

# Prayer: Finding Intimacy with God

## Session 5: *Contemplatio*: The Gaze of Love

HOME STUDY: our program is on FORMED: [www.formed.org](http://www.formed.org) – Sign-up then Login.

To sign-up for a FORMED account, use our SJN Parish subscription code: FPVD8M (all CAPS); set email & password.

- Locate our Study Program, “Lectio: Prayer”, one of these ways: 1) type “Lectio: Prayer” in the Search field then click on the result, or 2) click on the *Study tab*; then on *Bible Studies*; click on “Lectio: Prayer”.
- After arriving at “Lectio: Prayer”, scroll down, scroll to the right & select ‘Session 5’ (28 mins)

### ✦ Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,

Thank you for the gaze of love that you desire to give us in contemplation.

Teach us to cultivate a deeper love for you and for our neighbor;

That we may be ready to receive your gift of contemplation and return your gaze of love.

May we always seek your face and your presence diligently.

*Amen.*

### ✦ Introduction

Thus far on the ladder of prayer we have made full use of our minds and hearts in our encounter with God, but at the final step all of the efforts of our soul wait upon the Lord to receive his gift of *contemplatio*. Contemplation is most fully something we receive, rather than achieve, but we can prepare ourselves for it by drawing closer to God in love. As St. Gregory the Great said, “The greatness of contemplation can be given to none but those who love.”

### ✦ An Encounter with God – an Outline of the Video Discussion on FORMED:

#### I. *Contemplatio* – A Gaze of Love

- Described using analogies of tasting and seeing; needs to be shown more than explained
- Artists teach us how to see the world in a new way, with a gaze of love (Josef Pieper)
- “I gazed upon you in your sanctuary, beholding your glory and your strength” (Psalm 63:2)
- St. John Vianney recounts a conversation with an old man: “I look to God and he looks at me, and that is enough”; this man only needed to be in the presence of the Beloved

#### II. *Contemplation* – The Fruit of Love

- Contemplation takes cultivation
- St. Teresa of Avila – experience of contemplation is brief initially, but over time the experience is elongated with perseverance in prayer and the moral life
- Experience of presence – not about what we say or do, action is irrelevant; “Be still and know that I am your God” (Psalm 46:10)
- Elijah – God present in a still, small voice, not in earthquake, fire, or wind (1 Kings 19:11–12)
- Presence of the Beloved; difficult/rare because we lack love
- Lectio/mediatio/oratio* – work of obtaining water from a well; contemplation – patient reception of a gentle rain from heaven

#### III. Remember Encounters with God

- Israel remembers their encounters with God (written down in Torah, celebrate in annual feasts)
- Blaise Pascal – remembers and writes down his encounter with God on 11/23/1654
- We do this with natural love – pictures of wedding days, wedding rings, pictures of favorite trip
- Seek the face of God (like Moses at Sinai; David in Psalm 27:8)

## ✦ Being Open to God This Week: Focus on One Item This Week ✦

*Referenced Scriptures are on the pages that follow.*

### 1 *Contemplatio: The Gaze and Fruit of Love* “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away” – Song of Solomon 2:10

In *lectio divina* we put forth our full efforts of mind and heart in reading, meditating, and conversing with God – prayer requires this hard, consistent work. But the final step in our encounter with God relies more on his action as we patiently await him. *Contemplatio* culminates with the peaceful rest at the end of the arduous climb of *lectio divina*. Having encountered God, we are finally able to simply receive. *Lectio, meditatio* and *oratio* prepares our heart to receive and return God's gaze of love in contemplation. Like a farmer, after all his hard work, he must still wait patiently for the harvest before he can enjoy the results – he cannot force the fruit to ripen any earlier. This pinnacle of our encounter with God cannot fully be put into words. Guigo the Carthusian describes it as tasting “the joy of everlasting sweetness”. It is the moment our gaze is completely arrested by God and we rest in his love. Because contemplation is an ineffable experience of love, our capacity for contemplation is only as great as our love of God. We need to love more; as we grow our love, we are better able to receive the gift of contemplation and participate in that gaze of love. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

- ✦ Spend some time with the passage from the Song of Solomon 2:10–13, reflecting on God's love and his invitation to “come away”. What do you note? Reflect on its meaning. Journal your conversation with God. Take time to simply rest in God's presence.

### 2 *Adoration: An Encounter of the Beloved.* “Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love.” – Pope St. John Paul II

Pope St. John Paul II offers insights and benefits to spending time in adoration; reference these in the supplemental pages that follow under “Exercise 2”. What better way to train ourselves for *contemplatio*'s mystic gaze of love than to literally fix our gaze on our Beloved, physically present to us in the Eucharist. In Adoration we have the opportunity to practice what we long for in contemplation. Although we cannot force the experience of contemplation, even in the adoration chapel, we can practice a proper disposition for receiving the gift. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Adoration offers a refuge from the hustle and bustle that surrounds us. The Catechism says, “The choice of a favorable place is not a matter of indifference for true prayer” (CCC 2691). The silence and peace of an adoration chapel provides a favorable place. See additional reflection from Pope Benedict XVI in the supplemental pages that follow under “Exercise 2”. Even a quick visit to our Lord in the Eucharist has the potential to help us grow in love. Imagine if a husband and wife only showed affection toward each other when they could spend long periods of time together uninterrupted – how quickly marriage would run into trouble! Instead, a loving couple finds ways to pay attention to each other and offer tokens of their love with great frequency, even if it is hurried.

- ✦ Make time to visit our Lord in the tabernacle or adoration chapel this week and as you join the Beloved Disciple close to Christ's heart, practice the ‘art of prayer’ using Psalm 24:3–6

### 3 *Lectio: Elijah and the Still Small Voice.* “...the voice of the Lord is full of majesty...” – Psalm 29:4b

On Mount Horeb, Elijah experiences the presence of the Lord in the “still small voice.” Quiet. Rest. Peace. Stillness. A gaze of love between Elijah and the God he serves. See supplemental pages for “Exercise 3” to learn how St. Teresa of Avila described such an encounter with God to her sisters. Read 1 Kings 19:9-15, 18:

- ✦ What is God's question for Elijah? Why is the question unexpected?
- ✦ How is the voice of God's presence described? What adjectives are used? Look up the definitions of these words.
- ✦ What is the major repetition in this passage? What is framed by the repetition?
- ✦ Have you ever felt the trials of being faithful to God outweigh the benefits? Have you shared Elijah's despair? God meets Elijah where he is and asks, “What are you doing here?” God isn't surprised to see Elijah at Mount Horeb. God sent his angel to direct Elijah to this location. It's a question for Elijah's heart. Elijah's joy in following God no matter the consequences has been lost, and instead there is despair. How does God put Elijah back on track?
- ✦ What does it mean that Elijah is “jealous” for the Lord? How do his jealousy and faithfulness open the door to his encounter with God at Mount Horeb? What does the framing of Elijah's encounter with the repetition noted above teach us?

## ✦ Being Open to God This Week: Focus on One Item This Week ✦

*Referenced Scriptures are on the pages that follow.*

### 4 Remembering the Encounter with God “Remember the wonderful works he has done...” -- Psalm 105:5a

Memories are important. It is natural to commemorate important events. Our desire to preserve our encounters of love and friendship on the natural level points to a supernatural truth: it is right and good to commemorate our encounters with God as well. This remembering is modeled for us throughout the Scriptures. God’s people remembered their encounters with him in the Torah, in the teachings and exhortations of leaders throughout salvation history, in the prayers of the psalms, and in celebration through annual feasts.

In writing down Israel’s history in Scripture, the sacred authors record encounter after encounter between God and those he has chosen – from Adam and Eve in the garden to Noah on the ark, from God staying Abraham’s hand at the sacrifice of his beloved son to Moses leading the people out of Egypt, from David defeating Goliath to God’s protection of the three young men in the fiery furnace – salvation history is the story of how God encounters his people.

The psalms incorporate this remembering of the divine encounter into Israel’s prayer. Both psalms of lament and psalms of thanksgiving include reminders about what God did for Israel in the past, in order to inspire them, and us, to trust and praise God today and always.

✦ Read Psalm 77. How does calling to mind Israel’s past encounters with God shape the psalmist’s prayer?

Throughout Scripture, there are recollections and reminders of encounters with God, including the New Testament. We, too, must make a point to remember our encounters with God. We can be by journaling the words or verses God puts on our heart during our *lectio, meditatio, and oratio*.

✦ Spend some time joining the psalmist and his exhortation to “remember the works” of the Lord using a passage from Psalm 105:1–6

### 5 Truth and Beauty. “...we were discussing in the presence of Truth, which you are...” – St. Augustine, *Confessions*

In *Confessions*, St. Augustine relates a personal conversation and profound spiritual moment that he shared with his mother, St. Monica, only days before her death. The painting by Ary Schaeffer captures St. Augustine’s description of this.



The painting is simply done with little to distract our attention. St. Monica, clothed in shades of white, appears ready to leave this earthly world and join the white-robed multitude before the throne of God (see Revelation 7:9–14). St. Augustine, a man of thirty-three years who will spend another forty-three years serving God in the world after his mother’s death, is clothed in the more earthy hues of a tawny red. The affection between mother and son is seen in the tender way in which St. Monica holds St. Augustine’s hand. The faces of these two saints hold our attention as they behold something we cannot yet see. Their captivated gaze intensifies our longing that we too might experience such an intimate encounter with the Lord.

St. Augustine himself, in Book 9, Chapter 10 of his *Confessions* (translated by F. J. Sheed), best describes this moment that Scheffer captures on his canvas: “When the day was approaching on which she was to depart this life—a day that You knew though we did not—it came about, as I believe by Your secret arrangement, that she and I stood alone leaning in a window, which looked inwards to the garden within the house where we were staying, at Ostia on the Tiber; for there we were away from everybody, resting for the sea-voyage from the weariness of our long journey by land. There we talked together, she and I alone in deep joy;

(Continued in supplemental pages under “Exercise 5”)

## References from DVD Outline on Page 1 of this Study Guide

### 1 Kings 19:11–12

And he said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

### Psalm 27:8

You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.”

## References Supporting Exercise 1:

### Song of Solomon 2:10–13

“Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”

## References Supporting Exercise 2:

### St. John Paul adoration insights

“The Church and the world have a great need of eucharistic worship. Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love. Let us be generous with our time in going to meet Him in adoration and in contemplation that is full of faith...” (*Dominicae Cenae*, 3)

“It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. John 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the ‘art of prayer’, how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament?” *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25

### Pope Benedict XVI insights

“What matters most is that you develop your personal relationship with God. That relationship is expressed in prayer. Go by his very nature speaks, hears, and replies. Indeed, Saint Paul reminds us: we can and should ‘pray constantly’ (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Far from turning in on ourselves or withdrawing from the ups and downs of life, by praying we turn towards Go and through him to each other, including the marginalized and those following ways other than God’s path (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 33)... There is another aspect of prayer which we need to remember: silent contemplation. Saint John, for example, tells us that to embrace God’s revelation we must first listen, then respond by proclaiming what we have heard and seen (cf. 1 John 1:2 – 3; *Dei Verbum*, 1). Have we perhaps lost something of the art of listening? Do you leave space to hear God’s whisper, calling you forth into goodness? Friends, do not be afraid of silence or stillness, listen to Go, adore him in the Eucharist. Let his word shape your journey as an unfolding of holiness.”

*April 19, 2008. Address upon Meeting with Young People and Seminarians.*

### Psalm 24:3–6

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

## References Supporting Exercise 3:

### St. Teresa of Avila

“In this way His Majesty shows that He is listening to the person who is addressing Him, and that, in His greatness, He is addressing her, by suspending the understanding, putting a stop to all thought, and, as we say, taking the words out of her mouth, so that even if she wishes to speak she cannot do so, or at any rate not without great difficulty. Such a person understands that, without any sound of words, she is being taught by this Divine Master, Who is suspending her faculties, (continued on next page)

## References Supporting Exercise 3 -- continued:

which, if they were to work, would be causing her harm rather than profit. The faculties rejoice without knowing how they rejoice; the soul is enkindled in love without understanding how it loves; it knows that it is rejoicing in the object of its love, yet it does not know how it is rejoicing in it. It is well aware that this is not a joy which can be attained by the understanding; the will embraces it, without understanding how; but in so far as it can understand anything, it perceives that this is a blessing which could not be gained by the merits of all the trials suffered on earth put together. It is a gift of the Lord of earth and Heaven, Who gives it like the God He is. This, daughters, is perfect contemplation.”

– *Way of Perfection, chapter 25*

### 1 Kings 19:9-15, 18

And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Eli’jah?” He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” And he said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Eli’jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, “What are you doing here Eli’jah?” He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even only I am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” And the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive you shall anoint Haz’ael to be king over Syria;... Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Ba’al, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

## References Supporting Exercise 4:

### Psalm 77

Due to the length of the Psalm, please refer to the Bible.

### Psalm 105:1–6

O give thanks to the Lord, call his name, make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works! Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice! Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually! Remembering the wonderful works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of Abraham his servant, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!

## References Supporting Exercise 5 – continue from Exercise 5 under “Being Open to God This Week”

and forgetting the things that were behind and looking forward to those that were before (Philippians 3:13), we were discussing in the presence of Truth, which You are (John 14:6, 2 Peter 1:12), what the eternal life of the saints could be like, which eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man (1 Corinthians 2:9). But with the mouth of our heart we panted for the high waters of Your fountain, the fountain of life which is with You: that being sprinkled from that fountain according to our capacity, we might in some sense mediate upon so great a matter. And our conversation had brought us to this point, that any pleasure whatsoever of the bodily senses, in any brightness whatsoever of corporeal light, seemed to us not worthy of comparison with the pleasure of that eternal Light, not worthy even of mention. Rising as our love flamed upward towards that Selfsame, we passed in review the various levels of bodily things, up to the heavens themselves, whence sun and moon and minds and speaking and marveling at Your works: and so we came to our own souls, and went beyond them to come at last to the region of richness unending (Ezekiel 34:14), where You feed Israel (Psalm 79:2) forever with the food of truth: and there life is that Wisdom by which all things are made (John 1:3), both the things that have been and the things that are yet to be. But this Wisdom itself is not made: it is as it has ever been, and so it shall be forever: indeed “has ever been” and “shall be forever” and “to be going to be” are not eternal. And while we were thus talking of His Wisdom and panting for it, with all the effort of our heart we did for one instant attain to touch it; then sighing...”