

Opening Space for God: Living in the Light

**A participatory course
using a contemplative approach,
life experiences, spiritual practices and the Bible.**

“Be still ...and know that I am God”
Psalm 46:10 (RSV)

Greenbelt Community Center
Sundays
February 17 through March 24, 2002
3:30 PM

Offered by Friends in Christ

Mind and Heart

The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God.

-Theophan the Recluse

There are dangers along the path of seeking a relationship with God. The first danger is to see the path as an intellectual effort at knowledge. We like to use our minds. By analyzing, comparing and contrasting, we control ideas. We like to keep the spiritual journey in our mind so we can control it. Unfortunately, as long as we keep the search solely intellectual, we will fail. The essence of the journey is to let go and receive the Divine Other. True relationship is not controlling.

The second danger is to see the path as only one of the heart and emotions. We ache to feel the Truth. This way, however exciting it may appear, robs us of the great gift of thought and can trap us in the great currents of the flesh.

The goal of our inquiry here is **to stand with the mind in the heart before God**. We will not abandon our minds, but we will not be ruled by our minds. We must put our minds in our hearts, the core of our whole being; the center of our emotions and physicality. From this place and posture, we will relate to God. So, beware of overemphasizing either thought or emotion.

Welcome to this course which we hope will assist you on your spiritual journey. Our goal is to open our senses anew, to respond freshly, to the Divine Teacher who is always present.

We request that you begin the class by reading the Bible selections provided. Try to read and react to them as if you were reading them for the first time. Try to avoid complex intellectual analysis, but rather try to respond to the passages fully, with your memories of past experiences, with your feelings and also with your mind.

We request that you listen to the short teaching section with the same kind of openness.

Our sharing time will be an opportunity to share appropriate life experiences, feelings and thoughts. It will not be really a discussion, but it will be more of an opportunity for mutual sharing. Everyone's past experiences, feeling and thoughts are true for them; thus, we will not criticize or challenge each other.

Finally, we offer suggestions to stimulate you to keep a journal during the course. In the privacy of your home, you can reflect in writing about your thoughts and experiences as the course progresses.

Session 1 - February 17, 2002

Staying Close to Jesus

Jesus' first disciples felt drawn to him. While these disciples did not always understand what Jesus taught, they felt a closeness to God by just being with him. So too for us. Our first step on the pathway of God does not require we understand Jesus, just to stay close to him.

Mark 10:13-16	Jesus and children
Matthew 9:35-38	Jesus has pity
Luke 6:27-31	Jesus: love your enemies
Mark 2:18-20	Jesus rejects fasting
Mark 11:15-19	Jesus in temple
Luke 8:1-3	Jesus and women
John 8:1-11	Jesus and the adulteress

Teaching: Following Jesus

Sharing: 1. What are your present thoughts about Jesus?
2. Observing Jesus afresh, what kind of person do you see?

Practice: Guided meditation of being with Jesus

Journaling Suggestion: Imagine yourself present at one or more of the scenes in the Bible passages above. Write your reactions and what you would say to Jesus.

Session 2 - February 24, 2002

Opening Space for God

When we first meet some one we like, we feel a positive force in our interactions. The first step in building a meaningful relationship with this person is to spend time with him/her. So it also is with God. After sensing God, we must begin by opening some time for God by creating space in our daily activities.

Luke 14:16-24	Parable of the Great Feast
Exodus 3:1-3	Moses explores a miracle
Mark 1:4-5, 9-12	Jesus baptized and goes to desert

Teaching: Time and Relationships

Sharing: 1. What happens when you spend regular time with God?
2. What happens when you do not spend time with God?

Practice: In prayer, plan with God times to spend with God. Share with God your intentions.

Journaling Suggestion: Keep a daily diary of how you use your time. Now write what this diary tells you about yourself, your needs and values.

Session 3 - March 3, 2002

Silence and Waiting as Doorway to God

The practice of silent prayer, meditation and openness is found in many religious traditions. This practice opens us to depths of our being and the Divine Voice which speaks from these depths. When we act from these depths, our actions are an extension of our Divine foundation.

Psalm 37:7	Be still and wait (RSV)
Psalm 46:10	Be still and know (RSV)
1 Kings 19:11-13	Elijah hears soft voice
Mark 14:32-36	Jesus prays in the garden
John 14:12	You will do even greater things

- Teaching:** Contemplative tradition and Quaker practice. The Centering Prayer explained.
- Sharing:** What are your experiences with being silent? Describe your feelings.
- Practice:** Centering Prayer

Journaling Suggestion: After you practice the Centering Prayer daily, write about your experiences.

Session 4 - March 10, 2002

Bible as Doorway to God

Several things hinder our use of the Bible. Many times we have developed strong, interfering feelings about the Bible from our youth. Also, our education urges us to understand with our minds what we read. How can the Bible be used to open our hearts to God?

Luke 4:16-21	Jesus reads Scripture
2 Timothy 3:14-16	Scripture brings wisdom and salvation

- Teaching:** Bible reading. Lectio Divina and the Friends in Christ doorway approach.
- Sharing:** Explain your present feeling about the Bible.
- Practice:** Use approach with Revelation 22:17.

Journaling Suggestion: Choose a Bible passage. Read it and sit in silence. What feelings or life experience memories does the passage evoke?

Session 5 - March 17, 2002

Thankfulness as Doorway to God

Sometimes we see the world as a menacing place with which we must struggle. We feel threatened. There is little room for God here. But if we look at the same world with eyes of gratitude, we see miracles and gifts from God everywhere. Feeling thankful opens us to the Divine Presence.

Psalm 100:3-4	God made us and we are thankful
Psalm 136:1-3, 26	Give thanks for God's love
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18	Be joyful and thankful

Teaching: Attitude can change the world.
Sharing: What experiences hinder a thankful attitude in you?
Practice: In prayer, list everything for which you are thankful.

Journaling Suggestion: Each day write a list of everything for which you can be thankful.

Session 6 - March 24, 2002

Humility as Doorway to God

We Americans are taught to take care of ourselves. We are proud of our successes and hurt by our failures. Our pride tells us that we are on our own. Self promotion has become a way of life. Until we can put aside this pride, there is little room for God. Humility is the recognition that our lives are really rooted in God and that we need God.

Luke 18:9-14	The Pharisee and the tax collector
John 13:3-9, 12-17	Jesus washes his disciples' feet

Teaching: Positive humility as a spiritual practice. The Jesus Prayer: its tradition and practice.
Sharing: What thoughts do you have about needing God? Do these conflict with your feelings of self worth?
Practice: The Jesus Prayer

Journaling Suggestion: Write about ways you need God.

Friends in Christ Core Values

- We are committed to** seeking God through Jesus Christ.
- We are committed to** fulfilling God's desire for us and others to become children of God.
- We are committed to** living Jesus' command to love one another.
- We are committed to** sharing God's love with others by bringing them into a loving spiritual community.
- We are committed to** the Bible as an essential resource for spiritual growth.
- We are committed to** the immediate experience of the Holy Spirit as an essential guide for spiritual growth.
- We are committed to** prayer, in its varied forms, as an essential method for our fulfillment as children of God.
- We are committed to** communal worship as the community's expression of its relationship to God.
- We are committed to** using expectant waiting as a vital form of prayer and worship.
- We are committed to** a serving ministry assisting the healing of brokenness and the implementation of justice.
- We are committed to** recognizing, nurturing and developing the gifts for ministry and leadership in all.
- We are committed to** unity with others in the body of Christ in a common effort to witness the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Friends in Christ

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