

# Friendship with God

Exodus 33:7-11 • Psalm 62:5-8 • Luke 5:15-16 • Luke 11:1

## Session Overview

*Discovery Aim.* The group discovers that intimate, unhurried prayer is modeled by Moses and by Jesus himself, and receives St. Teresa's definition of mental prayer as friendship with the One who we know loves us.

*Catholic Touchstone.* Contemplative prayer (CCC 2709-2719): the Church defines contemplative prayer with St. Teresa's own words and calls it the prayer of the child of God, of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved.

## What You Need to Know

Tonight the study gets practical: what do you actually do in the inner room? The Carmelite answer is mental prayer, and its charter definition belongs to St. Teresa, from the story of her own conversion in her *Life*: contemplative prayer is nothing else than a close sharing between friends, taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. The Catechism adopted that sentence word for word (CCC 2709). It is worth reading twice: prayer defined not as technique but as friendship, and not friendship with a God we hope likes us, but with him "who we know loves us."

Teresa earned that definition the hard way. By her own account in the *Life*, she spent many years struggling in prayer, distracted, lukewarm, sometimes wanting the hour to end before it began, and at one period she even gave up mental prayer under the appearance of humility. Her testimony to strugglers is therefore not theory: the fidelity matters more than the feelings, and God was working in years that felt like failure. Tell the group this; half of them need it tonight.

St. John of the Cross adds the deep register: in the Carmelite reading of his maxims, prayer matures toward silence, a loving attentiveness to God that needs fewer and fewer words. His famous saying puts the reason in one line: the Father spoke one Word, his Son, and he speaks it always in eternal silence, and in silence it must be heard by the soul. Do not push beginners into wordless prayer tonight; simply open the horizon: words serve a friendship that eventually exceeds them.

A practical method to hand the group (this framing is ours, distilled from the Carmelite tradition, not a quotation): settle the body; read a short Scripture slowly; speak to Christ about it honestly, as friend to friend; listen without hurry; end with one resolution and one thanks. Fifteen minutes. The goal this week is a daily appointment kept, not an experience achieved.

## Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 33:7-11 gives the Old Testament's most startling picture of prayer: Moses in the tent of meeting, the pillar of cloud at the door, and this: "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (33:11). The verse Teresa's definition stands on is already here, the boldest biblical image of what prayer can become, and note the word "used to": it was habitual, an appointment kept.

The Psalms teach the interior posture: "For God alone my soul waits in silence... Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him" (Psalm 62:5, 8). Waiting, trusting, pouring out: the whole range of mental prayer in three verbs.

Jesus fulfills and models it. Luke, the evangelist of prayer, shows him habitually withdrawing: "But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed" (Luke 5:16), on mountains, before dawn, all night before choosing the Twelve (6:12). The disciples watched until they finally asked for what they saw: "Lord, teach us to pray" (11:1). The Son's earthly life ran on hidden friendship with the Father; ours will not run on less.

## Voices of the Church

### **VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Avila**

"Contemplative prayer in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us." Every word is load-bearing: sharing (it is mutual), friends (it is personal), frequently (it is habitual), alone (it makes space for him), and the ground of it all: we know he loves us. Teresa also testifies in the same book that she struggled in prayer for years; the definition was forged in perseverance, not in ease.

*The Life, ch. 8, as quoted in CCC 2709.*

### **VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John of the Cross**

Among his collected maxims, St. John teaches that the Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he speaks always in eternal silence, and in silence it must be heard by the soul. Prayer, for John, therefore leans toward listening: a simple, loving attentiveness to the God who has already said everything in Christ. Words in prayer are good servants; their work is to bring us to the Word.

*Sayings of Light and Love (the numbering of the maxims varies by edition).*

### **VOICE OF THE CHURCH Venerable Jan Tyranowski**

The Krakow tailor our study keeps hinting at built his hidden life exactly here. After his conversion in 1935 he adopted a demanding daily rule: morning meditation and Mass, the Rosary at a fixed time, spiritual reading, and regular examination of conscience, hours of interior prayer fitted around a workbench. He was no priest and no scholar; he was a layman who kept the appointment. Everything God later did through him grew out of that fidelity. Late in this study, his story continues.

*From the documentation of his cause for canonization (opened 1997; declared Venerable, 2017); Session 11 tells the fuller story and names its principal memoir source.*

## **Catechism Connection**

CCC 2709 defines contemplative prayer by quoting Teresa's Life 8, then adds the Church's gloss: contemplative prayer seeks him whom my soul loves; it is Jesus, and in him, the Father.

CCC 2710 makes the practical point leaders should press tonight: the choice of the time and duration of prayer arises from a determined will, and one does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time. It adds honestly that one perseveres in it whatever the trials and dryness.

CCC 2711 compares entering into contemplative prayer to entering into the Eucharistic liturgy: we gather up the heart and recollect our whole being under the prompting of the Spirit (Session 3's shut door remains the practical threshold), and CCC 2712 gives the beautiful ground note: it is the prayer of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved. Friendship, not performance, from first to last.

### **THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)**

Thread A ("The Tailor's Apprentice") advances materially tonight: the third Voice names Venerable Jan Tyranowski for the first time and describes his rule of life, but stops before the war, the young people, and the famous student. If the group asks who he influenced, smile and say Session 11.

Sealed guess: no discussion; the folded sheets keep coming back. Session 6 is two weeks away.

Plant quietly for Session 5: if anyone says tonight that prayer has felt dry lately, honor it and say next session is entirely about that.

## **Session Goals**

1. Discover the friendship pattern: Moses face to face (Exodus 33:11) and Jesus's habitual withdrawal (Luke 5:16).
2. Receive and unpack Teresa's definition of mental prayer (CCC 2709).
3. Hand the group a simple, concrete method and a fifteen-minute daily appointment.
4. Answer the objection that silent mental prayer is unbiblical or imported from Eastern religions.

*Time note (75-90 min).* Win 10 min; Build 50 min; Send and Live It 15 min (protect the Live It tonight: the method walkthrough is the payload). If pressed, cut Q3 and let the psalm surface in the closing prayer instead.

# Friendship with God

Exodus 33:7-11 · Psalm 62:5-8 · Luke 5:15-16 · Luke 11:1

## Opening Prayer

Lord, teach us to pray. You spoke with Moses as a man speaks to his friend; you rose before dawn to be with your Father. Give us tonight the desire, the honesty, and the determined will to keep the appointment of friendship with you. Amen.

## WIN

W1. Think of your closest friendship. How did it actually get that way? What did it require?

W2. If you overheard your own prayers this past month, what kind of relationship would they suggest: customer, employee, defendant, child, friend?

## BUILD

Q1. Read Exodus 33:7-11. List everything habitual in this scene: what did Moses do regularly, and what did the LORD do regularly? Then weigh verse 11: what does "as a man speaks to his friend" tell us prayer can be?

### ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The habits: Moses used to take the tent and pitch it; he would enter; the pillar of cloud would descend; the LORD used to speak with Moses. The Hebrew narrative forms describe repeated, customary action: this was their standing appointment. And its character is the boldest line about prayer in the Torah: "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Notice the people's posture too: they rise and worship, each at his own tent door (33:10): the friend's intimacy draws the whole camp toward God. Prayer as friendship is not a mystic's indulgence; it is the engine room of the community.

### DISCOVERY MOMENT · Q2

Luke is the evangelist who keeps catching Jesus at prayer. Give the group ten minutes and the Gospel of Luke, chapters 3 through 11, and have them collect every scene where Jesus prays or withdraws to pray. Build the list on a whiteboard, then ask what patterns they see (when, where, before what).

### ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The core catch: at his baptism (3:21); withdrawing to the wilderness as crowds grew, "But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed" (5:16); all night on the mountain before choosing the Twelve (6:12); praying alone before Peter's confession (9:18); on the mountain at the Transfiguration (9:28-29); praying in a certain place until the disciples ask him to teach them (11:1). Patterns: solitary places, hinge moments, habitual withdrawal precisely when demand was highest (5:15-16 is explicit: even as his fame spread, he kept withdrawing). The Son of God ran his mission on hidden prayer. Our Lord's example is the Carmelites' entire argument.

Q3. Read Teresa's definition aloud from the Voices box: "a close sharing between friends... taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us." Which single word or phrase in it challenges your actual practice most, and why?

#### ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Let each person answer; the definition diagnoses differently. Common catches: "sharing" (my prayer is a monologue), "frequently" (mine is occasional), "alone" (mine is never undistracted), "taking time" (mine gets leftovers), and most deeply "who we know loves us" (I pray to a God I am auditioning for). Close on that last one with CCC 2712: contemplative prayer is the prayer of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved. The knowing of his love is not the reward at the end of prayer; it is the doorway at the start.

#### BUILD, THEN PRESS: SILENCE, METHOD, MYSTICISM: IS THIS EVEN CHRISTIAN PRAYER?

Full strength, from two directions at once. First: "Jesus gave us the pattern of prayer, and it is words: when you pray, say Our Father (Luke 11:2). Scripture prays psalms, petitions, thanksgivings, out loud. Nowhere does the Bible command wordless mental prayer or meditative technique; that vocabulary comes from elsewhere." Second, sharper: "This silence-and-interiority business looks suspiciously like Eastern meditation with a crucifix on the wall: emptying the mind, focusing the attention, seeking states. The Vatican itself has warned about importing such methods. Why not stay with the safe, revealed prayer of the Bible?"

Take both seriously; the second concern is one the Church has genuinely addressed.

#### ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Affirm the guard-rails: vocal prayer is revealed, commanded, and permanent (the Our Father is the model of all prayer, and the Liturgy is the Church's highest prayer); and yes, the Church has cautioned against techniques that seek emptiness or altered states as ends in themselves. But Christian mental prayer is neither of those things, and it is biblical to the bone: Isaac went out to meditate in the field (Genesis 24:63); the blessed man meditates on God's law day and night (Psalm 1:2); "For God alone my soul waits in silence" (Psalm 62:5); Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:19); and of Jesus's own long nights on the mountain (Luke 6:12) Scripture tells us the duration and the solitude, not the form. The decisive difference from Eastern technique is the direction and the destination: Christian meditation does not empty the mind toward an impersonal absolute; it fills the mind with the Word and moves through it to a Person, "him whom my soul loves" (CCC 2709). It is friendship, not state-seeking; grace welcomed, not achievement engineered. And far from replacing the Our Father, it is where the Our Father slows down enough to be meant. The Catechism's ladder holds all of it together: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer, three major expressions of one life of prayer sharing a single trait, recollection of the heart (CCC 2699), all Christ-centered, all ecclesial. Teresa and John never left the Church's prayer; they went further into it.

#### DIG DEEPER: THEY WATCHED HIM PRAY

Luke 11:1 is the only place the disciples ask Jesus to teach them anything, and the subject is prayer, and the trigger is watching him do it: "as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray." Doctrine they heard; prayer they asked for. Ask the group: who, watching you across a normal week, would be moved to ask you that question? Who in your life have you watched?

Q4. Walk through the simple method from tonight's handout (settle, read, speak, listen, resolve, thank). Which step will be hardest for you? Practice now: take four minutes of silence with tonight's memory verse, then share one sentence about what it was like, if you wish.

#### ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Run the four minutes; do not skip this, it converts the session from information to initiation. Debrief gently and honestly: distraction is universal and is not failure (Teresa was distracted for years; CCC 2729 will say next week that the battle with distraction is the ordinary weather of prayer). The measure of tonight's success is not what anyone felt in four minutes; it is that everyone leaves knowing exactly what to do tomorrow morning and believing that the Friend will be there.

## SEND

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S1. What is the concrete appointment: what time, what place, how many minutes, starting tomorrow? Say it out loud to one other person in the group.

S2. Teresa says we pray to him "who we know loves us." Do you know it? What would you ask God to do about that this week?

### Live It This Week

- Keep a daily fifteen-minute appointment of mental prayer using the method: settle, read a short passage slowly, speak honestly as friend to friend, listen without hurry, end with one resolution and one thanks.
- Use Luke 5:1-11 as your reading early in the week and Psalm 62:5-8 later; let the memory verse be your settling line each day.
- When you miss a day (someone will), do not negotiate or catch up; just keep the next appointment. Friendship survives missed coffee.

### Closing Prayer

Father, your Son rose while it was still dark to be alone with you, and he has taught us to call you our Father. Give us the grace this week to keep the appointment: to sit with you as friend with friend, to speak honestly, and to hear the one Word you are always speaking, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE · EXODUS 33:11

"Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."

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*Every passage used, in order*

| Passage                                              | Where it is used                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ex 33:7-11</b>                                    | Q1: the tent of meeting; face to face as a man speaks to his friend |
| <b>Ps 62:5-8</b>                                     | OT Roots and Live It: waiting in silence, pouring out the heart     |
| <b>Luke 3:21; 5:15-16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28-29; 11:1</b> | Discovery moment: Luke's portrait of Jesus at prayer                |
| <b>Luke 11:1-2</b>                                   | Dig Deeper and steelman: teach us to pray; the Our Father           |
| <b>Gen 24:63; Ps 1:2; Luke 2:19</b>                  | Steelman answer: meditation in Scripture; Mary pondering            |
| <b>Luke 5:1-11</b>                                   | Live It: reading for the week                                       |