

LIVING THE PRAYER:

A STUDY GUIDE BASED ON *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* By Cynthia Bourgeault

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INTRODUCTION

Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening is a book filled with profound spiritual insights, strong theology, and deep teaching to equip the seeker for the spiritual journey. However, like all good spiritual books, the point of this book will be missed if it does not begin to transform the reader's life.

The aim of *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* is not merely to impart more information, or to make better-educated Christian learners. This book aims to guide the reader towards a renewed life of Christian practice. This book aims to equip the reader to move towards a life that is lived in the transforming presence of God known to us at the center of our innermost being.

So, if the words of this book remain for us simply words written on a page, or concepts to store away in our brains, or theological arguments to debate, we will have missed the point of the book entirely. We must take these words and use them to live new lives. We must feel the challenge of these pages to take up the discipline of prayer and to walk more fully in the light of truth that is the gospel of Christ.

The following study guide aims to help the reader come to a clear understanding of the concepts and theological constructs that form the underpinning of this book. The questions in this guide also aim to help the reader apply these concepts to his or her own life. But, most important of all, this study guide includes a "Task" for each chapter of the book. These tasks are the heart of this study and aim to bring the reader to a realization of the heart of *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*.

The number in brackets that accompanies many of the questions, indicate the page number in the book where the particular concept covered in the question is addressed.

This study guide should be used slowly. Some of the chapters in the book are longer than others. These chapters include more questions. Each of the questions deserves to be pondered, if possible discussed in a group and then carefully applied to the reader's own life.

Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening invites the reader to enter a rich and deep journey towards his or her true nature known in Christ.

STUDY GUIDE

1. Contemplative Prayer and Centering Prayer

A. How would you describe your earliest lessons in prayer?

1. What understanding of prayer was communicated to you by these lessons?
2. In what ways did you begin to experience this earliest understanding as inadequate?

B. What does it mean to say that “Silence is God’s first language”? (5)

1. What is your experience of silence?
2. What might make silence difficult for many people?

C. How have you experienced your “natural aptitude for the inner life”? (6)

1. What does this feel like?
2. What encourages or discourages you from following this “natural aptitude”?

D. Thinking “pulls you back to the surface of yourself.” (6)

1. How have you experienced this and what does this feel like?
2. Is there any problem with this?

E. Have you experienced “silent depths” within yourself? (6)

1. What is this experience like?
2. What is the impact of this experience on the rest of your life?

TASK – Make time in your day to experience silence. Be aware of what happens within yourself when you endeavour to be more silent than normal.

2. Deeper Silence, Deeper Self

A. What is the difference between “free silence” and “intentional silence”? (7,8)

1. Do you experience “internal resistance” to “intentional silence”?
2. What does this resistance feel like?
3. What might cause this resistance?
4. What might help you get beyond this resistance?

B. How have you experienced yourself as a victim “of a tragic case of mistaken identity”? (10)

1. What happens in your life when you live as a victim of “mistaken identity”?
2. What happens in communities of people who all live with unacknowledged “mistaken identity”?

C. Levels of Awareness

1. Ordinary Awareness –

- a. What “sense of self” is tied to the “mind as it usually thinks”? (10)
- b. How do you know when you are living in “Ordinary Awareness”?
- c. Ordinary awareness rests on the human capacity for self-reflexive thinking – ie., the ability to “split the field of vision into subject and object and perceive oneself in the third person” (16) – what is the risk in this self-reflexive thinking?
 - i. What solution does spiritual tradition offer to address this problem?
 - ii. How does “egoic identity” react to this solution?

2. Spiritual Awareness –

- a. What makes it difficult for you to be aware of that “interior compass whose magnetic north is always fixed on God”? (12)

- b. Describe a moment when you have been conscious of “spiritual awareness.” What made this moment possible?
- c. What are the primary differences between “ordinary” and “spiritual” awareness? (12,13)

3. Divine Awareness –

- a. What might be the implications for you of the conviction that “God dwells within us, as the center of our being”? (13)
- b. How might your life look different if you stayed connected to this awareness?
- c. Thomas Merton describes the center of “divine awareness” as: “a point of nothingness,” the “pure glory of God,” “a pure diamond blazing.” What do these descriptions feel like? Can you identify these qualities with any experience in yourself?

4. Read Luke 10:38-41

- a. How does the story of Mary and Martha help illuminate the three levels of awareness?
- b. With whom do you most identify in the story?
- c. What are “implications for our human interactions” (14) of the level of awareness in which we are operating?
- d. How might your life look different if you were able to “integrate and reprioritize” the levels of awareness so that your “ordinary awareness is in alignment with and in service to” your “spiritual awareness”? 15

D. How does “ordinary awareness” experience “intentional silence”? (16)

- 1. What problem does your “egoic identity” have with this?
- 2. What might help you to become more comfortable with “intentional silence”?

- E. What is the connection between the practice of contemplative prayer and our ability to “live the gospel”? (17)
1. How have you seen this connection lived out in your own life or in the lives of others?
 2. What are the barriers you can identify to connecting contemplative prayer with daily life?

TASK – Practice being conscious of times when you slip into ordinary awareness. Observe your thinking at this level of awareness and see what its effects are.

3. The Method of Centering Prayer

- A. What distinguishes a “surrender method” (21) of meditation from concentrative and awareness methods?
1. What might be the advantages/disadvantages of either approach?
 2. Which approach seems most fitting to your particular character?
- B. What is the fundamental intention that underlies the practice of Centering Prayer?
1. Do you identify this intention within yourself?
 2. How do we “put teeth in our intention”? (24)
- C. What fundamental gesture of the Christian faith are you practicing in Centering Prayer?
1. What would be the anticipated effects upon the rest of your life of this practice?
 2. What might inhibit you from adopting this gesture in your life?
- D. What is the “essence of Centering Prayer”? (24)
1. To what do you “return” in this prayer?

2. Why is this “return” so central to the prayer?

E. What are the differences between a mantra and a sacred word? (25,26)

TASK – If you have not previously practiced Centering Prayer, take a quiet moment to allow a sacred word to emerge in your heart, then sit in silence using your word to express your intention let go of all thoughts as they arise.

If you are already a practitioner of Centering Prayer set aside a time to reconnect with your deep inner intention that leads you to engage in this prayer. Allow this intention to renew your determination simply to *do* the practice.

4. Handling Thoughts During Prayer Time

A. What subtle faculties can you identify that are “normally blocked by overreliance on our more usual mental and affective processing modes”? (32)

1. What causes you to become overly reliant upon the “more usual mental and affective processing modes”?
2. What makes it difficult to be aware of the “more subtle faculties”?

B. How does the distinction between cataphatic and apophatic help in understanding Centering Prayer?

1. What is the apophatic understanding of silence?
2. In what ways might the apophatic understanding of silence be threatening?

C. Have you had the experience of yielding yourself “fully into the embrace of the silence”? (35)

1. What does this feel like?
2. What makes it more difficult for you to manage this yielding?

D. Which of the four thoughts outlined on pages 36-38 can you identify most commonly

as you go about your day?

1. How do you normally respond to these different kinds of thoughts?
2. Are there better ways you might imagine for responding to these thoughts?
3. What is the attitude of Centering Prayer towards thoughts? (39)
 - a. What might be the anticipated effects of this attitude on your life outside the prayer time?
 - b. What might hinder your carrying this attitude into the rest of your life?

E. What do you notice in your daily life as “letting go” begins to be patterned into yourself? (41)

1. How do you understand the “apophatic realm” to which this patterning gives you access?
2. What might block or hinder this patterning in your life?

TASK – Observe yourself throughout the day. See what thoughts occupy your mind. Watch particularly for thoughts that have “an emotional hook in them.” See how you respond to these “hook” thoughts.

5. Spiritual Non-Possessiveness

- A. What is the ego’s attitude towards the apophatic? (45)
1. Why is this so?
 2. How does your ego respond to silence?
- B. What is the problem with allowing yourself to be “dragged out of the apophatic back into the cataphatic”?
1. What factors make you particularly susceptible to falling out of the apophatic?
 2. What might be the advantage of staying “with the apophatic at all costs during the time of this prayer”? (45)

- C. What might be the indications of “spiritual materialism” in your life? (46)
1. What leads to “spiritual materialism”?
 2. What might you do in order to avoid falling prey to “spiritual materialism”?
- D. What is the problem with “dualistic selfhood”? (49)
1. What makes us so inclined to “dualistic selfhood”?
 2. What is the solution to “dualistic selfhood”?
- E. What is the “last attachment”? (50)
1. How have you experienced this attachment?
 2. What have been its impacts on your life?
- F. In the poem quoted on page 50 what is the poet’s problem for the first half of the poem?
1. What solution does the poet come to by the end of the poem?
 2. How might Centering Prayer have helped the poet arrive at this place?
- G. What is the true nature of “apophatic darkness” that “begins to reveal itself,” after “repeated practice in following the instructions of Centering Prayer”? (51)

TASK – Observe within yourself the tendency to grasp hold of spiritual achievements.
Practice surrendering this desire.

6. Centering Prayer and Christian Tradition

- A. What were the young pilgrims described on page 56 looking for?
1. Why might they have been disinclined to look within the Christian faith?
 2. How might the church attract such seekers?

- B. In the quotation from *The Cloud of Unknowing* on page 57, what is the moving force that leads a person to seek God?
1. What response does the author of *The Cloud* recommend in response to this force?
 2. How have you experienced this movement in your own life?
 3. What was your response?
- C. In what ways do you see Jesus' life reflecting evidence of a contemplative spiritual practice?
1. What aspects of Jesus' teaching do you see reflecting a contemplative life?
 2. Why might this dimension of Jesus' life have been missed by the church?
- D. In what ways might Matthew 6:5,6 serve as "a perfectly accurate description of the actual method of apophatic prayer"? (60)
- E. How do you understand and practice Paul's injunction in I Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing"?
- F. How does the practice of "attention" relate to meditation?
1. In what ways might your life look different if you were to practice attention?
 2. What are the hindrances to the practice of attention in our world?
- G. What is the "classic Christian practice" of apophatic prayer as described on page 64?
1. How does this differ from Centering Prayer?
 2. What might be the advantages of the Centering Prayer approach?
- H. How does the traditional practice of *lectio divina* provide a historical base for the practice of Contemplative Prayer?
1. What does the practice of *lectio divina* illustrate about the relationship between Word and silence? 67

2. How might the pattern of *lectio divina* provide a model for daily spiritual practice?

TASK – Slow down your normal pace of doing things. Pay close attention to the task you are performing. Notice how attentive action becomes embodied prayer.

7. The Loss and Recovery of the Christian Contemplative Tradition

- A. In what ways is the “ladder” metaphor for the spiritual life incompatible with the apophatic path?
 1. What has been the impact of “ladder” spirituality on the Christian tradition?
 2. How do you see the “ladder” metaphor having an impact upon spiritual expressions within contemporary Christian spirituality?

- B. What happens when word and silence become separated? (73)
 1. What is the impact upon your spiritual life/your relationships?
 2. What forces tend to drive word and silence apart?

- C. What is the difference between “acquired” and “infused” contemplation as traditionally understood? (74)
 1. Is there anything helpful in this traditional distinction?
 2. In what ways might the distinction be confusing?

- D. How have you experienced the “force of gravity” drawing you to center? (75)

- E. What problem arises as a result of the distinction between “acquired” and “infused” contemplation?
 1. What image of God is created by the “acquired”/“infused” dichotomy? 76

2. What is the problem of this image particularly for contemplative spirituality?
3. What contrasting vision of God does contemplative prayer hold out? (76, 77)
 - a. How does this contemplative vision of God resolve the “acquired”/ “infused” split? (77)
 - b. Refer back to the quote from *The Cloud* on page 57 – how does the author in that quotation resolve the tension between “acquired” and “infused” contemplation?

TASK – Throughout your day find moments when you can pause and observe the flow of *lectio divina* “moving from mind to feeling to stillness and back again.” Observe how this opens you to a “deepening interiority.”

8. The Theology of Centering Prayer

- A. What does it mean in practical terms for “our life to be a continuous ‘dying to self’”? (80)
 1. What way of “dying” does meditation open up for us that goes deeper than “the level of the will”? (81)
 2. What deep knowing are we imprinting upon our being by a regular practice of sitting in meditation? (81)
- B. What happens when we confuse the illusory, cataphatic self with which we are identified with the “greater Self,” the sense of which is “carried in our spiritual awareness”?
 1. How does meditation fulfill this “role”?
 2. What necessary foundation does meditation practice provide for Christian action? (83)
 3. What happens when we try to live the gospel without this foundation?
- C. What is the “role of meditation in service of the gospel”? (82)
 1. How does meditation fulfill this “role”?
 2. What necessary foundation does meditation practice provide for Christian action? (83)
 3. What happens when we try to live the gospel without this foundation?

D. How does Philippians 2:9-16 describe “the core gesture of Jesus’ life”

1. What might this gesture look like in your daily life?
2. What will a life look like when a person practices the “free squandering of” being?
3. What safeguard will there be in such a life against burn out, or the loss of Self? (87)

E. What is the potential problem with Anders Nygren’s distinction between *Eros* and *agape*? (84)

1. How might this distinction effect your image of God?
2. What is the impact of seeing these not as two types of love but “*two pathways of the same love*”?
 - a. What are the “immediate practical consequences for our own *human* journey” of seeing love in this unitive way?
 - b. What are the implications for our image of our relationship to God?

F. What does it mean to say that love is “made full in the act of giving itself away”? (88)

1. What does this kind of love look like?
2. Where have you seen this kind of love in action?

TASK – Notice within yourself the gentle pull of “a deeper aliveness.” When you become conscious of this tug, let go of everything else in the ordinary level of awareness and entrust yourself to that force which holds you.

9. The Divine Therapy

A. What is the difference between “a *receptive* method” of meditation and “concentrative methods”? (92)

1. Why might this be true?

2. What might be the impact of this difference upon your spiritual life if you were to choose to practice a receptive or concentrative method?
- B. What is the risk identified by contemporary psychology in “purification as traditionally presented in Christian teaching”? (92,93)
1. Why is this particularly a risk for Christian spirituality?
 2. What is the impact upon our lives and the church if we fall prey to this danger?
- C. In what ways do you experience the “false self” at work in your life?
1. How do you feel when this particular dynamic is at work in your life?
 2. What are the consequences of falling prey to the “false self”?
- D. How would you define the spiritual journey in terms of the teaching on page 95?
1. How might this differ from the vision of the spiritual journey you have had?
 2. What possibilities does this vision of the spiritual journey open up in your understanding of Christian life?
- E. Why, as we progress in Centering Prayer, might we find periods of “psychological ferment and destabilization”? (97)
- F. The “touchstones” of this practice are: “gentleness, patience, consent, and a willingness to let the process of integration unfold with its own pace and authenticity.” (99)
1. How do these qualities feel?
 2. How do you know when you are departing from these “touchstones” in your spiritual practice?
- TASK – Practice “gentleness, patience, consent, and a willingness to let the process of integration unfold with its own pace and authenticity.” See what unfolds.

10. From Healing to Holiness

- A. What is the attitude of “classic spiritual work” (102) to the ego?
1. What is the traditional goal of the spiritual journey in relation to the ego? (104)
 - a. How is this goal reached? (105)
 - b. What vision of the spiritual journey does this create?
 2. What nuance does Thomas Keating add to the understanding of the false self? (103)
 - a. What risk does this nuance open up in one’s understanding of the nature of the true self? (103, 104)
 - b. What image of the spiritual journey does this lead to?
- B. What is the difference between “therapy” and “sanctification”? (105)
- C. What is the “medical model” attitude toward the relationship between light and dark?
1. What is the alternative vision spirituality holds out for the potential function of “human darkness”? 106
 2. How have you seen this work in your life?
- D. Has your experience of Christian teaching led you to believe that “creation is good, and that the Fall, while it may have tarnished the *likeness* of God in the human person...in no way destroyed the image, the Divine Indwelling itself”? (107)
1. What is the alternative presentation of the understanding of the effects of the Fall on the human relationship to God?
 2. What are the implications for our understanding of God’s work in our lives of choosing either of these understandings?
- E. What is the potential “down side” for Centering Prayer of the “metaphor of the psychotherapist’s couch”? 108
1. What might be lost in this metaphor?

2. How does the reminder that Centering Prayer is *prayer* serve as a corrective to this danger?

TASK – Notice an area of woundedness in your life. Try to see how this wound has contributed to your growth and depth as a person.

11. Attention of the Heart

- A. What is the role of the watcher in “classic awareness meditation”? (114)
 1. How does the function of the watcher differ in Centering Prayer?
 2. What advantage might there be to the understanding of the role of the watcher in Centering Prayer?
- B. “Is there more than one way to pay attention?” (116)
 1. Describe how you may have experienced another way of paying attention.
 2. How do you cultivate this other way of paying attention?
- C. What is the necessary prerequisite to being able to “live the teachings of Jesus without hypocrisy or burnout”? (117)
- D. What are the three characteristics of *attention of the heart* as Simeon describes it in the quote on page 118?
- E. Have you recognized “the nothingness of all that is not God”? (120)
 1. What caused you to come to this awareness?
 2. What might inhibit us from coming to this awareness?
- F. How have you experienced “magnetic center”? (121,122)
 1. Would you describe it as a feeling, a physical sensation, an intuition, or in some other way?

2. Do you sense this “magnetic center” in a particular physical location within yourself?

TASK – Feel within yourself the “inner pulsation” of your yearning for God. Let go of everything that is less than that deepest center of Being.

12. Working with an Inner Observer

A. According to Eckhart Tolle (125) what is the particular characteristic of the ego?

1. In the quote at the bottom of page 125 and on 126, what is the human condition that leads to unconsciousness?
2. What causes this condition? How do you identify it?

B. Why might it be more important for a practitioner of Centering Prayer “to work diligently outside of the prayer time to develop a conscious witnessing presence?” (126)

C. What qualities distinguish the “inner observer” from the superego or “self-awareness in the usual sense” (127, 128)

1. What is the “inner observer’s” attitude towards feelings?
2. What makes it difficult for you to adopt this attitude?

D. Are you able to be “simultaneously present without prejudice, to both the contents of consciousness and the field itself”? 128

1. How do you understand this distinction between “contents” and “field”?
2. How is this distinction helpful in your daily life?

E. What purpose does magnetic center play in relation to the “inner or outer storms” that “assail you”? (131)

1. What is the effect upon your being when the “inner observer” really sees?

(132)

2. How might you respond differently to “inner and outer storms” when your “inner observer” has really seen?

13. The Welcoming Prayer

- A. With which of the three “energy centers” do you find yourself most often identified?
 1. What activates the “energy centers” for you?
 2. What is your usual response to the activation of the “energy centers”?
- B. How have you experienced “the Ferris wheel of the false self system”?
 1. What does this feel like?
 2. How do you know when you are on “the Ferris wheel of the false self system”?
- C. What are the effects of repressed emotions? (144)
 1. What alternative atmosphere does Welcoming Prayer attempt to adopt towards “unruly emotions”?
 2. What are the effects of this atmosphere when it becomes established?
- D. What is the distinction between “surrender as an inner attitude and as an outer practice”? (146)
 1. What is the effect of “surrender understood as an interior act” upon our ability to act in the external realm? (146)
 2. How does the world respond when confronted with “surrender understood as an interior act”?
- E. What are the effects of Welcoming Prayer? (148)
- F. What is the goal of inner work in relation to “the pain/pleasure principle”? (151)

1. What keeps us trapped in “the pain/pleasure principle”?
2. How might our lives look different if we were able to live beyond “the pain/pleasure principle”?

TASK – Faced with an unruly emotion, allow it to be, open to it, find where it resides in your body, and eventually release it. Notice how this affects your energy and the energy of any human interaction in which you partake.

14. Centering Prayer and Christian Life

- A. In what way is *kenosis* an “ultimately communal” gesture? (154)
 1. Where does *kenosis* lead? (155)
 2. What might a community of people who practice *kenosis* look like?
- B. According to the description at the top of page 156, what is the goal of contemplative prayer practice?
 1. What are the effects of a contemplative prayer practice?
 2. How do you see this fulfilled in your own life?
- C. What is the function of silence as defined on page 157?
- D. How do you understand “unitive seeing”? (158)
 1. What happens to your view of life when you start to see this way?
 2. What are the barriers to this kind of seeing you might encounter?
- E. In what ways does “this has everything to do with the Church”? (158)
 1. What might be the impact upon the Church of this perspective?
 2. What might Church do to become more effectively an instrument of such seeing?

F. What will we discover as we rest “at the center of our own being”? (159)

TASK – Reread the quote from Thomas Merton on pages 154, 155. Observe within yourself the unfolding reality of love in which you recognize your oneness with all that is. Notice within yourself exactly where this consciousness dwells and allow your spirit to rest there.

Epilogue: The Way of the Heart

A spiritual task for each paragraph:

1. Watch for those moments when surrender opens to you as an opportunity.
2. Learn to recognize the feeling of surrender in your body.
3. Be conscious of that deeper spiritual attentiveness which draws and holds you.
4. Become aware of moments when the outer becomes aligned with your deep inner self.
5. Attune yourself to the subtle perceptive abilities of your heart.
6. Be aware of those daily practices you can perform that nurture your heart.
7. Let go of whatever you are clinging to.
8. Allow any repressed emotions and pain to rise gently to the surface.
9. Rest in that deepening trust and sense of safety that grows through prayer.
10. Practice observing your life from your deep “magnetic center.”
11. Whatever you encounter, focus on the emotion that arises, sink in, welcome, let go.
12. Watch to see if you are utilizing the threefold practice of nurturing the heart.

GLOSSARY FROM:

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Apophatic – spirituality that bypasses the faculties used in cataphatic spirituality, instead using the more subtle faculties which are normally blocked by overreliance on the mental and affective processing modes

“Apophatic Psychotherapy” – the process of resting in God during which the emotional wounds of a lifetime gradually surface and are released in prayer allowing the false self to weaken and the true self to emerge

Attachment – the egoic determination to hang on to the level of ordinary awareness which drags one immediately back to the smaller self; things (ideas, values, physical objects) the small self feels it needs in order to feel safe and comfortable

“Attention of the heart” – the capacity to be fully engaged at every level of one’s being: alive and simultaneously present to both God and the situation at hand

Aversions – things that “push one’s buttons”

Awakening – the interior rearrangement that is the real business of Centering Prayer enabling one to penetrate the core illusion of the smaller self and giving one the capacity to perceive and act in accordance with the higher laws of the Kingdom of Heaven by developing a stable connection with the greater Self bringing about a marriage of the higher self with the lower/egoic self so that both can contribute their uniqueness to a true individuality within the person

Awareness, divine – God dwelling within as the center of one’s being

Awareness, ordinary – (egoic thinking) the mind as it usually thinks and one’s sense of self tied to that thinking

Awareness, spiritual – a kind of interior compass whose magnetic north is always fixed on God, a way of perceiving through an intuitive grasp of the whole and an innate sense of belonging

Cataphatic – spirituality that makes use of the memory, reason, imagination, feelings, and which emerges out of and reinforces ordinary awareness

Center – an innermost point of truth which shares the likeness and even the substance of God’s own being, entered only through the gateway of complete poverty

Centering Prayer – a simple intention based, meditation practice that has the capacity to reconcile one with the natural aptitude for the inner life, based entirely on return through surrender to openness to God expressed by the use of a sacred word used at any point during the meditation time when the practitioner becomes aware of any thought

Chi – sacred energy of being, life force

Consciousness, self-reflective – the capacity to stand outside and look upon oneself in the third person, the mode of perception characteristic of ordinary awareness which splits the world into subject/object

Contemplation – seeing from the perspective of oneness, from the level of spiritual awareness

Contemplation, acquired – contemplation reached through spiritual practice

Contemplation, infused – contemplation given purely as a gift of God’s grace, beyond the reach of all human techniques

Contemplative Prayer – a wordless, trusting opening of oneself to the divine presence

Dissociation / Repression – a primary occupational hazard of people on a spiritual path in which one places unrecognized emotions in the unconscious so that they go back down into the body blocking the free flow of one’s being

“Doubled Awareness/Attention” – the capacity to be simultaneously present, without prejudice, to both the contents of consciousness and the field itself (see inner observer)

Dying to self – the only known route to unitive freedom

Ego – that part of one’s being that mistakes itself for the whole and creates its own reality in ignorance of (or defiance of) its connection to divine being

Ego-regression – the safe place created by prayer that allows one’s wounds to come to the surface and be spontaneously evacuated

Energy Centers – programs triggered by emotional turmoil through which one attempts to achieve happiness by reinforcing an illusory sense of power/control, esteem/affection, security/survival

“Eye of the heart” – ability to perceive with a deepening interiority that engages both conscience and the visionary imagination

False self system – the vicious circle of life lived out of ordinary awareness which begins to relativize of its own accord as one nurtures the heart

Heart – the core of the human person; an organ of spiritual perception with the capacity to create a spontaneous inner alignment between oneself and God allowing authentic being to manifest

Identification – the condition of being so caught up in one’s thought processes, emotions, reactions, needs, wants, desires, aversions that one becomes unconscious

Inner work – spiritual practice that aims to free one from the pain/pleasure cycle of ordinary awareness and identification by finding a comfort zone in a consciousness completely at home in itself and in God regardless of external circumstances

Intention – the aim to be totally open to God expressed by using the sacred word

Kenosis – self-emptying, the core reality underlying every moment of Jesus’ human journey which demonstrates the reality of love made full in the act of giving itself away

Kingdom of Heaven – life lived from the perspective of an attained spiritual awareness

Lectio divina – a simple but comprehensive practice of praying the scripture that leads from the mind to the heart, from cataphatic processing to apophatic opening

Magnetic Center – the gravitational pull, the actual inner pulsation of one’s yearning for God and God’s yearning for you which reminds one of the deepening flow of prayer and helps one to thread one’s way through the competing claims and clamours of the outside world and the continuous undertow of the false self system; the stable base of the observing “I”

Mantra – short word or phrase of sacred origin and intent, used repeatedly throughout the prayer time to tether the mind, invoke the divine presence, provide a touchstone for the attention, and bypass ordinary thinking

Meditation – the bridge between ordinary and spiritual awareness

Meditation, awareness – practice in which one aligns oneself with an inner observer and watches the play of energy as thoughts and emotions rise, take form and dissipate, thus learning to separate one’s ordinary awareness and sink deep roots into the field of consciousness itself

Meditation, concentrative – practice in which the mind is given a simple task to focus its attention, always involves a certain degree of egoic effort and therefore diminishes the participation of the unconscious

Meditation, surrender/receptive method – prayer in which one practices the central gesture of letting go, releasing thoughts as they arise, relaxing the attention so there is no longer a single-pointed focus for the mind

“Monkey mind” – the chaotic, random, reactive operation of the mind at the level of ordinary awareness

Observing “I”/ Inner Observer/ Watcher/Witnessing Presence – the someone who is present in a state of presence; Self-awareness in the sense of shifting one’s center of gravity from its usual egoic orbit to a deeper place which essentially watches *through* one, from the non-identified perspective of Being itself

Passions – full-fledged identified emotions

Perichoresis – the complete inter-circulation of love that takes place in the Trinity by which the Father spills into the Son, the Son into the Spirit, and the Spirit into the Father

Presence – an active awareness of Being itself

Reactivity – mechanical actions dictated by the unconscious force of one of the three energy centers

Sacred word – simple, one or two syllable word that symbolizes one’s intention to let go of anything that might arise during a period of meditation

Self, false – the needy, protective, unrecognized motivations, protective behaviors, and driven addictive energy that govern and characterize most of untransformed human behavior in response to perceived threats to one’s well-being

Self, true – non-dual or unitive consciousness flowing from a connection with the deeper unbounded consciousness within, which comes into being through the conscious acceptance of one’s shadow side

Silence, free – outer silence that stops words and busyness but allows for the continuing free association of the mind

Silence, intentional – (meditation) detaching the mind from all thought process and confining it within the present moment without allowing it to wander

“Sleep” – the usual state of one’s being which drains out the inner music with the constant barrage of “I need,” “I want,” “Pay attention to me” that is characteristic of ordinary awareness

Spiritual Journey – the on-going process of freeing the “true self” from the gravitational pull of our psychological woundedness beneath which it lies buried

“Spiritual materialism” – the tendency to help oneself to spiritual experience in order to build up the ordinary self

Spiritual senses – the more subtle faculties of perception that are engaged in apophatic spirituality

Spiritual transformation – the integration and reprioritization of levels of awareness so that ordinary awareness is in alignment with and in service to spiritual awareness

Surrender – the process of letting go, releasing all that to which one clings, good as well as bad, which opens one to the apophatic realm as one entrusts oneself to the deeper level which is divine consciousness resonating in the heart and unmediated by a witnessing presence

Tantra – love utterly poured out

Thought – any mental idea, emotion, memory, interior dialogue or commentary, or physical stimulation that pulls one out of open, undifferentiated awareness, capturing one’s attention in a pinpoint focus, and drawing one back into the ordinary level of awareness

Transference – a deepening trust and sense of safety experienced during prayer which encourages psychological healing to occur and deepens one’s relationship to God

Unloading of the unconscious – the process by which repressed past pain and emotion rise to the surface when the tight repressive bands that the egoic mind keeps wrapped around one’s shadow places loosen and begin to depart through the gentle consent of Centering Prayer

Welcoming Prayer – tool that enables one to make the transition from surrender understood simply as a methodology of meditation into surrender as an underlying attitude and practice for meeting daily life