

## LESSON 13: Centering Prayer



REFERENCE

Page 169[EXPERIENCES /EXPOSURE &amp; EXPRESSION]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (1)(2) LSM: 'Us and God'
- (2)(4) TSM: 'Centering Prayer'
- (3) TSM: 'Body Relaxation'

### AIM

- To provide the learners with an experience of centering prayer

### OUTCOMES

- KUI Learner understand and can follow the recommended steps in centering prayer.
- EXP Learners experience centering prayer.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson aims to expose learners to centering prayer. An experience of this kind of prayer was provided in Grade 10, Lesson 8, so link with that if the learners can recall having done the exercise. As you lead them through this prayer experience bear in mind that centering prayer rests on the following two premises: (i) There is within us a God who is love; and (ii) In silence and quiet we can open ourselves to that God.

This form of prayer is done silently. So, invite learners in your class from faith backgrounds other than Christian to participate – but to choose their own appropriate 'prayer word' or closing prayer from their own faith practice. You may need to think about how this affects your choice of words as you guide the learners through this exercise. Note that the Lesson Materials page, 'Body Relaxation', assumes that this lesson can be done in a space where the learners can sit or lie down on their backs on the floor. If you are not able to find space that allows for this, then the exercise can still be done by the learners in chairs or behind desks. However, you will need to take this into account when you lead them in the relaxation exercise.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### 1 Introduction

As an introduction to this lesson, give the learners a copy of the Lesson Materials page 'Us and God'. Read through it with them, passing a few comments and or explanations where necessary or appropriate. Alternatively, invite the learners to read it, and to share what struck them.

#### 2 Basic Steps

Introduce the learners to the recommended steps for centering prayer: They can be found on the reverse of the Lesson Materials page 'Us and God'. Further ideas are provided on the Lesson Materials page 'Centering Prayer', but note the different numbering of the steps as illustrated in the following table:

Lumko (Burke)	Pennock
Step 1	Step 1
Step 2	
Step 3	
Step 4	Step 2
Step 5	
Step 6	Step 3

### 3 Body Relaxation

Use the Lesson Materials page 'Body Relaxation' to prepare learners for the centering prayer experience. This relaxation is important, for we come to prayer with our bodies as well as our spirits. Adapt it to suit the learners in your class.

### 4 Prayer Time

After the learners have relaxed, lead them in centering prayer guiding them through the steps you have familiarized them with.

### 5 Debriefing

Ask the learners for some feedback. How did they find it? Was it too short, or too long? Some will have liked it; others will have found it difficult.

## OTHER IDEAS

### 6 History and Practice

You may want to explore with the learners some of the history and practice of centering prayer, if this was not done in Grade 10 Lesson 3. Here is an excerpt from the Wikipedia website:

Centering prayer is a popular method of contemplative prayer, placing a strong emphasis on interior quiet and the experience of God's presence. Though most authors trace its roots to the contemplative prayer of the Desert Fathers of early Christian monasticism of the 300s, to the *Lectio Divina* tradition of Benedictine monasticism, and to works like *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, its origins as part of the "Centering Prayer" movement in modern Catholicism and Christianity can be traced to several books published by three Trappist monks of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts in the 1970s: Fr. William Meninger, Fr. M. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating.

(<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer-method/>)

## MATERIALS

### LEARNER

- CIE. 2005. 'Us and God'
- Michael Burke. 1991. 'Centering prayer – steps' 135 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 134

### TEACHER

- CIE. 2005. 'Body Relaxation'
- Michael Pennock. 1985. 'Centering Prayer' in *Prayer and You*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, p 93-94



## Lesson Materials



### Us and God

We are	God is
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very mixed-up evolving people</li> <li>• living in a particular neighbourhood and in relationship with a particular family, certain friends and acquaintances.</li> <li>• a complex of body, mind, will, imagination, physical strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>• with feelings and emotions.</li> <li>• a bundle of contradictions, tensions, illusions, and aspirations.</li> <li>• an incomplete self with hopes of completion.</li> <li>• a network of relationships in which we are strengthened and weakened, liked and disliked, encouraged and frustrated.</li> <li>• have past, present and a future in one.</li> <li>• all we have been and done since birth has made us the sort of person we are.</li> <li>• all these past experiences in childhood, at school, at work and recreation are influencing us today and the way we look at life.</li> <li>• the future also is exercising its influence on us to the extent that what we want to do and become in the future is determining the choice we make today.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a much greater mystery than people</li> <li>• near, with us</li> <li>• creator – creation is a continuous activity of God</li> <li>• He makes the world exist</li> <li>• all things are totally and continuously dependent on Him</li> <li>• in Him we live, move and have our being.</li> <li>• not just alongside us, He is within us.</li> <li>• a Father who loves and freely communicates with us.</li> <li>• in union with all His people in a truly personal way</li> <li>• closer to us than child to parents or wife and husband.</li> <li>• present and active within all, dynamically letting them be and enabling them to become freely their true selves.</li> <li>• in the world – as creator and sustainer, involved in everything that happens. Nothing is outside his attention, care and concern.</li> <li>• creatively present at the very center of human experience in things, in events, and especially in people.</li> </ul>

Prayer consists then in being conscious of God living in and for the world. Since we encounter Him where He is, namely in ourselves, in our friends and neighbours and in the events of daily life, it is there and only there that we can listen to Him and respond to Him in prayer.

## Lesson Materials

US AND GOD (Cont)

### Centering Prayer - steps (as crystallised by Lumko)

- 1 Quieten down: become aware of your breathing.
- 2 Move in faith to God dwelling in your depths.
- 3 Rest for a bit in the center, in faith-filled love.
- 4 Take up a single simple word/phrase that expresses this, and let it repeat itself-within -perhaps in the time with your breathing.
- 5 Whenever, in the course of the prayer, we become aware of anything else, simply and gently return to the presence by the prayer-word.
- 6 End with a slow recitation of a known prayer, such as the 'Our Father'.

© Michael Burke. 1991. 135 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 134

## Lesson Materials



### Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is an active prayer which can lead to the passive prayer of contemplation. It is a method to help us quiet down and be in the presence of the Lord. Many spiritual writers say that in true contemplative prayer we are at rest in the presence of the Lord who loves us.

#### Step 1

Find a quiet place to pray. Relax by slowly inhaling and exhaling.  
Assume a comfortable position with your spine in a straight line.  
Close your eyes. Now move to the very center of your being.  
Become aware of God's presence. Express your faith in words such as these:

*Lord, I believe that you are present in me, at the very center  
of my existence, keeping me alive in your love. For my prayer  
period, I want to just be with you. Draw me close to you, Lord.  
Let me experience your presence and your love.*

#### Step 2

After a minute or so, select a special word that makes you think of God and his love. Recite this word over and over. The repetition will help keep distractions away. Choose a name, quality or title that carries deep meaning for you. Here are some examples:

Jesus	Father	Spirit
Lord	Abba	Love
Truth	Life	Way
Saviour	Yahweh	Protector

After a short time you can stop reciting the word as you become aware of the Lord at the center of your being. If distractions come your way, and they often do, return to the word to refocus on God and his loving presence.

#### Step 3

At the end of your time of prayer, thank the Father for his presence.  
Tell Jesus of your love for him. Ask the Lord and his love to remain with you. Slowly and meditatively recite an Our Father.

Note: Ten to 20 minutes is a good time to spend on this centering prayer.  
Try it daily for two weeks and then reflect on your own reactions to this prayer.

## Lesson Materials



### Body Relaxation

#### Objectives

Through experiencing a state of physical relaxation and receptivity, students will begin to understand how essential this preparation is to the preliminary stages of prayer.

#### Notes to the Teacher

This lesson provides a preparation for the concentration lesson which is to follow: An atmosphere conducive to relaxation is primary and should be approached with two considerations:

#### A. PLACE

This exercise can be done while the learners are seated, as usual, at their desks. However, if possible consider what other possibilities might be available. A carpeted floor-space? Or sitting on gym mats? In a circle of chairs in the school hall? Or somewhere in the school grounds? Will natural light be sufficient? (I.E. turn off electric lighting.)

#### B. TEACHER

That the lesson be approached with confidence, sensitivity, and with the proper timing dictates that the teacher practice a method of relaxation previous to the class. Once a student realizes a calmness in the teacher he/she is interested enough to participate. The relaxation exercise should be done slowly and calmly so that an atmosphere of peace and calmness pervades.

#### Procedure

1. Before the students enter the class, turn off the lights but allow for natural light by leaving the curtains open and move the desks aside.
2. As students arrive, ask them to take a place on the floor.
3. The teacher should introduce the following method of body relaxation as a preparation for concentration and increased awareness in prayer. Students may feel awkward or self-conscious at first with an exercise like this. It is essential, then, that the teacher creates a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere prior to the exercise. It helps to gradually move the students into the exercise by briefly telling them what they'll be doing rather than too quickly jumping right into it. Something like the following would be good preface to the exercise:

Today we are going to try/...

## Lesson Materials

### BODY RELAXATION (Cont)



Today we are going to try a body relaxation exercise which will help us learn to slow down – physically – and to achieve a kind of quiet and peace that opens the way to interior awareness. You may feel the same kind of peace or calm associated with sleep, but do not allow yourself to drop off into a sleep state. Eastern prayer techniques see this peace as a state of actually intensified mental alertness and awareness. If you tend to feel slightly uncomfortable or self-conscious at first, please allow yourself to relax – no one will be watching you, including me.

(This last point has been found to be reassuring to some young people, who tend to be self-conscious at this age anyhow.)

We are ready to begin:

- a. Lie on your back with palms up at your side.
- b. Slowly close your eyes and clear your mind of all thoughts and worries.
- c. Begin to concentrate on your breathing. With every breath you take in, breathe in peace, calmness, stillness, goodness. Let every breath you exhale breath out tensions, anxieties, pressures, fear, nervousness.
- d. Practice breathing with the fullness of your capacity (by using your stomach muscles as well as your chest). Take deeper, cleansing breaths – to lift your burdens and lighten and free your spirit.
- e. Now as I count from 1 to 6, inhale on the count of "4" and exhale on the count of "6". (Allow 3 – 5 minutes for this activity.)

(If you have been breathing properly, you should feel light-headed or slightly dizzy.)

- f. As you feel more comfortable, allow yourself to relax and try to increase your attention to your breathing.
- g. We will now concentrate on a part of our body, first tensing and then relaxing ourselves.
  - 1 Slowly tense your forehead; then relax slowly.
  - 2 Tense your jaw muscles; then relax.
  - 3 Tense your eye muscles, closing your eyes tightly; then slowly relax them.

4/...

## Lesson Materials

BODY RELAXATION (Cont)



- 4 Tense the muscles of your neck; relax slowly.
  - 5 Clench your fists tightly, then slowly open your hands.
  - 6 Tense the muscles of your upperarms; now relax them.
  - 7 Tense your stomach muscles; now relax them.
  - 8 Tense your leg muscles; then relax.
  - 9 Bring the heel of your foot back, stretch your legs, tensing the calf muscles; then slowly relax your legs.
  - 10 Tense your feet; now relax them.
- h. Your whole body should feel a sense of peace and well-being. You should be so relaxed that you are scarcely aware of your body any more.



## LESSON 14: Psalms and Canticles



REFERENCE

Page 171 [KNOWLEDGE,  
UNDERSTANDING & INSIGHT]

### WHAT YOU NEED

- (1)(2)(3) Bibles
- (2) TSM: 'The Psalms'
- (3) Psalm translation

### AIM

- To consider psalms and canticles as forms of prayer
- To familiarise learners with a selection of psalms and canticles

### OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand psalms and canticles as prayers that are suitable for particular occasions.
- DAP Learners choose a few psalms and canticles as their personal prayer.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

The psalms are a collection of prayers, composed at various times for various reasons and gradually collected into the book we now know as Psalms. It is also known as the Psalter which indicates that it is a book of poems or hymns intended to be accompanied by stringed instruments. Further background on this collection is given below. Canticles are songs or hymns found throughout the Bible. Many translations of the Bible show these by shifting from a continuous prose narrative form to a verse narrative form. Three of these, from the New Testament, are often used in prayer by Christians. However, the lesson time really only allows for one text to be considered. Thus, these particular canticles are listed under Other Ideas (5). The Psalms listed here, too, could provide you with a good starting point for deciding which particular psalm you and the learners could pray with. Familiarity may be important. However, in choosing and introducing a psalm for prayer one needs to be aware of the mood within the text and the class, together with the resonance of this with events in the school and the world. Other Ideas (4d) provides a suggestion which could be used to further amplify the learner's understanding of this relationship between text, their life, or the world they live in.

#### BACKGROUND

*The Psalter is Israel's hymnbook. It includes prayers for every occasion in the nation's life: for the solemn Temple liturgy as well as private, meditative prayer', prayers after victory and defeat, in joy and in sorrow', prayers of thankful praise and prayers of sad entreaty. Many are royal prayers, at an enthronement or royal wedding, and show the messianic hopes centred on David's line; others celebrate the kingship of Yahweh.*

*The historical allusions in the psalms and the language show a vast range of dates, spreading from David's time, right down to the Maccabean era. The tradition of David's own association with the liturgy and the psalms is so strong that some may even stem from him. Some were composed for different schools of Temple singers, and other earlier, partial collections existed, which explains some duplication and overlap.*

*This is the poetry of a vivid and passionate people. It uses colourful even wild, imagery of despair, of God's intervention, of hopes for future prosperity, and prayer for violent revenge on opponents, protesting innocence and guilt with similar whole-hearted sincerity.*

*In the Hebrew numbering, Ps 10 - Ps 147 is one more than the Greek and Vulgate numbering. For example, in the Hebrew numbering The Good Shepherd psalm is 23 while it is 22 in the Greek tradition.*

(Introduction to Psalms. *The Jerusalem Bible*, Pocket Edition)

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## **LESSON OUTLINE**

### **I Introduction**

- i Introduce the ideas of 'psalm' and 'canticle' to the learners, building on their present knowledge. Your introduction might go something like this:

*Within the Hebrew Scriptures of the Bible we find a collection of prayers that the people used in worship. This collection is known as the book of Psalms. In addition, throughout the Bible, readers will come across canticles (songs or hymns) embedded in the text. Many translations of the Bible show these by shifting from a continuous prose narrative form to a verse narrative form.*

- ii Invite learners to find and to browse briefly through the Psalms. Direct them to Chapter 3 of Daniel which contains two well-known canticles – 'The Song of Azariah in the Furnace' and 'The Song of the Three Young Men'.

### **2 Overview of the Psalms**

With the learners look at the following:

- Total Number of psalms
- The different numbering schemes ( See Background in Teacher's Note)
- Groups (books) of psalms ( See Lesson Materials page 'The Psalms')
- The longest psalm (119)
- The shortest psalm (117)
- Classification by categories ( See Lesson Materials page 'The Psalms')

### **3 Praying a Psalm**

- i Choose a psalm, which is appropriate for the class and the day. Use a translation, which is reader friendly (such as the Good News Version, New International Version, or New American Bible translation used in the African Bible).
  - ii Quieten the class.
  - iii Read the psalm – either yourself or a learner who reads well.
  - iv Encourage the learners to re-read it for themselves and to let God speak to them through their listening. They stay with it for a few minutes.
  - v Re-read the Psalm aloud again for the class.
  - vi End with a short prayer of thanks.
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## **OTHER IDEAS**

### **4 Some Variations**

- (a) After the learners have stayed with the psalm for a few minutes, invite them to read one word, one line from the psalm, which struck them.
- (b) Invite the learners to share their thoughts from the prayer time.
- (c) Invite the learners to share a prayer.

- (d) Invite the learners to either write their own, or to re-write the psalm in their own language, with reference to their own situation or contemporary national or global events.

### **5 Choice of Psalm or Canticale**

- (a) The following psalms are more likely to be known: Psalms 23, 51, and 130
- (b) These are suitable: Psalms 16, 139, and 142.
- (c) Also helpful are Psalms 22, 89, 118, 136.
- (d) Some New Testament canticles are Ephesians 1: 3 – 10, Philippians 2: 6 – 11, and Colossians 1: 15 – 20.

### **6 A Psalm Prayer**

Here is a list of eight psalms with a theme for each. Ask learners to do the following:

- Read several psalms (the ones listed or others).
- Select one that expresses something that you wish to tell the Lord in a conversation.
- Rewrite the psalm in your own words.

Psalm 8: The glory of God and the dignity of human beings

Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd

Psalm 28: A call for help

Psalm 46: God is on our side

Psalm 51: A prayer for forgiveness

Psalm 63: Longing for God

Psalm 104: Praise God the Creator

Psalm 150: Praise the Lord

(Michael Pennock. 1985. *Prayer and You*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, p 31)

### **MATERIALS**

#### **TEACHER**

- Amplified Bible. *Introduction to the Psalms*. Michigan: Zondervan



## Lesson Materials



# The Psalms

## Introduction

“Praise Songs” is the Hebrew title of this book. The Greek title *Psalmoi*, meaning “songs to the accompaniment of stringed instruments,” is the basis for entitling this book as The Psalms. With few exceptions, each of the 150 chapters is a separate and complete unit.

By title the authorship of approximately one hundred psalms is assigned as follows: David - 73; Asaph - 12; Sons of Korah - 10; Moses - 1; Heman the Ezrahite - 1; Ethan the Ezrahite - 1; and one or two to Solomon. The rest of the psalms are anonymous.

With many authors over a long period of time contributing to this collection, the Psalms reflect a wide variety of feelings, emotions, attitudes, and interests. Since these psalms come out of the experiences of individuals from such a wide background, they have had a universal appeal throughout the millenniums since they were written.

Frequently psalms are classified by categories. Some of the suggested classifications, with examples that may be helpful for further study, are the following:

1. Liturgical – 120-130
2. Messianic – 2, 16, 22, 25, 69, 110
3. Penitential – 6, 32, 51
4. Personal – 23, 27, 37
5. Historical – 78, 105-106
6. Praise – 95-100, 146-150
7. Alphabetic – 25, 111-112, 119
8. Prayers of the righteous – 17, 20, 40, 55

David, who wrote so many of the psalms, had a genuine interest in establishing worship and may have begun the liturgical use of numerous psalms (1 Chronicles 15-16). Very likely the early collection of the Psalms began with David. Further additions and arrangements may have been made by Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah and others. Since evidence is lacking to establish the composition of any psalm later than the fifth century B.C., it is possible that Ezra may have been responsible for the final arrangement of the Psalms.

## Outline

- |           |                |
|-----------|----------------|
| Book I.   | Psalms 1-41    |
| Book II.  | Psalms 42-72   |
| Book III. | Psalms 73-89   |
| Book IV.  | Psalms 90-106  |
| Book V.   | Psalms 107-150 |

## LESSON 15: Prayer Model



REFERENCE

Page 170 [EXP], 171 [KUI]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (1) Prayer journals
- (4) Poster

### AIM

- To introduce learners to the idea of a model for prayer

### OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners recognise some of the common elements of the different prayer forms.
- KUI Learners conceptualise a model for prayer.
- DAP Learners appreciate the usefulness of a prayer model.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson draws upon the learners' prayer experiences over the last few years. As the learners, together with your help, recall these, you may wish to remind them that many of these forms can be used by people of various religious backgrounds – i.e. that the form, method, or pattern, allows the person who prays to 'fill' it with content appropriate to their own faith.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### 1 Introduction

Remind learners that during this year (and previous years) they have tried different prayer styles and methods. The first task in this lesson will be to call them to mind and to list them. If they have kept a prayer journal it will be very helpful for this exercise.

#### 2 Remembering

After a list has been compiled (and you may well need to add to their memories), ask the class to get into small groups (of 3 or 4) and to refresh their memories of the different styles by discussing the following questions for each prayer style listed:

- What can we remember about it?
- Was there a particular theme, imagination point or focus, etc?
- How did we begin?
- What was the main element of the prayer time?
- Did we enjoy it?
- How did we feel?
- What were some of the other elements of the prayer time?

#### 3 Common Elements

Ask the learners to identify the common elements which they discovered during their discussion. List these.

#### 4 A Prayer Model

If we look at the elements and arrange them in some order, we can develop a “model” for prayer, since most prayer types will, broadly speaking, have these elements in this order. Propose the following ‘RE’ model using whatever form of presentation is suitable – perhaps a poster. Learners might use it to develop one that is more useful to them.

- Step 1 **RE**collecting (the presence of God)
- Step 2 **RE**ading or **RE**membering (Scripture passage, or written prayer, or spiritual book, or events, or people of the past day)
- Step 3 **RE**flexion (on what has been read /remembered: the essential thing is to *listen* for the ‘voice’ of God in this)
- Step 4 **RE**sponse (to what we hear: now it is time to *talk* to God)
- Step 5 **RE**turn (to step 1, whenever the process dries up).

(Michael Burke. 1991. ‘A method of prayer – ‘RE’ steps’ 137 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 134)

#### 5 The Essentials of Prayer

You might close with these two thoughts – that prayer is:

- a contemplative reading of the Word of God and of the experiences of life – a listening in silence for the ‘voice’ of God (cf. tuning into a radio broadcast – the radio-waves are there all the time, but only when we tune in do we hear the broadcast);
- a response of the heart (worded or wordless) and of the ‘hands’ (action).

(Michael Burke. 1991. ‘The essentials of prayer’ 138 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 134)

### OTHER IDEAS

#### 6 The Five “P’s” Prayer-process Model

Here is an alternative model:

<b>Passage</b>	from scripture. Pick one and have it marked and ready.
<b>Place</b>	where you are alone and uninhibited in your response to God's presence
<b>Posture</b>	relaxed and peaceful: a harmony of body with Spirit
<b>Presence of God</b>	Be aware of it and acknowledge and respond to it. If nothing happens turn to the ...
<b>Passage</b>	from scripture. Read it very slowly aloud and listen carefully and peacefully to it.

(Taken from an article by Armand Nigro SJ and John Christensen SJ)

#### MATERIALS

- There are no further materials provided for this lesson.

