



THE JESUS PRAYER

Session One

INITIATION INTO THE JESUS PRAYER

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

When we think of a person's name, that person seems to come alive for us. A famous singer or athlete, a friend or relative: the mention of their name has the power to put them before our eyes.

Mentioning the Lord's name in faith does even more. When we call on the name of Jesus, we are actually putting ourselves in touch with His presence—a presence that is always with us. This is why people can experience the power of Christ when they call on His name in faith.

In the *Jesus Prayer* we put ourselves in the presence of Christ. We recognize that He is always with us as He promised. When we call on His name in this way, it is a saving name, with the power to bring us the mercy and love of the Father.

Scripture Readings

Ezekiel 37: 1-13

Acts 3: 1-18

Acts 16: 16-18

At Home...

Pray the *Jesus Prayer* for five minutes every day before an icon of Christ.

Session Two
SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

Each of us has something inside: an inner quality which shows itself in the way we act. People sense these energies in us and feel good or bad about them. We are unfulfilled if our inmost spirit is not in touch with the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is not just a "part" of God. This Spirit is a personal being, one of the Holy Trinity. Christ promised that the Father would send the Spirit and that His presence would be different from Christ's. Christ was sent in the flesh to a specific time and place. The Spirit would be "present in all places and filling all things" (hymn of Pentecost) forever.

The Spirit dwells within each believer who received the "seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in Chrismation. When we work along with this divine Spirit, we are freed from our physical limitations and limited personal abilities. When the Spirit takes the direction of our lives, we are brought out of our individualistic, self-centered ways and share in the divine life.

The Spirit does not force His divine life on us. We must reach inwardly to Him and grasp that life. But if we allow the Spirit of God to work through us, if we open ourselves to Him, we become powerful with the might of God working in us.

The *Jesus Prayer* accustoms us to reach inwardly, to find the source and guide of our life inside, in our spirits where the Spirit of God has taken up His dwelling.

Scripture Readings

Genesis 2	Exodus 14: 21	Ezekiel 37: 9-10
John 14: 16-17	1 Corinthians 6: 19	2 Corinthians 5: 5

At Home...

Write a reflection about your own spirit. How has it gone forth from you this week and how has it affected your environment (home, school, etc.)? Continue to pray the *Jesus Prayer* for five minutes daily.

Session Three

INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

Parents often say that their son or daughter is a “different person” outside the home, forgetting that they too are different in public. When we try to please others, we often don’t say what we feel—and that may be good. When we try to impress others, we just as often try to hide ourselves behind a false image. That’s not so good.

We say that God knows us completely, better than we know ourselves. He knows, not what we might like Him to know about us, but the entire depth of our personality and being. And knowing us in our weaknesses, our fears and our sins, He accepts us anyway! God accepts us totally for who we are, even when we don’t accept ourselves. This is what we mean by “mercy”: it is God’s *unconditional* love.

When we say God knows us as we are, we’re not just thinking about the things we’d like to hide. God sees us as we are truly meant to be as well. He sees us as made in His image (Genesis 1: 26). This means, among other things, that we have the potential to become lovers of mankind as He is. We can grow in the likeness of God, coming to love as He loves.

If we are always distracted by the things around us, we will never develop into what God wants us to be. We must learn to “lay aside all earthly cares” (Divine Liturgy) and reach inwardly to meet the Spirit of God dwelling within us. By learning to be silent, to be still we can open ourselves to the activity of God in us and come to see ourselves as He sees us.

Scripture Readings

Genesis 1: 26

Luke 15: 11-32

John 8: 1-11

At Home...

Write a reflection on what you feel about the *Jesus Prayer*. How do you feel about the silence of the prayer? Have you become more sensitive to people, more open to the things around you, more of a listener to others and to the world? Increase your daily time with the *Jesus Prayer* to seven minutes.

Session Four
PRAYER OF THE HEART

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

Our life is continually changing. Our tastes, the fashions we are so fond of, our bodies, our attitudes and even our way of seeing ourselves are all subject to change. Some change—not all—is growth and progress. As Christians, we see life as a progress to God, a pilgrimage.

But life is not just a pilgrimage *to* God; it is a pilgrimage *with* God. His Spirit dwells in us so we can live by His power and walk through life under His lead, if we so choose. And because He is always with us, we can always be in contact with Him through prayer.

The Scriptures say we should “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5: 17), because God’s Spirit is present to us without ceasing. This is why Eastern Christians have long connected the *Jesus Prayer* with the act of breathing. If we develop the practice of this prayer with every breath, we will at some time find ourselves praying the *Jesus Prayer* even when we don’t consciously sit down to do it.

This doesn’t happen overnight. But the more we devote time to the practice of this prayer, the greater the possibility of it becoming “prayer without ceasing” in us. After we do this for some time, we may find that the prayer moves inside us and acquires a rhythm all its own. It becomes a “prayer of the heart”, at the center of our existence.

When this happens, we are not saying words with our lips anymore. We are in constant contact with the Spirit who dwells in us and who transforms us by His loving presence.

Scripture Readings

1 Thessalonians 5: 17

At Home...

Continue to pray the *Jesus Prayer* before an icon of Christ for seven minutes every day.

Session Five

BREATH CONTROL AND POSTURE

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

In some non-Christian religions people believe that the body is not important, or even evil, a prison of the soul. On the other hand, many materialists and atheists believe only in the satisfaction of the body. In the Church—especially in the Eastern Christian Tradition—we stress that we are persons, and that body, soul and spirit are intertwined. We are created by God in this total way and saved by Him in this same manner.

We are called to use our whole being, including our bodies, to glorify God. Our whole existence is meant to be brought into our prayer. This is why our church services are so physical with their gestures, sights, sounds, even smells! This is because our bodies too are meant to be glorified and share in the divine nature. As we say in the creed, “I look for the resurrection of the dead”.

We bring our bodies into the *Jesus Prayer* chiefly when we join the prayer to our breath. Most people breathe poorly. Athletes and musicians, who need good breath control, learn to breath from the diaphragm. As “athletes of the Spirit”, we too try to learn proper breathing, because it enhances our experiences of the *Jesus Prayer*.

When we pray the *Jesus Prayer* and unite it with good breathing from the diaphragm, we find we can relax better and focus ourselves more on the Lord. We are better able to go within ourselves and to experience the reality of God’s Spirit who dwells there.

Scripture Readings

Genesis 2

1 Corinthians 6: 19-20

At Home...

Increase your daily prayer time to ten minutes.

Session Six
LIVING PRAYER

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

Everyone has experiences of love. Sometimes we think a person really loves us, but discover that they don't care for us any more. Then again, often our love is conditional. It depends on whether the other person loves us or does what we want them to do.

God's love, on the other hand, is unconditional. It doesn't depend on what we do. God knows us as made in His image. He sees our worth, even if we don't, and He loves us no matter what.

Christ tells us that our love for others should be like His love for us. As sharers in His divine nature, we have His Spirit within us and so we have the power of God to love in us. The more we strengthen our relationship with this indwelling Spirit, the more are we able to love with the love of God.

When we are people of continual prayer, as the *Jesus Prayer* helps us to become, we are more aware of God's Spirit within us. This fills us with the energy of God and makes us more God-like. As we become more God-like, we become more outgoing, because God is love: a love which cannot be contained. We become more like Him whom we call the Lover of mankind and who transforms us into the likeness of His heavenly Father.

Scripture Readings

John 15: 12-13

Matthew 25: 35-46
2 Peter 1: 4

Matthew 7: 20

At Home...

Continue to pray the *Jesus Prayer*. Talk about your continuing experiences with this prayer from time to time with your priest or with the catechist who led this program.

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