

Improving Conscious Contact: The Ancient Path to Prayer k.wilson
#4 Open the Eyes of My Heart

God is restoring an ancient path to prayer, because without conscious contact with him, we don't do well; we shrivel up inside.

So where have we been on this path, so far? We began with Jesus on the path to prayer: a place where he was soaked in Abba's love; a place he needed to go often and that produced in him the tenderest love for others.

Then we turned to Paul on this same path: Paul sees Jesus as the portal to the heavenly realms; a transcendent-parallel dimension, marked by lavish, grace-laden forgiving love. The same place Jesus was soaked in love. A realm which is also a **communion of saints** (forgiven sinners surrendering to divine love) and **fellowship of the spirit**. Where Paul holds us (loved ones) in memory in the Presence of Divine Love. And maybe we can too.

Today: the place in us that interfaces heavenly realms thru the Spirit.
Eph. 1: 15-19a

Last week, we introduced the **internet** as an analogy for understanding the spiritual realm [thanks to Phyllis Tickle.] That place in the realm under the dominion of divine love by virtue of being in Christ--something like an online community. In some sense the **internet is a place**: because we all know that we "**go online**," albeit a different kind of place, a virtual one.

How do we "go online"? We sit down in front of a computer, at home or at work and we log in & dial up. The computer becomes a nodal point on the internet. The **human person** as a temple of Holy Spirit, especially the heart, is such a nodal point in the heavenly realms—we go online through the human heart. The **software** we need for this entry into the place of Abba's love, is the gospel. "**and you also were included in Christ** [in the heavenly realms] **when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**" (Eph. 1: 13)

The place we go is **virtual**, not **material**, but we get there through the heart—the heart of Jesus mingled with our own.

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.” (Eph. 1: 17-19)

Paul is our **sponsor** on the Jesus Path (a path marked by Twelve Steps) and now he’s praying for our Step 11: **“sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him...”**

So he’s praying for our understanding of God—that we may know him better. It’s conscious contact we need. Because he longs for this for us, he also prays that ***“the eyes of your heart may be enlightened”***

Bingo! This is where we connect into this online community of divine love, under the reign of Jesus. This is the nodal point, the interface between us and heavenly realms. So **of course** he would want the **eyes** of our **hearts enlightened**. We **need to go online** and often. We need to get pickled in the Father’s love like the Son, but now through the Son in order that we would be filled with the tenderest love for others, and come into the world shining, like Moses down from the mountain.

Let’s understand: ***“the eyes of your heart may be enlightened”***

“heart”: is a another rich biblical word. Gk. **dianoia**; root, nous, to know. “A thinking through or over, a meditation” (Vine) Translated: mind, thought, heart, imagination.

eyes (Gk. ophthalmos) of your heart **enlightened** (Gk. photizo) suggest that Paul has the heart in it’s imaginative capacity especially in mind. Imagination, is a after all, a seeing with the heart.

Let’s stop for a moment to catch up with ourselves. This is a multi-textured notion. Wherever it is prayer happens in us, it’s a richer, deeper place than the place we balance our checkbook. But we don’t have language or understanding in our reductionist **modern**

worldview that accounts for this. So it sounds like **mystical mumbo jumbo** or late night new agey cable mush. Because modernity has **stripped us naked** practically. That is, the underlying assumptions of the dominant modern worldview (at least in N. America and Europe) have reduced us to some kind of **computer** wrapped in **meat** and **skin**.

It's a **crying shame** we think in this stripped down way, that we don't understand the riches of our own hearts because a more spiritually informed view of the heart is as biblical as Moses or David or Jesus.

If we **dip back** into a Christian tradition that wasn't so taken with the rationalism-gone-wild materialism that fueled modernity, we could do worse than look at the Orthodox tradition, the Eastern wing of Christianity, which is after all a Near Eastern religion in it's roots.

Orthodox Christians speak of prayer as "descending with the mind into the heart." The heart being understood as this deeper and richer realm within us. Not a **mindless** place, because we go with the mind into the heart, but a more **fertile** place than just a thinking place. A place of our **fullest humanity**: of our deepest longings, desires, feelings. A place of thought, **decision**, of **memory** and **imagination**. If our **bodies** are a **temple** for the Spirit, then **this place** is the **holy of holies**.

And the ancients thought of it as right here in the chest: this heart-lung-respiring, thumping, rhythmic nexus. Where Heb. ruah and Gk. pneuma (breath-spirit) go. Right here is a pretty good place to locate it, matter of fact. Close to our literal center of gravity. The place in us that begins functioning by day 24, post fertilization. Literally descends from neural plate down into what becomes the chest in the embryo. The place in us that when it stops ticking, we move on. The place our vaunted brains are screwed into to hold them secure.

Is "the heart" as Paul speaks of it, literally right here? I'm not sure where to locate it, precisely, or even whether it admits of precise location. But I do know it's **in us**, and it is **deeper than mind**, which is maybe why it's experienced by many, right here in the chest.

Is it any wonder that St. Paul wants this place in us to wake up?
Because in order to go online, we first need to fire up the home computer.

And now I'd like to cash in whatever equity I may have with you to tell you what's been happening with me in the prayer department lately. I've had the experience of descending with my mind into my heart. It happens with a sense of profound stillness inwardly. This experience has taken my prayer life to a new place, literally, I think or at least I wonder.

Some time ago this experience was accompanied by a sense of a visual landscape, as the eyes of my heart seemed to open. This was unusual for me because my imagination doesn't tend toward visual images, but that's been changing. So anyway. I find myself, in my mind's eye, in a cave. The only light in the cave is from a fire like a campfire. Jesus is standing in the cave. I can see him with my mind's eye. So I sit down next to him and together we simply look at the fire.

I wish I could describe the wonder of this. It was like the first time I can remember driving in the car with Nancy when we were first falling in love. We had that experience where we both knew it wasn't important to "keep up the conversation" because we were both content to be in the other's presence. It was like that only with Jesus, looking together at this fire in this cave.

And then I began to cry. Literally, or actually, or with saline tears falling down my face. I was just aware of myself as a sinner. Not any particular sin so much as the sin condition. I was one of those—a sinner. And I knew he knew. And he understood with me, that it really is a shame to be a sinner. It's lousy state to be in. But he was regarding me, in my sin status, with sympathetic understanding. And with the most powerful and tender love. At that moment, I almost thought the angels would envy my sinner status to be able to experience the marvel of this love He has for sinners. So this went on for a while. He had his arm around me during this time.

Then I asked if I could remember some loved ones with him there and he nodded yes. So I named the loved ones—starting with my immediately family members, then extended family members, the

church staff and their family members if I knew them, and down the list. And with each person mentioned or remembered there with him, he would nod in recognition. It was like a couple of high school friends who are now 20 years out of school and get together for coffee after not seeing each other. How they remember mutual friends and reconnect through that process. It was like that only infinitely better than that.

At various points, he indicated things about the person I remembered before him. At one point, I told him about a family member of a friend of mine who was a single mom, had a daughter, and was now married. When I mentioned the daughter to him, he said, “And another one’s on the way.” And I thought, “this is a data point!” So I later checked with my friend who told me that yes his extended family member was pregnant and how did I know because it was brand new news—a long awaited pregnancy as the couple were having difficulty conceiving. This suggested to me that this experience of prayer was something more than “just in my imagination.” That, and one other thing.

I noticed after this time of prayer was over that I felt almost frightened by the depth of intimacy with Jesus. That was a sign of authenticity to me because I know that deeper intimacy can often provoke fear, because we fear intimacy even though we long for it. So the next time I prayed in this way (the next morning) I had to talk myself into surrendering again to Jesus—not to pull back, but to surrender, whatever he wanted.

So here’s something you can add to that “Be in a Room Exercise”

Be in a Room Exercise

“I have discovered that all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they are unable to stay quietly in their own room.” –Paschal

1. Find a space, then sit down and enjoy the space.
2. Savor the tone of the transcendent-parallel place in Eph. 1:3-10

Having established a sense of the place, two options...

3. Hold loved ones in memory before this Love.

-and/or--

4. Place yourself by imagination into the scene of a text.
Imagining yourself right there, look around.

+ For example, Psalm 23. See yourself in your mind's eye (through the eyes of your heart) lying on the green pastures of Psalm 23, next to the quiet waters, etc. Place yourself in the scene evoked by the words of the Psalm. And what point are those words, if not to call a scene to mind—to open the eyes of your heart?

+ Or try this at the suggestion of Brother Lawrence in *Practicing the Presence of God*. See yourself as the blind and paralyzed beggar at the rich man's door in the parable about Lazarus (the Rich Man, if I've got my Bible straight) and Divies. Picture yourself in that condition, what it would feel like to be at the rich man's gate, ignored most of the time. Then, Jesus or one of his disciples passes by. Picture what Jesus or one of his disciples—I'd go for John, who seemed to catch the love bit—would do to tend to your condition. When I did this, I pictured my sore infested face being washed for the first time in days. I sensed what it would be like to be given a cool drink of water.

Or any other biblical text that so moves you will do.

What are you doing?

You are giving yourself permission to engage the text and the Lord of the text with your whole heart, including your imagination. (By way, it's commanded: "Love the Lord your God with your whole dianyos [mind-heart]" "Treasure these words in your heart" So if it feels odd, get over it. Isn't this just the most sensitive advice you've ever received?)

At first (either in the session, or the first number of times you try this) it way feel self-directed. Then you will find that it has a life of its own. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is involved, that's why, if he's dwelling in your heart. And all that takes is surrender to Jesus.

For some, this may feel a little self-conscious: “I’m using my imagination. I feel like a Junior High boy in art class being asked to tap into his artistic self.” For the love of God and yourself, get over it.

When after the fact, you notice that something has kicked in, take note of what it felt like. The sense of it. That’s your heart you’re sensing dude! And there’s plenty more where that comes from!