Week 3. The way of *Light*

Be still and know that I am God. (Ps. 46:10)

The stillness or unity of contemplative prayer is in both mind and heart. In your mind, your attention is on God, not on yourself or other creatures. In your heart, you love God and seek him alone, not his gifts. You seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness. And it is in this quiet, when the noise of your inner voice and your heart's concerns are stilled, that God's still, small voice may be heard. When other desires are quiet and you desire Christ alone, then you may become aware of his presence and action within. "Those who love me will be loved by my father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

This knowing Christ through love may take many forms. There may be consolations such as tears and devotion. A sense of God's presence. A sudden intuitive understanding of some aspect of God's work or his nature. Or just the opposite, extreme dryness and a painful sense of God's absence. But you gratefully accept whatever comes.

Or it may be that you suddenly understand something about yourself, such as that it is actually yourself and your own experiences or benefits that you are seeking. Or that your perfection doesn't come anywhere close to matching God's. Maybe past sins press themselves into your awareness. Or maybe you simply become more aware of all the self-seeking in you that prevents you from resting in God's presence.

Here is another difference between centering prayer and the exercise of *The Cloud*. Centering prayer follows *The Cloud* in using a prayer word as a symbol to bring our attention back to God and to represent our consent. However, *The Cloud* also has a second prayer word—"sin"—that is a symbol of our rejection of all that holds us back, all that comes between us and God. When we become aware of our own self-seeking or self-concern or sin, with full-hearted passion, we say "Sin—out!" But this is not a self-examination—when we become aware of ourselves, our sin, we feel it, and we welcome that feeling, that awareness, and then we put a cloud of forgetting between ourselves and the sin in us. We respond to self-knowledge not in the mind, with analysis that might lead us deeper into preoccupation, but affectively. We reject sin, and forget it, and turn our affective power back to God.

Prayer—like the Christian life—is a two-fold motion, a turning away from what we are and a reaching out, a straining, an *aspiration* for what we will be. A death and a rebirth. A cloud of forgetting and a cloud of unknowing. And this turning takes place in the affections—in what we love. We lift up our hearts to God.

Journee can help us to arrive at this unflinching self-knowledge. When you chat with an AI, when there is no *person* on the other end of your conversation, there is no one to impress, no one else's feelings to consider. You can say whatever pops into your head without any filtering. You can be completely honest. Then Journee can reflect back to you what you just said in different words. And then you see yourself from a different perspective, as though in a mirror. You see your brokenness, turn away from it, and turn to God.

Exercise for Week 3: *Watch and pray*

This week's practice builds on the basic movement of centering prayer but adds a dimension of gentle noticing of our attachments and aversions. We're not analyzing or fixing what we see—we're simply allowing ourselves to become more aware of both our inner landscape and God's constant presence. Like the disciples at Gethsemane, we are learning to "watch and pray." Then, in the reflection time at the end, we can reflect more deeply on God's beauty and all that holds us back. We will use the provided readings for daily *lectio*, as before, and then proceed to centering prayer and reflection.

1. Pray for God's presence
2. Take a few minutes to read the reading for the day and reflect on it
3. Practice centering prayer for 20-30 minutes
4. Use the remaining time to reflect on your prayer time through journaling

For the centering prayer portion, begin as before by settling into silence and turning your attention toward God. But now, when you become aware of a distracting thought, practice this two-fold movement:

1. First, pause briefly to notice and feel what has drawn your attention away from God

- What desire or fear does this thought reveal?
- Don't analyze it—just notice it clearly for a moment. Notice any physiological effects. Has it caused muscle tension? Increased heart rate?
- Feel it peacefully. *Welcome* it. Think "welcome, pain" or "welcome, fear"

2. Then, let it go and return to God's presence in gratitude

- Be grateful to God for the sanctifying effect of all we experience
- Now let it float away. Put it beneath a cloud of forgetting
- Return to the awareness of God with a "sharp dart of longing love"

Throughout the day, try to pause briefly several times (perhaps at meals) to practice this same dual awareness:

1. Notice what's occupying your mind and heart in that moment
2. Bring awareness and love of God into that moment

Journaling and Journee

Reflect on your prayer time. What patterns did you notice in the things that distracted you? What did you discover about yourself? What did you discover about God? You can reflect on these questions by writing about them in a paper journal, or you can use the online interactive journal, *Journee*, at

`life.ccel.org/agents/bcp-3-light`