



**GOD ALONE**

**Practical Instructions for**

# **Practicing the Presence of God**

**Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven  
and all else will be provided**

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**The Father spoke one word, which was his Son, and this word he always speaks in eternal silence and in silence must it be heard by the soul.**

**Saint John of the Cross<sup>(6)</sup>**

Cover: Photo taken on 25Dec2016 of a gate adjacent to a walkway leading to the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani. This monastery near Bardstown, Kentucky, in Nelson County, is home to monks of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, better known as Trappists. Thomas Merton resided here from 1941 until 1968.

Release F1.7

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## **Preface**

**Communing with God is not something “you” can do. It is a gift provided by the Grace of God. That being said, paraphrasing the words of Saint Teresa of Avila<sup>(5)</sup>, there is a lot we can do to put ourselves in a position to receive that grace. This booklet is offered in that spirit.**

## **Introduction**

**God is always with us. Jesus, the Apostles, Saints, and Sages of all ages tell us this. When asked, we will readily confirm we believe it. Yet, usually we feel separate from God. Be it consciously or subconsciously, we go through our lives separating ourselves, and our activities, from God.**

**Let us first consider our concept of God, and then remember any concept we can have of God falls far short of the reality of God.**

**The ancient Hebrews forbid speaking God’s name. This was to guard against putting God in a box so to speak; to keep from creating a conceptualized definition of God and guard against turning God into an ideal or an idol. Most of us will readily admit God is infinite, everywhere and unknowable, and yet, if honest with ourselves, will admit we are guilty of conceptualizing God.**

**But is this not how the human mind works? When we think and use language doesn’t this happen automatically? When we form a sentence is there not a subject and an object? Can we (the subject) know God (the object)? Can we know**

**God to be a Him, or a Her, or even an It? Can God be objectified? The author of the Cloud<sup>(2)</sup> indicates we experience God through a “cloud of unknowing”, implying God cannot really be conceptualized at all.**

**Since words and concepts can never really explain God, we have to be very careful when we use language. We must remember words can only point toward God. We must vigilantly guard against mistaking these conceptual pointers for the reality to which they point.**

**Meditate on this. Is there anything in your experience that is eternal, everywhere and unknowable?**

**We are told to look for God within, as that is where we will find Him. Saint Paul tells us God is that in which we live and move and have our being and our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit. Saint Augustine says God is closer to us than we are to our ourselves. Yet, we usually don't feel God's presence or even consider God as being with us, let alone in us. What do we expect this presence to feel like? Could it be we ignore a real felt experience of God's presence? Are we like fish that do not realize the water in which we swim?**

**Do we have preconceived expectations about what God's presence should be like? If we do, our experiences will be held up against them to see if they measure up. Jesus tells us not to judge. So we must be careful. Jesus also told us the Kingdom of God is upon us, in us, and spread out among the land. Let those with eyes see!**

**We are told by Jesus, countless Saints, and Profits, that to find God we must first look inward. We know God is here and everywhere, right now and forever, and unknowable by our human mind. What is all around us and yet we cannot see? What is everywhere and yet seemingly nowhere? What does each and every object originate from and yet is far greater than those objects? What is inherently us at the core of our being, unknowable, and yet knows all things? These questions we each have to answer for ourselves.**

**As i see it, we each experience the world through a mental model we make of it. A model made of concepts, and shaped by our unique life experiences, that runs like software on our gray-matter-computers. A model we have been constructing all our lives and that tells us we are separate from God.**

**This booklet is meant to accompany Brother Lawrence's book, *Practicing the Presence of God*<sup>(1)</sup>. Its intent is to help us realize answers to the questions above. It provides specific tools to help remove the veils from our eyes and bypass the mental model that artificially separates us from God. After practicing as outlined here, we may realize our moment-to-moment thoughts fool us into this artificial separation and we might learn to experience God continuously.**

## **1. – Making the Effort at Dedicated Times of Prayer.**

**The instructions presented in this booklet presume the reader is living a moral, just, and righteous Christian life. All, major prerequisite for benefiting from these practices. A wise man once said, trying to gain from prayer without a firm grounding in moral virtues is like putting tremendous effort into rowing across a river without untying the boat from the dock.**

**The practices outlined here are not meant to replace your silent prayer practice. If you have an established practice that is proving effective, stay with it. These practices are similar to the Centering Prayer practice Fathers Thomas Keating, William Meninger and Basil Pennington founded. However, their Centering Prayer practice is based primarily on the Cloud of Unknowing<sup>(2)</sup>, where these are derived more from those of the Desert Fathers<sup>(3)</sup> and the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Personally, i use both methods; some days one will work better for me than the other. When my mind is quiet, i may go right into a centering practice but most days i pray as outlined here. Since we are all different, and each on our own unique spiritual path, i offer the following for your consideration.**

- Find a quiet place and time that will minimize interruptions.**
- Set a timer for 20 to 60 minutes.**
  - Start slow and increase gradually. Consider adding 10 additional minutes after each month of practice.**

- **Use a prayer bench or chair that keeps your back straight.**
  - **If you use a chair, recommend you do not use the backrest.**
  
- **Try not to move for the entire session (this helps to reduce the number of noisy, complaining thoughts you will have).**
  
- **Close your eyes and start with a personal prayer from you to God. Explain you cannot do this on your own and you need His help. Ask Him to let you feel His Presence. You may also want to ask the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, your favorite Saint and Brother Lawrence for help.**
  
- **Then move to traditional prayers said silently to yourself.**
  - **Synchronize the prayer with your breath. For example, say to yourself "Our Father who art in Heaven" on an in-breath, "hallowed be thy name" on the out-breath. "Thy Kingdom come" on the next in-breath, and "Thy will be done" on the following out-breath... It's not important what parts of the prayer you say as you breath in or out, only that you do it and divide your attention between the breathing and the praying.**
  
  - **To the greatest extent possible, focus your attention on only the breathing and the praying. Incorporating the breathing into your awareness helps you focus and promotes deeper concentration.**
  
  - **Pay close attention to each word. Do not just mindlessly recite them. Concentrate on every aspect as the words**

**form and are said in your mind; “watch” yourself mentally say every word and syllable.**

**-- In this same way, you may want to say a Hail Mary, a Glory Be, and then your favorite version of the Jesus Prayer<sup>3</sup>:**

**Lord Jesus Christ (on the inhale)  
Son of God (on the exhale)  
Have mercy on me (on the inhale)  
A sinner (on the exhale)**

**or a shorter version:**

**Jesus (on the inhale)  
Mercy (on the exhale)**

**- Repeat the Jesus Prayer multiple times to focus and settle your mind. Again, you are saying the words silently to yourself and focusing as much attention as you can muster to watch every syllable of every word form in your mind. Do not think about the meaning of the words, just watch/listen to them as they form in your mind.**

**- If you would like, use the Trinity Prayer in place of the Jesus Prayer or switch to it at some point during the prayer session. (Note: the Trinity prayer, as i call it, is my creation; i find it very powerful to pray in Jesus’ native language, the ancient Aramaic.)**

## **Trinity Prayer:**

	<b><u>Phonetic Spelling</u></b>	
	<b><u>In Breath</u></b>	<b><u>Out Breath</u></b>
<b>Abba</b>	<b>Ab</b>	<b>Ba</b>
<b>Yeshua</b>	<b>Esh</b>	<b>Wa</b>
<b>Ruach</b>	<b>Roo</b>	<b>Ach</b>

**- When you find your mind wandering, do not make a big deal out of it; this will happen repeatedly for the rest of your prayer life. When you notice it has happened, simply return to the breath/prayer. Even if you think you have just realized the solution to world hunger, return to the breath/prayer.**

**- As your mind quiets, and if you are familiar with traditional Centering Prayer practice, you can switch to your centering prayer word and use it to recollect the mind if you would like.**

**- Repeat your final prayer either until the timer goes off. When you are finished, rest for a few minutes with your attention at your center in whatever Stillness was created.**

**-- If at any time during the prayer session you have an overwhelming sense of Stillness, drop the prayer and rest in the Presence, trying not to do anything.**

**- This can prove challenging, as Resting in God is kind of like balancing on the head of a pin; the mind wants to jump in there and own the situation and this tends to destroy the Presence. God's Presence shines through when one humbles one's self to the point where there is**

**no longer a sense of a separate self. For example, if you think “ this is cool, i cannot wait to tell my friends about this”, then the sense of self is back and the Presence diminishes. So as soon as you notice thinking (mental self-talk of any kind), shift your attention back to your breath and/or focusing on the prayer to reestablish the Presence.**

**Let us elaborate on what is meant by the Presence of God. This is important because you do not want to stop the prayer too early. If you stop and bask in the stillness too soon, this may feel good, but in my experience it is almost a sure ticket to a dry spell (a lack of a felt sense of God’s Presence) for the next few prayer sessions.**

**i used to get so excited about the euphoric sensations the stillness brought and i would crave it. This intense desire usually guaranteed my “self” would not disappear (as it is the self that is doing the wanting) and therefore an assured dry prayer session). Instead, keep the prayer going until you are in such glory that you could not continue even if you wanted to, then you can stop. But even then, try not to make a big deal out of it.**

**If after you stop, word thoughts start popping in again and you cannot let them pass without getting hooked by them, start the prayer up again. It is kind of like easing yourself into the water; you go in a little at a time. A more accurate description is you are surrendering control to God. Usually, this is not easy to do and you have to keep re-surrendering. You are going against a deep-seated habit, inherent in**

**human nature, so expect this purification process to take a while.**

**It is important we disregard our expectations. Continuously judging one's experience as good or bad, meets or does not meet expectations, is detrimental to the practice.**

**Understand, this is hard to do, but if you put all your effort into watching yourself silently say each syllable of every word of the prayer then there will be no mental capacity left to anticipate or judge anything. Again, lapses of attention (wandering thoughts or daydreaming) are to be expected and in some ways a good thing. Bringing your attention back to the prayer/breath after realizing you have lapsed into a daydream builds concentration and Presence. On the other hand, getting upset with yourself for letting your attention drift has detrimental effects. Just come back to the breath/prayer and carry on.**

**When you get to a point where you can rest in the Inner-silence more or less consistently (and this may take weeks, months, or even years), with your internal voice, silently drop a single word prayer (or short phrase) into the Stillness. Recall the faintest sensation of the experience that the word represents. For example, drop in "Love" and ever so faintly recall the warm feeling you get in your heart when you experience love. Do not think about it in words, but instead try to feel the sensations you get when you experience love.**

**Let that word/feeling reverberate in the Stillness for a few breaths and then drop it in again (note: if thoughts start jumping in you may have to go back to the Jesus prayer or**

**your centering method for a while to reestablish the Stillness). Then try another word in the same manner. Continue with nine or ten different prayer words (e.g., Peace, Compassion, Joy, Wisdom, Health, Selflessness, Abundance, Faith, God's Present Help, etc.).**

**If you just start up with a long petition prayer, you may lose the connection to Presence. However, dropping a single intention and then going back to rest at your center preserves the Presence. Adding this type prayer to the tail end of your twice-daily formal prayer practice will build Stillness. The veil between you and the divine thins as the Stillness builds and these short prayers can produce miraculous results.**

**This is about as Christian as one can get, albeit maybe a little Eastern Orthodox and Desert Father like. If however, you feel this has too much of an Eastern feel, you may want to consider judging a tree by the fruit it bears. Guarantee, this tree won't bear bad fruit. It will not be easy, and may even prove to be one of the most challenging things you have ever done, as it is not easy to humble one's self completely, even temporarily. Nevertheless, it won't bear bad fruit.**

**Recommend you practice twice daily in the manner outlined above. Find times and locations that work for you; maybe first thing in the morning and before you eat dinner. Praying like this, when done consistently over time, will build Stillness into your life. The next section will show how to hasten building Stillness by expanding your practice to include your daily activities.**

**Eventually, you will find you have established a new habit and can do as Brother Lawrence<sup>(1)</sup> directs and practice the Presence of God throughout your day. You can drive to work basking in the Presence. The world becomes very divine indeed, when you realize the Kingdom of Heaven is all around you.**

## **2.**

### **Continuing the Practice Throughout the Day**

**There is no reason to limit your practice to those times of formal prayer. Saint Paul tells us to pray without ceasing. He says God is that in which we live and move and have our being. From the Psalms we learn God is our present help. If we keep a portion of our attention in the present moment, knowing in our heart God is with us, we thin the artificial veil we subconsciously place between God and ourselves.**

**Initially, keeping an awareness of God can prove challenging. It is all too easy to get sucked into your daily activities and realize you have neglected God for hours. As you continue your twice-a-day silent prayer practice as outlined in Section 1, your internal Stillness we build. The increasing Stillness, along with the following practices, will help you develop a habit of keeping awareness on God's Presence.**

**Suggested techniques to use throughout your day:**

**- As you go about your day do everything for the Love of God. Brother Lawrence<sup>(1)</sup> said he would not even pick up a straw from the ground unless it was for the Love of God. Remind yourself frequently all you do is for God and not for yourself or to impress others.**

**- Accept the circumstances in each moment as God's will. This does not mean if your car gets stuck in the mud you have to resign to staying stuck in the mud. It means to not judge the content of the current moment as good or bad. Accept it for what it is, and then take the steps necessary to get out of the mud. But when you put the cardboard under the tire and it shoots out and the car is still stuck, accept that moment too. Just accept the content of the moment as it is. Know that for whatever reason God wanted, or at least allowed, the moment to be as it is. Maybe it was to teach you a lesson in acceptance. Maybe it was to delay you so you would avoid a car accident. Who knows? Don't analyze it or try to figure it out. Just accept it and continue, taking every action for the Love of God and with the intent of doing God's will.**

**- When the alarm clock goes off in the morning hit the snooze alarm. Close your eyes and direct all of your attention into your body. Feel your entire body from the inside. Feel the bed press against you. Feel the life in the body. If you find this difficult, first feel your breath go in and out for a minute or two. Then feel your extremities. Feel your feet from the inside. Let your attention rest in the sensations of just having feet. Then feel your hands. Feel the aliveness in them. Then feel your hands and feet at the same time. Then try to feel the entire inner body all at once. Remember, Saint Paul tells us the body is a Temple for the Holy Spirit. Feel the life in your body and know it is the Holy Spirit.**

**Let your attention move from the tips of your toes on the exhale and run it up your body to the top of your head at the end of the inhale. Then reverse the direction on the exhale and move your attention from you head, down your body arriving again at your toes when you are out of breath. Continue in this manner until the alarm goes off again. Then say a short prayer thanking God for the gift of another day and commit all you will do that day to God for His love. Do this again when you lay down for sleep in the evening and thank Him for the day.**

**- As you go through the day, during those activities that do not require intense mental activity like walking, climbing stairs or sitting, direct as much of your attention as possible into the present moment (consider the present moment analogous to God's presence). Pay attention to the movement of your legs, the feel of the ground beneath your feet, your breath as it goes in and out. Let the walking be a form of prayer; know what a miracle it is to walk upon God's Earth.**

**Focus on the activity so intensely you step out of that part of your subconscious that separates you from God. Know in your heart that every step you take is on Holy Ground. Pay attention to the sounds, the smells, the sights. Don't think about any of these sensory inputs, don't analyze them with internal self-talk. Just experience them fully. Pay close attention to how your body feels. Not if it feels good or bad. Don't judge anything; just experience the bodily sensations in the moment. Keep a portion of your attention on this inner-body feeling and know it is the Holy Spirit.**

**- Before an activity that will take a great deal of mental effort, pause and say a short prayer dedicating the upcoming task to God and ask for His help. Take frequent breaks. During which, close your eyes, feel your breath go in and out, feel the inner body for a while. Then say a short prayer and return again to the work.**

**- If there is no one with you that minds, pause for a minute or two when you get in your car. Close your eyes. Feel and experience the present moment (God's eternal moment). Feel the car seat press against your body. Feel your feet on the floor and the touch of the pedals on your toes. Feel the wheel in your hand. Feel your breath go in and out. Know God is present. Say a short prayer dedicating your upcoming journey to God and then do it for His Love.**

**- As you drive your car, know it is for the Love of God; let the driving be a form of prayer. Pay complete attention to the driving. Leave the radio off. Focus on the road in front of you. No self-talk about the day or its upcoming activities, just focus your attention on the driving. Experience the scene through your window as it unfolds in front of you; see the seeing. Feel the breath as it goes in and out. Again, feel the seat of the car press against your buttocks and back. Feel the pedals against your feet. Feel the life inside your feet and your hands. Drive with both hands and feel the steering wheel in your hands. Feel each dimple of the wheel against your fingers. Every time your mind wanders off, into daydreams or self-talk, bring your attention back to the driving and the present moment sensations. Know you are in God's Presence.**

**- Exercise a number of times a week. Do it for the love of God to better your body so you can better do His will. Leave your music off. If you walk, do so as described above. If you use exercise equipment, like an elliptical, treadmill or stationary bike, hold onto the handholds, close your eyes and feel every movement. Feel your breath. Pay attention to all the sensations as you move and breathe. Know you are in the Presence of God. Every time your mind wanders, bring it back to the present moment sensations and your awareness of God's Presence.**

**- Minimize any distractions prior to eating. Turn off the television, close the laptop, and put your phone away. Give God thanks. Ask that His will be done and that the energy from the food you are about to eat go toward doing His will. Then pay close attention to every movement, to every bite you put in your mouth. Really taste each bite. Chew slowly and savor the flavors. Know it is by God's grace you have your daily bread and He is with you as you eat. Every time you find your attention has wandered, simply bring it back and continue.**

**-You may want to use the Jesus prayer<sup>(3)</sup> to help your focus during any of the above mentioned activities. Use whatever version of the prayer you like or the one that fits the situation. For example, when my mind is very agitated and i have trouble concentrating, i find the long version works best. If only a little distracted, i might use my short version "Jesus" on the inhale, and "Mercy" on the exhale. As you inhale silently say to yourself "Jesus" such that when you are full of breathe you have completed saying "Jesus". Try**

**to notice the silence between the words, Then exhale as you silently say “Mercy” timing it so you are out of air when you finish the saying the last syllable. You can use this prayer to get the Lord’s help in centering you, or keeping you centered, in God’s Presence.**

**- Whenever you have a chance, listen to silence. Silence is everywhere. Sounds would not be possible if it were not for the silence between them. Listen to the silence between words, between the notes of a bird’s song, between the leaves rustling in the wind, and even between the cars and trucks on the highway. It has been said, silence is the language of God. Know that as you listen.**

**- You may prefer to use a breath prayer whenever you have a chance. Richard Rohr told of a Jewish Rabi that said “YHWH”, when pronounced in the ancient Hebrew tongue, mimics the sound the breath makes as you breath in and out (“Ya” on the inhale, “Way” on the exhale). Therefore, you can pay close attention to your breath, listen to its sound, experience the sensations as your lungs fill and empty, and know each breath is a prayer for God.**

### **3.**

#### **Resting in the Presence of God**

**The previous two sections should serve as a good introduction to the Practice of the Presence of God and may be all you ever need. However, it might be beneficial to say a little more about Stillness; that inner-silence that builds over the months of practice. You may have noticed words like Stillness and Presence are capitalized in this booklet and words like “i” are either omitted or purposely not capitalized. There is a great deal of significance behind this as should become clear by the end of this section.**

**As we go about our day, our attention constantly goes out from what we assume to be our self to the outside world. We attend to the ten million things that make up our world. So maybe it should not be so surprising that when we try to turn our attention inward, and temporarily disregard the external world, our minds revolt. We are fighting a deep-seated subconscious habit of constantly attending to the material world. When we attempt to do as Saints, Sages and Spiritual Directors tell us, and to turn our attention inward to find God, our mind’s habitual tendencies of attending to the external world kick in and we lose focus.**

**Deep subconscious programming drives us to stay in control. When we try to ignore the outside world, we subconsciously fear we will lose our grip on reality and everything will unravel (which includes our sense of self and/or ego). Meditation, and some pre-contemplative forms of prayer like the Jesus Prayer, make a concession to this**

**mental habit by reducing the ten million things down to just one or two. Ideally, we would just rest in the Presence (eventually we will be able to do just that by letting our awareness rest on itself). However, in the beginning we will likely find it easier to focus on one or two external things.**

**Practicing this over time will yield space between thoughts. Space that will fill with inner silence. Your life will not fall apart because your quantity of thoughts decrease. On the contrary, you will think clearer, have less stress, and be more creative and productive. Watch your mind and you will quickly realize most of your thoughts are redundant and unnecessary. If you had a friend that talked to you as much as you talk to yourself, you would probably ask them to shut-up. Think of this as surrendering control to God. Trust God and let Him help. Give some of that attention to God's Presence. Have faith, relax, notice the abundant life all around you, and know God has got your back.**

**After practicing the Presence for some time, we begin to find ourselves with a calmer mind and less mental chatter. But let us be clear, we are not trying to suppress thoughts. On the contrary, any effort to suppress thoughts will only lead to more thoughts. Instead, we learn to ignore thoughts and when we do not pay attention to them, they decrease on their own. Said another way, we learn to surrender control to God. We do this by returning repeatedly to our singular focus and we gradually break the habit of dedicating all our attention to our thinking mind and the mental model that separates us from God. We establish a new habit of keeping**

**a portion of our attention on an awareness of God's Presence.**

**As in most endeavors, it is best to first crawl, then walk, then run. Meditation, and early-stage forms of contemplative prayer, allow us to crawl by focusing on just the one thing (or two or three) vice the ten million. This single focus is more doable. It allows us to wean our minds off the often chaotic and habitual attendance of the ten million things (we may never completely break this habit, but even a few added minutes of Peace each day is life changing).**

**Nevertheless, as we diligently continue our twice-daily prayer practice we slowly start to reduce the habit. We notice some silence between "Jesus" and "Mercy" and, while it is far from the ultimate, we sense an increased Peace and sense of well-being. We begin to walk.**

**This Inner-silence, Peace, Love, and Joy is a felt experience of the Presence of God. There will be more Presence some days and less others, but overall you will see a gradual increase. You will also notice a witnessing quality develop. A quality that allows you to take a step back from yourself and watch your own mental activity (witnessing our thoughts leads to realizing the false self for what it is... more on this below).**

**This distinction between crawling, walking and running is a bit contrived. It is far fuzzier than this explanation may lead you to believe and it is not a one-way street. There will be days when you dip your toe into the run phase for a few**

**moments only to fall back to a crawl. Other times you may be solidly running one day only to find the next day, or the next two weeks, is a tough dry crawl (i.e., not feeling God's Presence). Do not despair. Do not worry or even think about it. Just continue your practice and the Kingdom will come.**

**Make no mistake, while we are clearly making an effort with this practice, it is Grace that will reveal the Kingdom. You must make an effort right up to a point and then not make an effort (this sounds like a paradox but in my experience it is spot on). Our expectations of the Kingdom, and its coming, only hinder the matter. So make an effort and then don't make an effort.**

**There is a point at our center, the absolute center of our being, where we can learn to rest (i.e., stop making an effort). Instead of our attention going out from ourselves to our mental model of the ten million things, we learn to rest it at our center and let the sensations come to us. We will see those sensations are made of inputs from our five senses and our thoughts, and they float by like clouds in the blue sky. You will come to realize your deepest Self is like the blue sky, and the inputs the clouds and those clouds are separate and "known" by your Deeper Self. Resting in one's center leads to this realization and the run phase of contemplation.**

**This center is where you feel you reside. The absolute center of your being. It is not in your feet, for if you did not have feet you would still be. It is not in your legs, or your hands, or your arms, or your mid-section, or even your thoughts. All these are known by this deeper You.**

**For most of us, our center feels like it is behind and slightly above our eyes. As you practice, try to focus on that part of you that is doing the focusing. After a while, you may feel a very mildly pleasant feeling at your center. This may make it easier to focus there. Eventually, it will seem more like a “defocusing”; more like a resting at, or in, your center.**

**Initially when you do this, it may feel like you are balancing on the head of a pin (as mentioned in section 1). Your mind will want to comment on the experience; it will want to own it. Let the narrator go. If there is commentary, however subtle, “you” are still there. Let it go. Surrender. Inhale “Jesus”. Rest in the Stillness. Exhale “Mercy”. Feel the Stillness. Keep surrendering like that as often as needed.**

**When you can rest at your center and not pay much attention to the occasional thought, notice the false self disappears. The “false self” is a term Thomas Merton<sup>(4)</sup> used that refers to the self we usually take ourselves to be (to me, this does not seem as much like a false self as it does a conceptual self; we identify with our mental-model of our self – our false self). Conscious and subconscious thoughts continuously run the “story of you” (and your entire model of the world for that matter). This story is made up of memories and interpretations of experiences you have had since birth (this false or conceptual self is what is represented by the small “i”).**

**Dis-identifying with the false self is one of the gateways into the Kingdom. By dis-identify, I mean realizing there is a much deeper aspect to yourself and the life-situation you**

**find yourself in only the thin surface layer (you will be in the world but not of the world). There are probably an infinite number of gateways; however, in my experience dis-identifying with the false self, keeping your attention in the present moment (which is aided by feeling the Holy Spirit in your inner-body) and a deep trust that God's will is being done in His eternal moment, are the most prevalent. People sometimes think any talk about the present moment is "new-age" spirituality and mistake the present moment for what happens in it. But that is not right. The present moment is the container in which everything happens. Remember Saint Paul's description of God: He is that in which we live and move and have our being. Is there any doubt we live and move and have our being in God's eternal moment?**

**Practicing the Presence leads to the Kingdom and realizing the Peace that surpasses all understanding. Initially, entry into the Kingdom will likely come as just a glimpse as the false self will jump back in and try to own the situation. There can be no "you" in the Kingdom. No "you" separate from God; to enter the Kingdom the false-you must be completely humbled to the point of non-existence, or at least greatly diminished. One must die to the false self; this is what is meant by dying before you die and what Saint Paul meant when he said i live no longer i, but Christ in me.**

**After that initial glimpse, one's conceptual self will be extremely eager to get back into the Kingdom and get another glimpse. Of course, that is impossible as "it" was never in there to begin with. Only your True self was. Therefore, until that desire is tempered it might be awhile before Your next glimpse.**

**In some respects, entering the Kingdom is kind of like going to sleep. Just as you cannot make yourself go to sleep, you cannot willfully enter the Kingdom. You have to surrender your will to God. Again, make an effort and then don't make an effort. Surrender control and allow your attention to rest on itself (i.e., relax your attention on that place from which your attention originates – that “knowing awareness” at your center). Rest there and continually surrender the narrator and when you least expect it the Kingdom will come.**

**Our sensory inputs get filtered by our mind. We do not really see the world as it is, we see it as we perceive it to be. This perception results from our mental-model of the world. Our mental-model is a personal project we have been working on since we were toddlers. Everyone's model is unique according to his or her personal experience and mental abilities. We construct our models to make sense out of the world. As we experience new things, our model changes and develops and we learn. The first real steps toward contemplative prayer are to start breaking the habit of placing all our attention on our thinking mind and to know our mental model for what it is.**

**Once you pass through the gateway, the filters of this mental-model seem to get bypassed. Everything seems to sparkle; it appears fresh and new as if you were seeing it through the eyes of a child. You may still seem to reside at your center and consist of an unchanging, infinite, eternal, all-encompassing, knowing awareness. Sometimes your True Self may seem to expand from what was your internal-center to encompass everything. It is as if you pass from a**

**small separate self to a large all-encompassing Self. All the same sensory inputs are there, but the birds singing in the tree overhead no longer seem separate, or at any distance, from you. It is as if your center expands to contain everything and simultaneously be everywhere.**

**It feels as if your sense of self expands to encompass all of your sensory inputs... or said another way, God, the entire world, and you become one (Atonement... At-one-ment). This infinite aware Inner-silence is subjective as opposed to objective. All objects are encompassed in it but it is not an object. Meister Eckhart called it Nothing or “No Thing” and referred to it as the birth of Christ within us; he said God was NoThing. God, the ten million things, and you all become One.**

**Stay in this place as long as possible and let God teach You.**

**To summarize, we can draw on the collective wisdom of the ages:**

**Know thyself, and in the knowing you will realize you are nothing, and in being nothing, you will be everything.**

**May God speed you on your spiritual path to Peace, Joy and Love.**

**Amen.**

## **References**

**(1) Practicing the Presence of God, by Brother Lawrence. Brother Lawrence was a 17<sup>th</sup> century, French Carmelite lay brother whose letters and conversations make up the Christian classic “The Practice of the Presence of God”.**

**(2) The Cloud of Unknowing, by Anonymous. A 14<sup>th</sup> century classic written by an anonymous author on contemplative prayer.**

**(3) The Philokalia, Saint Nikodimos. A collection of texts written by Desert Fathers between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

**(4) New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton.**

**(5) Teresa of Avila – The Book of Her Life.**

**(6) Saint John of the Cross – From his spiritual Maxims.**

