that He would help you trust His leading in areas of prayer where you need to grow and deepen.

—IN RELATIONSHIP

- 1) God with us: When we bring a new baby home from the hospital we may initially rely on the good advice of others in caring for it. We quickly realize this little one is unique. In a way, its personality will shape how we parent, combining good practices with flexibility based on how they're wired and what they seem to need from us. This also applies to God's training of us.
- 2) We with God: David is a good model of one who knew God. He knew God's heart. He was a man after God's heart and would do all God's will (Acts 13:22). He knew that God knew him through and through

(Psalm 139:1-18). We get to know the heart and purposes of another by listening carefully to what they entrust to us because we really care. Because we really care to know God's ways, we will ask for and listen intently for His leading and purposes.

Unique Journey † Wisdom in the Process

Isaiah 55:2-3b † 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 rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live....

Jeremiah 2:13 † ... for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Why would we prefer things that don't satisfy? What is there about listening to God that satisfies the yearnings of the soul?

There is a spectrum of attitudes about hearing His voice. There are those who feel it is presumptuous, perhaps even dangerous, to think God would speak to us. There are many for whom the norm is to hear from Him daily in great and small things. They would say, "Why wouldn't you expect God to talk to you?" Many of us are satisfied as we are. We may need to ask God to awaken us to this good gift He has for us.

Why not ask?

Need: The health of our soul can depend greatly on how we approach our heavenly Father. Who else can truly affirm our worth? Who knows and cares about us more than the Lord? No matter how well we are handling things, we may not be in touch with our core needs and desires. We may have thirsts related to our deficits in love and nurture. Or, we may simply be missing the richness of relationship with God and not realize it. We can simply ask that He would draw us back to Himself and give us a thirst for His love – His fountain of living water.

Barriers to Trusting His Voice: The need for caution in assuming we have heard from the Lord is real. That is why we are led on a personal path. "Is it my own voice?" we wonder. God's training includes distinguishing between what we want to hear and the ability to clearly identify His voice and message. He will help and train us to identify our thoughts and desires. We can rely on His help!

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

We can test what we are hearing against the truths of Scripture by asking Him:

- 1) Please confirm that this is from You.
- 2) Is this meant for me to know and to pray about, or am I also to share this with someone?
- 3) Is this for now, or sometime in the future?



His word to us can also be a prompt that He wants to speak to us about something more weighty. "Take time to sit with it and with Me. I will show you what you need to understand."

Asking – Seeking – Knocking

Jesus' teaching from Luke 11:9-10 is key in listening prayer. Our asking opens the way for the Lord to respond. Below are examples of basic questions.

FOUNDATIONAL QUESTIONS

These are extremely basic and can be part of our prayer time, or any time. The point is that when we have asked, we stop and wait for a response. We can easily go on to form our own questions.

1) Lord, what is on your heart about this person, situation, task, problem, or me? We go beyond what we see and understand to the purposes of Jesus, which spring from His deep, caring heart. Knowing the purposes of God's heart enables us to act or speak effectively, our efforts focused in the right direction.

2) Lord, what do you have for me in this situation, this day, this assignment, etc? This opens the door for God to deepen our understanding, knowing we are willing to alter our assumptions and honor His Lordship! It clears the clutter of options and puts us on the same path He is on, serving His purposes, which may prove different than ours.

3) Lord, what is the path of love in this particular moment or relationship? We're inviting Him to pave a way for a healing conversation or act that restores what is broken. His way and timing can guard us from human efforts that make things worse or, from failing to address the situation at all.

4) Creative questions; nothing is too basic!! Questions show that our heart is fully engaged—wanting to join Him in what He is doing, and to “know the Father's business” (John15:15-16). Our prayer becomes a conversation rather than a monologue. We can build off of such simple questions as: *What are Your purposes in this moment? What am I supposed to be seeking or asking? Do I have a role here?*

5) The vast realm of dialogue with God! We invite the Counselor into our world by leaving room for Him to speak. He may have answers to questions that haven't yet occurred to us. In quiet waiting there is the “still small voice,” speaking to the quieted heart, with its capacity to hear and understand.

6) Images and Symbols We can ask God to give us a picture of what He wants us to understand. For example, He may want to show us our role, or how a situation is impacting us. We would know how to pray according to His purposes. The image may be a literal representation of what we need to see. Or, it may be akin to Jesus' parables, offering symbols that convey the meaning behind what we are experiencing, or, clarifying what we're meant to learn. The image may stay with us, unfolding God's message like a puzzle, coming together piece by piece, over time.

To listen to God is to look up to Him with the heart. Through the eyes and ears of the heart we see and hear God – we apprehend the transcendent. The Scriptures graciously invite us to look up and see the invisible. (See Ezek. 44:4; Ezra 8:22; Acts 7:55-56; Luke 1:38).

True listening prayer is obedient listening. To listen to God is to obey Him. Wisdom from above is received by those who are prepared to obey it. To listen in prayer for the voice of the Lord is to find the mind of Christ. • Leanne Payne¹



¹ Listening Prayer by Leanne Payne
A Hamewith Book, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI
Summary of excerpts, Chapter 8, Listening to God, pp. 121-132

FAMILIAR SCRIPTURES THAT CALL US TO DRAW NEAR

Psalms 27:4, 8 • Isaiah 55:1-3a • Song of Songs 2:14
Acts 13:22 • Revelation 3:20 • Psalm 139:1-18

Psalm 139: 1-6

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.



Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?

WRITING AS WE PRAY

BENEFITS OF A PRAYER JOURNAL*
DRAWING ON THE SPRING OF LIFE



1. Taking time to write out what is going on in our lives and what we think and feel about these things is even more valuable when we do it prayerfully.
2. The writing we do can unlock our soul because we must work to express what is real to us.
 - Find the words, the language
 - Identify the dynamics, as we see them
 - Open to God the recesses of our soul in detail, including how a situation has affected us
3. Investing genuinely in our communication with our Maker and Redeemer honors Him.
Rev 3:20 He knocks; we invite Him in
Ps.27:8 He says, "seek my face." And like King David we say, "Your face, Lord, do I seek."
4. Processing within our hearts in the light of Scripture makes room for His Presence: the Word made flesh who dwells in us. We make room for His Presence as we notice where our soul is cluttered, or focused on the presence of other things that vie with His Lordship.

*We use the term *journal* as opposed to diary or notebook because, by definition, it is more personal: "a record of experiences, ideas, or reflections kept regularly for private use".¹ A diary or notebook often includes a record of events, transactions, observations and memoranda. (Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary)

Developing a Journaling Method

Writing in your journal can be completely freestyle and spontaneous. But if you feel the need to establish a pattern, and order the path, here is a simple Bible study method gleaned from Intersociety Christian Fellowship, based on *Lectio Divina**.

1. Exactly what does the text say?
2. What is the interpretation of the text?
3. How does the text apply to my life?
4. What, beyond these considerations, is the Lord saying to me through this text?

Brief explanation of what each step might cover

1. What does the text say:
 - Facts involving people, place, setting or action, any historical facts which impact your understanding of the passage.
 - Statements about God's character or nature.
 - Promises or claims, either conditional or unconditional, to be appropriated.
 - Anything else which strikes you about the facts involved.

2. What is the interpretation of the text?
 - What is the message of the speaker(s)? For example, if Jesus is speaking, what lesson or information is He conveying?
 - What meaning is there in this passage for the people involved in the scene? For example, in reading about Noah you might interpret his actions in light of God's message to his generation.
 - Go beyond the facts to the underlying meaning in the context of the passage and its general application.
3. How does the text apply to your life?
 - Apply the text and truth to your own life. Does it call for a response? Does it call for self-examination? Is there something to lay hold of for your life? (For example, reading the Sermon on the Mount moves us to examine our lives according to Jesus' most central teachings.)
 - Internalize and personalize the truths in any way that seems appropriate, asking God for insight.
 - If God speaks to you about something you should do in response, use this time to pray, to yield, etc.
4. What else might the Lord be saying to you through this?
 - During this time, allow the Lord to speak further to you about yourself, and about Himself.
 - Wait in silence for several moments, worshipping, listening, allowing time and quiet for the Lord to speak into your heart—to dialogue with you.
 - Write down anything else He brings to mind.
 - We don't always hear something specific from the Lord, and we don't always have words for what we feel.
5. It is good to have the freedom to just BE in God's presence, whether or not we come away with a fresh impression or message. We may simply want to minister to the Lord in worship, just telling Him that we love Him. We may need to wait in His Presence, letting the Holy Spirit wash or fill or renew us in some way.

*"Lectio Divina", a Latin term, means "divine reading" and describes a way of reading the Scriptures whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. In the 12th century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of Lectio Divina. There are various ways of practicing Lectio Divina either individually or in groups but Guigo's description remains fundamental. *The Order of Carmelites / www.ocarm.org*

SING A NEW SONG



*Oh sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Psalm 96:1*

Our dialogue with the Lord, spoken, prayed, sung, or written, is an opportunity for the release of the song of our heart. That deepest heart song gives Him access to us beyond the filters of our thought life. A song rises from the emotional self, a spontaneous expression of how we feel, whether we're joyful, sorrowful, grateful or needing a way to express our deep love for Him.

What characterizes that dialogue?

How often we respond by applying His truths, as we must, but miss or avoid real transparency with Him? Do we know the full value of His Presence in our inner lives? Are we familiar with the tender, personal counsel of the Lord that comes with a different meaning: His affection for us.

To sing a new song is to release the wellspring of our heart in response to His love.

HOW DO WE GIVE GOD GREATER ACCESS TO OUR HEART ?

1. RESPONSE TO A FELT NEED + IN TOUCH WITH OUR THIRST

- Ask the Lord to show you what He desires of your love that He does not have?
- Ask yourself what is lacking? What am I not seeing? What exactly does God have for me that I am not thirsty for?
- Do you recognize His invitations to engage more personally with you?
- Ask God to help you experience His love more deeply—to be more receptive to Him.

2. PREPARED GROUND: QUIETED AND RECEPTIVE

Find time with the Lord when you can give Him your full attention — a quieted mind and an open spirit. Pray for receptivity to His voice. Consider scriptures that point to this intimacy with God and pray them as your own. (Ps. 27:8; Song of Songs 2:14)

3. MINISTERING FROM A HEART I KNOW!

The quality of our security in God's love affects how others receive our ministry. God affirmed David as a man "after His own heart" who would do all His will. What value do we put on the fruits of knowing God's heart as it affects our serving? One precious gift of a deepening relationship with the Lord is that we know Him, and are known by Him, more experientially. His Presence in us is apparent to those we serve, and we become more sensitive to what moves God's heart.

Surprised by Love?

Have you ever received a love letter or card expressing affection or affirmation for you? Our God is an emotional, feeling Person. As we form a habit, and build a highway of real dialog in our souls, He will use that way to speak of how He feels toward us. As a parent looks for ways to affirm and bless a child, so our Father longs to "speak tenderly"¹ to us. In some cases, He has waited a long time to convict our hearts—to prepare us to really hear and internalize His "I love you."

To quote a listener, Frances J. Roberts, who has recorded much of God's counsel in her book Come Away My Beloved,² this assurance of God's love is essential to all else. Below is a portion of one message: The Love Covenant.

Service is the salvage of love. It is like the twelve baskets of bread that were left over. The bread that was eaten was like fellowship mutually given; and the excess and overflow was a symbol of service. I do not expect you to give to others until you have first eaten. I will provide you with plentiful supply to give if you first come to receive for your own needs.

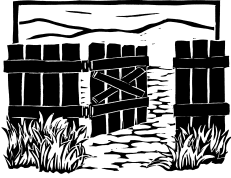
This is not selfishness. It is the Law of Life. Can the stalk of corn produce the ear unless first it receives its own life from the parent seed? No more can you produce fruit in your ministry unless you are impregnated with divine life from its source in God Himself. It was from the hands of the Christ that the multitudes received bread. From His hands you also must receive your nurture, the Bread of Life to sustain your health and your life.

This is His love-covenant with you. It is the message of John 15:4: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me." This abiding is a love relationship, and this is why I said, "Service is the salvage of love."

Service will be futile and burdensome unless it springs from an overflowing heart. Overflowing not with good intentions and condescending self-righteousness, but overflowing with the love of God. This you do not have of yourself, nor can you give, however much you might desire to do so. You shall possess this love only as you wait upon Me, and take time to absorb it from Me, like a quiet flower takes life from the warm rays of the sun.

¹ Hosea 2:14

² Barbour Publishing, Inc., Uhrichsville, PA, 2002; pp. 204-205
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LISTENING PRAYER

GATEWAY TO GOD'S HEART

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY HEART

In our dialogue with God, trust grows. He knows and understands us. Being listened to by Him is a gift! We accept that He wants to speak to us personally. When our dialogue is about the health of our soul, we can trust that He can build into our souls these foundational truths: **I am a loved one, created by God. He knows me. God is for me!**

As we know, in our subconscious the responses to what we experience in daily life shape how we define ourselves. How we interpret what's communicated to us about ourselves, spoken or unspoken, becomes part of our self-image. When we live with damaged emotions and false definitions of ourselves we see life through a filter, and we don't function as God meant us to. There is a false self and a true self. Only our Maker can restore our souls to the original person He created.

If we recognize that we need help, there are many good resources available: good therapists, counseling pastors and church focus groups, and many written resources. But the practice of maintaining our souls on a daily basis can be more significant than we realize. We make room through our dialogue with the Lord for His truth to sort out what we cannot see ourselves.

—"The Holy Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (1 Cor.2:10). He searches our hearts and intercedes for us according to God's will" (Rns 8:26-27).

Jesus, our Redeemer, has shown us how to maintain our outward lives through Word, Sacrament, worship, repentance, thanksgiving, and dependence on His life within us. He has redeemed our inner life as well—the root system of our history, using these same provisions.

—"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal.2:20).

It takes time to notice, in the light of His Presence, what we are carrying, and what is beneath the surface that God wants us to notice or name. What is fueling the painful things we struggle with?

—God "has searched me and known me" (Ps. 139:1-17). I cannot get away from His Spirit. Even my inmost being is known to Him who made me.

Inviting You In ▪ "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Rev. 3:20)

Just as we are, and in the context of how we pray and what we need, we ask Jesus to meet with us. At meal times with people we trust, our guard is down. This is the fellowship He offers – a dialogue where we don't need to fear judgment. He receives us and the conditions of our lives—hopeful or

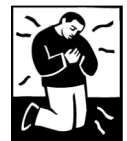
difficult, with grace. Our questions invite Him to go to deeper areas of our souls—to the details, like the inner workings of a finely crafted clock. It is a way of trust—of gradual revelation at a pace we can handle.

Identity Questions about our identity lead to the basic question of who has had authority to shape us—the right to speak into our soul, to tell us who we are? This helps us sort out before the Lord the various defining messages we've internalized. We learn to ask whether another's comments and perceptions are trustworthy. Are they to be received and applied, or laid aside? In this sorting process, we learn who we are not – what is not true about us, which frees us to operate only out of what is true according to the Lord.

Identity questions address evaluations and attitudes about myself and my potential to mature as myself. He will bring up, out of the subconscious, these shaping communications: messages, labels, roles, assignments, inner vows and directives. Our questions before God will be very basic:

- Is this message true? Is this role I have been playing in my family, or other social system, true to who I am? How has it defined my life? Is this label or role I've accepted pleasing to God, drawing me to be my highest self before Him?
- Has a decision, for example, an inner vow to never do certain things, or always do certain things—the setting of my will in this way, helped me walk by faith? In what way is it a barrier to honoring God's will for me? Am I following the directive or script of someone else rather than God's living path?

Law vs Grace The Lord will show us how to access the redemption of the Cross where we are conforming unconsciously to a variety of laws, assigned by others or ourselves. We ask for His light to uncover self-made rules, judgments, and self-blame related to our attempts to atone for real or imagined errors. He will help us name those laws and receive forgiveness and grace.



True or False? We must let God begin to "diagnose" the condition of our soul by simply exploring what is and is not TRUE from His point of view. It may relate to our self-image or our image of God. Knowing what is there will not in itself heal us. But we have a basis on which to receive God's healing words and open a process of restoration in our hearts.

Neglect, abuse, lack of adequate nurture of any kind, raises an important foundational question. Does it line up with the truth about myself, my life, fruitfulness, honor, sacredness—my value in God's eyes? Have we exchanged God's objective truth for human messages. We're asking God to replace false ways, i.e., perceptions about ourselves that we've agreed to. We then stand WITH GOD over our wounded or damaged souls, giving Him access to cleanse, comfort, repair, and reconstruct. * Find on page 6 a fuller explanation of these inner dynamics. Included are prayers you can pray by yourself, with trusted friends, or in a prayer ministry setting.



HE RESTORES MY SOUL" ✚ BRINGING BARRIERS TO LIGHT

- 1) Identifying and naming what is false
- 2) Renouncing (breaking agreement with) wrong ways of operating
- 3) Repenting of the ways we define ourselves that are not of God

BASIC TOOLS FOR REMOVING BARRIERS

1 Discern and Name

- ~ clarify/dialogue over what you are encountering
- ~ name the core message, vow, etc. and identify how it has functioned in or impacted your life

2 Renounce and Replace (The following is for renouncing a message. Adapt this for labels, roles, etc.)

"In Jesus' name I renounce (use the words of the message). I break my agreement to operate according to this message, etc. (More detailed prayer may follow.)

Ask the Lord to speak His true message that replaces the false one. Wait on Him; He will most often give that new message to you if you are praying about this, or to the person you are praying with. Pray simply to replace the old message with what the Lord has spoken to you. (More detailed prayer may follow.)

3 Breaking a Vow

Where a vow is being broken, use the same format. Repent of any awareness of how you've chosen to be governed by this vow, e.g., to take matters into your own hands, or take a path other than one of faith in the Lord.

4 Repent and Release

In the context of these prayers, forgiveness is often needed, for another person or for your own sin. If you have not already done so:

- 1) repent for your part in embracing a lie, or failing to trust or respond to His Lordship.
- 2) repent for other consequences related to the situation (attitudes, actions, blame of self or others, etc.).
- 3) forgive others, or ask Him for forgiveness.
- 4) release the person (or yourself) from judgment, acknowledging that God only must be the judge.

5 Affirmation and Blessing

In these prayers, we ask God to "bring His healing word" at any level or juncture along the way. This simply means that He knows what message or affirmation is needed to close the wounds we have brought to Him.

After praying through, to break any of these barriers, ask for His words of blessing over the person and their new path, opened through this time. If that person is you, ask the Lord to bless you in the area you have just processed with Him.

COMMON BARRIERS AFFECTING OUR IDENTITY

Messages and Labels

Affect our worth or identity in ways contrary to our God-given identity as beloved children, created to belong, to love, and to serve Him in meaningful ways with the gifts and talents placed in us.

- » Messages and labels influence us in hidden ways:
 - spoken to us by others
 - formed unconsciously through negative experiences or neglect
 - formed through praise or comparisons based on achievements, etc.

Examples: I am unlovable ▪ I don't matter ▪ I am stupid ▪ I'm always on the outside ▪ I won't amount to anything ▪ I can't do
- » Labels about status or perceptions that limit/disable:
Ex: average ▪ loser ▪ underachiever ▪ poor
- » Labels we serve or need to live up to: gifted child ▪ high achiever ▪ good girl ▪ handsome/beautiful

Vows: responses to hurtful messages and experiences

- » Influential inward controls about what we will always, or never do or be. They may steer us away from dependence on God to work toward healing in our situation or bind us to our own strategy of avoiding pain and vulnerability instead of placing our faith in the Lord.
- » Can serve as helpful boundaries at first, but later become bondages/laws we serve.
- » Can actually affect our health and act as "curses" that close us off to His blessings.
Examples ~ "I will always ..." or "I will never ..."
I won't try ▪ I will never trust ▪ I will not grow up
▪ I will never voice my opinion ▪ I will always appear cheerful ▪ I will always be in control ▪ I will never cry

Roles and Assignments

Within family system – adopt certain ways of functioning:

- » to keep the family intact
- » take on someone else's emotional issues or unsatisfied ambitions to please/placate them
- » adapt ourselves for the sake of others, perhaps to avoid personal conflict, pain or responsibility.
- » Assignments: e.g., manager ▪ fixer ▪ peace-keeper ▪ scapegoat, etc.

Sins • Where we have denied, buried or been unaware of ways in which we are offending God, failing to respond to His Lordship, or hurting others, we need simply to have this uncovered and dealt with.

1) Name what was done against you

Less effective: “My mom left when I was two, but I know she loved me, and I’m sure she must have been too immature to handle having a baby.”

More effective: “My mom left when I was two. I was **abandoned**¹, and I experienced a lot of **pain and loss as a result** ².”

¹ Using the word for what really was not right will also help you forgive what really happened to you. Though you may understand why someone did something, as part of your forgiveness you do not have to excuse them or take responsibility for their choice.

² Naming what you suffered or experienced as a consequence for someone else’s betrayal or offense will help you clearly release them for the cost of their sin to you.

2) Before the Lord, say that you are forgiving this person, and what you’re forgiving them for.

Less effective: “Lord, help me forgive my neighbor for what she did.” This is a good prayer to pray when you need help, but it is not the same as naming the offense which you then forgive.

More effective: “Lord, **I forgive Mrs. Smith for her negligence** in letting her dog run wild, and **causing me to be hurt** as a result.”

3) At this point, you may realize you are not ready to forgive, not because you’re unwilling, but because there are deeper issues that have impacted you through this relationship. The Lord will help us identify losses, hurts, additional offenses we will need to forgive, and also blessings and gifts, associated with the circumstance.

4) Now, release this person from any judgment you have held in your heart toward them.

- » we are judged in the same way we judge others; only God can judge
- » we’re also acknowledging many things about them that only God knows, remembering that they deserve His grace and forgiveness just as it has been extended to us in similar circumstances.

5) Identify/ask forgiveness for sinful ways in which you responded to the offender.

Less effective: “Lord, I am sorry for any ways I reacted.”

More effective: “Lord, **I have held a grudge** toward Mrs. Smith, and talked negatively about her to many people. I am sorry, and as **I forgive her now**, I ask that you would also **forgive me for closing my heart to her and exposing her sin to others** all these years.”

6) Receive absolution (I John 1:9), in Christ’s name, through the person you’re praying with, (or when you next participate in Communion and the words of absolution are spoken).

7) Is there anything more? Yes.

- » How do you want God to bless those you have just prayed about?
- » What requests do you have of the Lord, that He may bring restoration to your heart?
- » Ask that the Lord “seal” in you the work done at this time, and keep you in His love and freedom.

The Imagination in Healing Prayer

by Ken Polsley
Winter 2015/16

In 1987 I attended a small group where they were reading a book by Dr. David Seamands, a seminary professor who taught pastoral counseling. The book was titled *Putting Away Childish Things*. It was about dealing with emotional bonds or difficult memories that were blocks for many people, keeping them from growing to Christian maturity. I can't say that I was very interested in the subject, or that I discerned that I had any emotional blocks that I needed to have removed. However, I was intrigued by one of the stories that Seamands told about Anne, a woman with whom Dr. Seamands had a counseling session of what he called "healing prayer:"

About a week after we prayed, she awoke very early in the morning. She couldn't get back to sleep, so she lay in bed and began to pray. She said it was as if Christ Himself came into the bedroom, called her and said, "Come, Anne, take my hand. I want us to walk back through your life."

"Lord, I couldn't stand it again. It was so hard when I told the pastor."

"Anne, this time is going to be different. I am going to be with you each step of the way."

Anne then described that walk with Jesus in a most unusual fashion. The two of them were in a great art gallery where each painful incident was a picture on the wall. As Jesus led her they would stand before each vivid memory, like looking at a painting. And as she looked at them one by one, all the original emotions she had experienced swept over her. Once more she relived the fear, the pain, the shame, and the rage connected with those ghastly memories. Each time she would weep bitter tears and each time an inner voice would say, "My child, just turn it over to Me; forgive everyone involved and receive forgiveness for your own hate and rage." As she surrendered each memory to the Lord, it was as if Jesus reached up and took down that particular picture.

*This went on for several hours until finally, when she looked around, all the pictures had been taken down and the walls of her mind were clean and whole. The scalding bitterness and the poisonous fangs had been removed from those destructive memories. — *Putting Away Childish Things*, David A. Seamands, Victor Books, 1982*

I was puzzled by this story. I had heard of guided imagery that was used therapeutically by some psychologists. I thought that this might be like guided imagery, except that there was no counselor present guiding her. The counselor seemed to be the Lord. As Anne told it, Jesus was guiding these pictures in her mind, and she was following as a willing but apprehensive observer. Was this possible? Was this desirable? Was this a Biblical encounter of some kind?

Does God really engage the imagination of people in this way, or was Anne making it up by means of auto-suggestion, guiding herself in a memory story? Was it even right to use imagination in prayer? I was puzzled by the story and only mildly interested because I didn't see that Anne's experience had much application for me. Her experience was certainly outside of anything that I had experienced, and quite naturally I was skeptical of any kind of prayer not precisely described in the Bible and outside of my experience.

A week later my wife, Sue, had a conversation with my grandmother. Sue had asked me how my mother had died and I told her that she had died during childbirth when I was two years old.

“But why, how did she die?”

“I don’t know, I never asked.”

“Why don’t you know anything about your mother? It isn’t right!”

I had learned at a very young age that it was taboo to ask questions about my mother’s death. I did not even know her name until I was eight, nor had I seen a picture of her. My maternal grandmother was assigned to tell me about her when I was eight and to take me to the gravesite, but I asked no questions and only retained a few foggy facts. My wife, however, was not content to let the past lie forgotten, and she went to my father’s mother and asked her all kinds of questions. They went upstairs to the cedar chest and out came all the pictures that had been put away the week of my mother’s death and many stories were told that I had never heard. Grandma told my wife that when I was four or five, I used to go out by the road at her house and stand by the mailbox and look across the fields at the vacant house on the next hill, where my dad and mom and I lived before mother died. Grandma said that she felt so sorry for me. I told my wife quite matter-of-factly that I had no memory of doing that, nor did the story move me in any way that I could discern. I couldn’t see how that story had anything to do with my life now – I was a stable pastor, an emotionally well-adjusted husband and a father of two. Let the past stay in the past. But my wife had noticed something else about me in our eight years of marriage – what I called emotionally stable could also be interpreted as aloof, living totally in my mind, emotionally cool, and not always present in the presence of other people.

This story that Grandma told me about the “young me” standing by the mailbox dogged me for about a week. I couldn’t get it out of my mind. Then one night as I was praying all alone in my room, I began to have a “daydream.” I call it a daydream because it had that quality of playing out like a movie that I was watching. It was a picture of a four or five-year old boy standing by the mailbox. I recognized the boy in my mind’s picture; it was my son. I watched him as he looked off across the valley to the next hill to the vacant house. After a while, in my mind’s eye, Ryan changed, and I saw myself standing by the mailbox as a young boy. For a long time I watched myself stand alone at the edge of the gravel road looking intently. Then a man walked into the picture. I could only see his back but I knew it was Jesus. Then Jesus stood beside me looking with me across the fields to the house. Then he knelt beside me, still just looking. Then Jesus put his hand on my shoulder, and we looked across the fields together at the vacant house. I was waiting for him to say something to me, but he didn’t speak. All he did was just kneel beside me and look with me. At this point, something in me broke, and I started weeping. I had never really wept before. I had been choked up on occasion, I had swallowed back lumps in my throat during sad movies, but I was thirty years old and had never wept. Now I was weeping, and I couldn’t stop. I cried often for the next week; it was embarrassing. I remember that we had invited someone over for dinner, and he told a funny story. I started laughing at his story, and then I had to excuse myself from the table because my laughter had turned to tears. This was my first experience with a very common kind of prayer that we call inner healing that addressed unresolved grief in my life.

There were many more experiences of inner healing to come for me regarding abandonment by death, problems during conception to birth with my mother, and receiving a mother's blessing that I missed.

Francis MacNutt has written this definition of inner healing:

1. *The basic idea of inner healing is simply this: that Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, can take the memories of our past and*
2. *Heal them from the wounds that still remain and affect our present lives;*
3. *Fill with his love all these places in us that have been empty so long, once they have been healed and drained of the poison of past hurts and resentment. — Healing, Francis MacNutt, Ave Maria Press, 1974*

Often in inner healing the Lord will engage the imagination. Most people with whom we pray for inner healing at Christian Healing Ministries, have a picture in their mind of a traumatic personal memory. When we ask, "Can you remember what happened?" and they say, "Yes, I can remember it clearly," it usually means that they can picture it. They have an image in their mind of where they were, what was happening, who was present, and how they felt. When we invite Jesus to come to the person in their memory in whatever way he may choose, often Jesus enters into the memory as an image of himself. They see Jesus. We are often surprised by what Jesus does — he may speak to them, or he may shine a light into the memory, or the recipient may be aware of his presence without seeing anything. After this experience with Jesus in prayer they tell us things such as, "I was a baby and we were playing with the bubbles in the bathtub," or "Jesus was swinging me on a swing," or "Jesus was walking with me and holding my hand and we were picking flowers in a meadow." Sometimes it is more simple — "Jesus held me," or "Jesus looked at me and smiled," or "Jesus took me out of that dark place." Often these experiences lead to forgiving people who hurt them, or the release of fear from the memory because Jesus is with them, or the destruction of a lie that they were at fault for what happened to them. In our prayer ministry, we do not practice guided imagery. This is not a judgment against the practice of guided meditations that lead to encounter with Jesus. We prefer to invite Jesus into the memory in whatever way he chooses, but not suggest how that might happen.

We try not to suggest what Jesus might do. Often, but not always, Jesus enters the memory visually and drains the memory of its debilitating poison by his presence.

Does Jesus engage the imagination in this way in the Bible? I used to be skeptical of any use of images in prayer because I was influenced by a faith tradition that frowned upon those kinds of experiences. However, we have descriptions in the Bible of similar experiences with God that use imagery, where the recipient watches a sequence of events play out in their mind. In the Bible, dreams given by God have this same movie-like quality. For instance, we read in Matthew 2 that "the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.'" Joseph saw an image of the Lord in a dream, and the Lord spoke to Joseph and gave him meaningful direction. Joseph was asleep. Joseph was an observer and listener. Visions in the Bible also have that movie-like quality to them. In Acts 10, Peter has a vision that led him to be more open to the inclusion of Gentiles into the body of Christ. "About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on a roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down . . ." As this vision unfolds, we understand that the images that Peter sees are symbolic and not literal. The Lord is present in the vision to explain its meaning to Peter. Peter is awake and has a dream-like vision. We often have people who experience symbolic images in our times of prayer with them. Other times the images in visions recorded in the Bible are

quite literal, like the vision that Paul had of a man of Macedonia pleading with him to come and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” This vision in Acts 16 leads to the opening of Christian witness in Europe. I would put God’s engagement of the imagination in inner healing in the same general category as dreams, visions, and trance–like daydreams because they share similar characteristics — meaningful visual images, both symbolic and literal pictures, a movie–like quality where the prayer recipient is attentive and watching but not guiding the story, and purposeful action where Jesus is the protagonist.

In a larger context, the Bible actually invites the use of the imagination in all kinds of individual and corporate prayer through the prayer book of Israel and the Church, the Psalms. For instance, in Psalm 27, David says that he longs “to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord in the temple.” We read and pray the Psalms and share that same longing. What is this experience of gazing for which David yearns?” Is it *literal* gazing on the Lord or *spiritual*? If it is spiritual, then it involves the imagination. Or consider the familiar verses that I treasure from Psalm 103, which includes a series of visual images. “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love for those who fear him.” (Look at the stars and the vast spaces between them and you can imagine the immensity of God’s love for you filling the heavens.) “As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.” (Imagine all your sins being balled up and thrown westward over the horizon to disappear and never return.) “As a Father shows compassion to his children so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” (Imagine a good father doing kind deeds for his son and daughter, favoring and smiling upon his children, and say that is how the Lord is with me!) “Almost every prayer in the Psalms invites us to use our imagination about how the Lord relates to us. They invite us to form meaningful pictures of God’s love and care and protection. God’s engagement with our imagination in prayer is very biblical.

It would be a strange thing if God did not engage our mind and imagination in prayer. Visualization is involved in almost every human endeavor. An artist has a vision for a painting. A golfer visualizes his next golf shot before he steps up to the ball. We rehearse in our minds beforehand how an interview might go. In almost every human endeavor we picture something and then we act. We do it so much that we rarely think about it. Many of us primarily think in pictures. It would be surprising if God did not engage in prayer, including healing prayer, that ubiquitous quality of visualization in our imagination that he created in us. It is part of the gentle and gracious way he renews our minds and hearts.



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