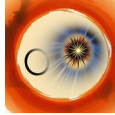


Series: From Ego to...?



Episode: 4.

The Inner Turning

Tony Macelli

How does the self actually get healed and transformed? What “inner turning” is needed to better align with divine grace in such a process. Probably not by gritting our teeth or mastering a perfect spiritual technique — more often, it’s about learning how to work with grace instead of against it. In this episode, we’ll explore seven time-tested Living Orientations — from silence and surrender to trust and deep interior prayer — each one a way of spotting the path grace may already be tracing in your soul. Along the way, you’ll meet wise guides in the form of contemplative Christian teachers past and present who’ve walked ahead and left their maps behind for us.

Here I use the phrase ‘living orientation’ to name the subtle art of inner turning—an active, ever-renewing disposition that leads us, trusting and courageous, into the unknown as we yield to the transforming grace and loving embrace of God. Other names for this are mostly subject to various

IN THIS SERIES...

In Episode 1 “What is the Ego?” we saw how the false self is a survival structure—formed through adaptation and fear—that can obscure our true nature in God.

In Episode 2 “Ego and Transformation” we saw how Christian contemplative teachers, through their own lived experience, guide us in loosening the ego’s grip and cooperating with grace in times of disruption and change.

In Episode 3 “Preparing for Healing and Transformation” we saw how the healing of the ego takes root through daily practices of surrender and silence, making space for inner clarity, emotional release, and a more spacious identity to emerge.

Today in Episode 4 “The Inner Turning” we see how grace often meets us in the subtle shift of an “inner turning,” where our task is not to invent a perfect method but to notice and consent to what God is already beginning in us. Through seven time-tested “living orientations,” we explore ways to deepen that consent — from stillness to surrender, trust to embodied presence — each a doorway into the healing and transformation already unfolding.

misleading connotations, such as being static or predictable: *inner stance, inner commitment, method, disposition, process, and others*. While ‘orientation’ suggests a definite direction, ‘living’ suggests a dynamic, unpredictable unfolding.

Out of the teachings of various Christian mystics of East and West—ancient and contemporary—we may distinguish seven “living



orientations,” presented below. They can be experienced as distinct paths, yet they often overlap in practice. One might imagine them as different trails converging on the same clearing in the forest.

Each arises from a different spiritual terrain—silence, surrender, attention, humility—but from within the Christian mystical perspective, each is understood as leading toward the same inner healing and transformation: the letting go of the self incapable of divine love and the emergence of the self already abiding in God’s love—indeed, *as* God’s love. This synthesis reflects in one interpretation of how these traditions interrelate; other practitioners or scholars may frame the connections differently.

Each living orientation offers a different way of cooperating with grace. They are not mutually exclusive — they’re like doors, each opening into the same room of healing. You may be drawn to silence and stillness. Or it may be mercy, watchfulness, or the simple repetition of a sacred word that draws you.

-o-

Seven Living Orientations - which one is for me?

Before we look at the seven living orientations for the needed inner turning, there is an important caution any genuine contemplative guide would give.

Which living orientation should I choose? The answer, in the contemplative tradition, is not to ‘choose’ in the modern sense of selecting a preferred product, but rather: To listen inwardly for the living orientation that is already beginning within you.

Here’s the thing: the false self can’t heal itself, no matter how hard it tries. The ego loves to collect methods like trophies — “If I just find the right tool, I can fix myself.” Grace works differently. It waits for our yes. Choosing too aggressively can just replay the ego’s old game. Contemplative practice begins instead by noticing: what is grace already stirring in me?

This isn’t a spiritual buffet, and you’re not here to pile your plate high with whatever looks tasty. The ego loves that kind of variety-shopping — “Ooh, I’ll take a spoonful of this, a dash of that, and maybe something Instagrammable on the side.” But that’s not how grace works, it’s how ego works. If we let ego lead the way, it’ll pick a path for all the wrong reasons: comfort, novelty, or the glow of self-importance. The better way is to tune in for the quieter invitation — the one that doesn’t shout but somehow feels meant for you.

Each ‘living orientation’ corresponds to a particular inner... well, orientation. A person gripped by fear may intuitively resonate with trust in divine mercy. A busy professor, student, or an obsessive thinker, or some other person flooded by overthinking may long for silence and stillness. A business executive, a large agency manager, or a leader



with a directive style of leadership, or someone else exhausted by control may find that ‘letting go’ calls from somewhere deeper than intention. In each of those examples, the ego may easily decide wrongly.

A busy professor, student, or obsessive thinker—someone habitually immersed in mental activity—may feel drawn toward silence and stillness. By contrast, a business ex-

ecutive, large-agency manager, or leader with a directive style—accustomed to control—may experience a deep inner prompting toward letting go. These illustrative examples are not psycho-spiritual diagnoses, but possibilities echoed in spiritual literature (for example, Gerald May’s *Addiction and Grace*, 1988). In both cases, the seeker’s initial choice of practice may be mistaken if guided only by habit rather



than discernment.

A person in Christ, open to the Holy Spirit, with the intention of deepening her or his unity with God will be able to rely on being guided. As Cistercian Abbott Thomas Keating asserts in one his workshops on *Centering Prayer*:

“In this talk we're emphasising the method, and so you could easily get stuck on, well, how to do the method just right. But it's always a relationship. And that means unlike certain other disciplines ... if you don't do it correctly, it doesn't matter. It's a help if you do it correctly, but it doesn't matter because it's your intention that counts, and the relationship is with God and God sees that you're trying hard to do a nice job, the best you can, however much you're stumbling.”

“He's not going to hold your mistakes against you. He's looking at your love, and through another person or book eventually, or through the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, you'll correct whatever mistakes you're doing. The main thing to do is to do it. The principal method of *Centering Prayer* is to sit down! Now that isn't too hard for most people. [audience laughs]”

“Once you sit down, then the Spirit has sort of got you, especially if you are determined to sit there for the 20, 25 minutes that you have agreed upon. If you do that every day, then your mistakes and misconceptions will gradually evaporate. Doing it is the primary discipline! But there are ways of doing it that facilitate this sitting.” (Keating, 2017 –

from transcript)

These different living orientations, and others, aren't mutually exclusive - they're like doors, each opening to the same room. Seek to notice what you may already be drawn toward in your own present season.

The spiritual heart, an organ for tuning into spiritual realities, already knows its next step. That's a basic contemplative truth: you're not starting from zero — something in you already longs for healing. These seven Living Orientations aren't prescriptions but recognitions, *mirrors* for what's already moving in you, however faintly. Don't overanalyse; just notice: which one touches that longing? Which one feels like home, like a challenge, or like an invitation?

As you read through these seven living orientations, don't try to pick “the best” one. Instead, pay attention to which one seems to be noticing you. This isn't a supermarket aisle. These aren't items to choose off a shelf; they're movements that might already be choosing you. Not products, not skills — but relational openings into a deeper life that's been here all along.

Which living orientation reflects something already stirring in my depths — perhaps quietly, perhaps urgently? That may be the place where grace is already waiting to begin its work. Perhaps waiting for my permission? Grace is not ultimately dependent on human permission, but our conscious willingness can open the way for its deeper work. You might say the Holy Spirit is somewhat ‘shy’!

-0-

The gentle beginning: listening before 'choosing'

Instead of picking the practice of a living orientation, the way forward for most of us is probably a sequence like this:

- First, learn to listen to the heart – that subtle, God-attuned inner place most of us are barely in touch with.
- Begin with silence – not as an empty trance, but as consented, receptive awareness in God's presence.
- Familiarise yourself with the orientations – lightly, without trying to "do" them all at once.
- Discern – over time, one of these paths may begin to draw you in more deeply.
- Commit to living it – giving it the time and faithfulness needed for it to bear real fruit.
- Only later, once well-rooted, might you find the Spirit integrating elements from another orientation to balance or deepen your journey.

A helpful analogy. Think of the great world religions. They share certain truths, and a seasoned practitioner of one may wisely draw on elements from another – but



only after being firmly grounded in the depth of a single path. If you try to walk several paths at once, you rarely make much progress; you remain on the surface, achieving width but not depth.

It's much the same here. The seven Living Orientations spring from different spiritual landscapes — silence, surrender, watchfulness, humility, and more. They share deep kinship, but each is a whole, self-contained way. They gain their universality and transformative power through depth, not through borrowing.

Why start with silence?

Silence is the clearing where the loud, restless voices of ego start to quiet, even briefly, allowing the delicate movements of the spiritual heart to be felt.

Martin Laird puts it simply:

“When we notice that we have been taken away by thought, the work is simply to come back – again and again – to the silence where God dwells.”

This is not about achieving special states. It is about returning, gently and repeatedly, until we begin to sense a deeper current beneath the noise.

This isn't about chasing special states. It's about coming back, gently, again and again, until you start to feel a deeper current moving beneath all the noise



About the seven living orientations

These living orientations are drawn from the Christian mystical tradition, East and West. They are gifts left to us by those who travelled the inner road before us. They overlap in some ways, but each has its own texture, rhythm, and demands.

Here, they are presented not as a checklist, but like a gallery of doorways you may walk past in your early days, simply noticing which feels strangely familiar. Over time, one may open to you in a way the others do not.

Until then: stay with simple, faithful silence. Read the descriptions slowly. If something nudges your heart, let it rest there – without rushing.

-o-

Practice

Beginning in silence – a gentle daily practice

Before moving deeper, you can root yourself with this simple form of daily silent prayer. This is not about performance or achievement, but presence and consent.

- Prepare a quiet space
- Find a place where you can sit undisturbed for a few minutes.
- Sit comfortably, with feet on the ground and hands at rest.
- Set your intention
- Offer your time to God, Christ, Holy Spirit, or the Ultimately Real as you understand That.
- Silently: "Here I am; help me listen."
- Settle in
- Close your eyes gently.

- Notice your breath coming and going. There is no need to control it; simply attend.
- When thoughts distract, just notice and gently return to resting in God.
- Attune to the heart
- Bring your awareness to the chest or heart area as you breathe.
- Notice if any subtle feelings, invitations, or inner movements arise – do not push or force anything; just notice.
- Consent and wait
- Give silent permission for God to act as God chooses within you.
- You do not need to make anything happen; trust that your simple presence is enough.
- Close
- After 5–10 minutes, open your eyes gently.
- Offer thanks for whatever occurred or apparently did not.

It is normal to face restless thoughts, emotional waves, discomfort, or impatience. As shared in Episode 3, welcome what arises without judgement – distraction or resistance is not failure, but a friendly opportunity to return to silence and let grace do its work.

-o-

The Seven Living Orientations

Distilled from the teaching of contemplative Christian writers, these orientations describe ways of living in consent to grace, rather than being techniques to master.



Table 1 – Silence / Stillness / Interior Quiet

Silence is not the absence of sound but the deep presence of God. In stillness, the compulsions of the false self lose their grip—not by suppression, but by disuse. What remains is a spacious receptivity where grace works unseen, softening the heart and quieting the mind.



Author / Source	Living Orientation	Summary of Method or Practice
Laird, Martin (2006)	Interior silence	Resting attention in simple, receptive silence allows compulsive thought patterns and egoic reactions to lose their grip.
Palamas, Gregory (1983a, Triad II, Treatise ii)	Noetic prayer	Prayer of the <i>nous</i> (spiritual intellect) in the heart, illuminating the soul and quietly freeing it from ego-driven passions.
Theophan the Recluse (2010, Ch. 2)	Standing in the heart	Attentive repetition of the Jesus Prayer from the heart, remaining present before God in stillness.

Cross-reference: For a related path that builds on interior quiet by opening into an attitude of trustful release, see Table 2 – Letting Go / Surrender / Consent.

Table 2 – Letting Go / Surrender / Consent

The false self clings to control, but healing begins when we stop tightening our grip. This orientation is about yielding to God’s action in the present moment, trusting that love is already at work. Letting go is not defeat — it is deep alignment with the One who transforms



Author / Source	Living Orientation	Summary of Method or Practice
Keating, Thomas (Open Mind, Open Heart, 2006)	Centering Prayer (consent)	A daily act of consent to God’s action within, consenting to God’s presence and action. Gently using a sacred word to absorb the attention momentarily when a thought is noticed; returning to the gap between the thoughts
Cynthia Bourgeault (Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening, 2004)	Letting go (<i>kenosis</i>)	A daily practice of self-emptying trust, following the pattern of Jesus’ <i>kenosis</i> (self-emptying), allowing love’s deeper current to guide.
Gerald May (Addiction and Grace, 1988)	Consent to grace	Healing unfolds when we release control and allow God-given goodness to surface from within.
Ruth Burrows (Essence of Prayer, 2006)	Passive availability	Letting go of spiritual striving allows God to act within the soul.
Pseudo-Dionysius (The Mystical Theology, ch.	Unknowing surrender	Releasing all images and concepts so the soul may be drawn into the healing darkness of God’s mystery.

us.

Cross-reference: For an orientation that focuses on the moment-to-moment noticing and disidentification from thoughts, see Table 3 – Watchfulness / Attention to Thoughts.

Table 3 – Watchfulness / Attention to Thoughts

Watchfulness (*nepsis*) is the gentle art of noticing the movements of the heart and mind without identifying with them. The aim is not to suppress thoughts but to see them clearly, letting their hold loosen. Over time, the soul grows free from the stories the ego tells.



Author / Source	Living Orientation	Summary of Method or Practice
Evagrius Ponticus (Praktikos, §§6–15)	Awareness of thoughts	Noticing, naming, and letting go of inner impulses to weaken the patterns that feed the ego.
St. Hesychios (Philokalia, vol. 1)	Watchfulness (<i>nepsis</i>)	Continual guarding of the heart, joined with the Jesus Prayer, keeps out distracting thoughts and nurtures grace.
James Finley (Merton’s Palace of Nowhere, 1978)	Witnessing illusion	Seeing the thought-driven “separate self” as illusory, allowing one to rest again in God’s love and communion.

Cross-reference: To explore how watchfulness can mature into deeper heart-centred presence, see Table 4 – Descent into the Heart / Prayer of the Heart.

Table 4 – Descent into the Heart / Prayer of the Heart

To descend into the spiritual heart is to centre one’s attention not in thought, but in God’s presence. This is not the emotional or physical heart, exactly. Prayer here is less about words than about being-with. Grace works by drawing the self into its true home, where all that is false falls away in love.



Author / Source	Living Orientation	Summary of Method or Practice
Gregory Palamas (1983a, Triad II, Treatise ii)	Noetic prayer	Prayer of the heart in which the <i>nous</i> rests in God, illumining and purifying the soul.
Theophan the Recluse (2010 Ch.2)	Standing in the heart	Remaining present before God in stillness, repeating the Jesus Prayer with inward attention.
Freeman, Laurence (WCCM)	Loosening ego-narratives	Silent meditation with an Aramaic prayer word, <i>maranatha</i> , letting the stories of the separate self fade as divine communion deepens.

Cross-reference: For a complementary practice that includes the body’s awareness in prayer, see Table 5 – Embodied Presence / Breath–Body Awareness.

Table 5 – Embodied Presence / Breath–Body Awareness

The false self often operates through disconnection — especially from the body. Reclaiming the body as a place of divine presence restores wholeness. Breath, posture, and sensation become doorways to awareness, grounding prayer in the life we actually live.



Author / Source	Living Orientation	Summary of Method or Practice
Tilden Edwards (Living in the Presence, 1987)	Spacious receptivity	Letting go of grasping in prayer to create a spacious inner openness for God’s transforming presence.
Shalem Institute	Body–breath–mind prayer	Integrating simple breath awareness with bodily presence in prayer, releasing tension; parallels with hesychast breath-and-prayer rhythm.

Cross-reference: For an approach that shifts the heart toward deep trust beyond self-justification, see Table 6 – Trust in Divine Mercy / Self-forgetting Humility.

Table 6 – Trust in Divine Mercy / Self-forgetting Humility

Ego resists mercy because it wants to earn, justify, or control. Humility accepts God’s love without qualification. This is not self-denial but self-forgetfulness, where we are freed from the endless work of defending an identity.



Author / Source	Living Orientation	Summary of Method or Practice
Augustine (1991, X.28–29)	Humility and dependence	Acknowledging one’s need for God’s mercy and relying on grace rather than self-justification.
Theophylact (2007 ch. 18)	Rest in mercy	Abandoning self-defence before God, resting in mercy to reshape the soul.
Gregory the Great	Gentle detachment	Patient detachment from self-will through steady, merciful correction.
Rohr, Richard (CAC)	Divine therapy	Humble recognition of need; allowing God, not effort, to transform the heart.

Cross-reference: For a form of prayer that unites humility with illumination of the soul, see Table 7 – Interior Illumination / Noetic Prayer.

Table 7 – Interior Illumination / Noetic Prayer

In Orthodox Christian teaching, noetic prayer is the prayer of the *nous*—the innermost spiritual faculty or “eye of the heart” that, when purified, knows God directly and beyond conceptual reasoning (cf. Palamas, Gregory, 1983a, Triad II, Treatise ii). This form of prayer is inward, heart-centred attentiveness, in which the mind rests in God’s presence. In this quiet union, the soul is illumined, and the ego’s passions are gently extinguished.



Author / Source	Living Orientation	Summary of Method or Practice
Theophan the Recluse (2010, Ch. 2)	Standing in the heart	Steadfast prayer before God using the Jesus Prayer, with attention focused within the (spiritual) heart.
Palamas, Gregory (1983a, Triad II, Treatise ii).	Noetic prayer	Inward prayer of the heart where the <i>nous</i> rests in God, illumining and purifying the soul from passions.

Cross-reference: To see how this illumination rests on the foundation of silence, see Table 1 – Silence / Stillness / Interior Quiet.

For Reflection, alone or in a group

If you are in a small group, such as a contemplative practice group, or you would like to go deeper, consider these discussion points together after practice. Each is informed by common challenges explored in Episode 3.

What emerges in your silence? Are there recurring thoughts or emotions? Do any particular living orientations begin to quietly call to you? If not, there is no hurry.

Which challenge resonates most today? Do you notice inner resistance? Flood of distractions? Impatience for results? Spiritual ambition? How did you respond – with judgement, gentle return, or self-acceptance?

How do you experience consent and letting go in your actual sitting, not just in theory? Is there a moment where you sense yourself relaxing control, or do you catch the ego stepping in?

If practising with others: Invite each person to share a moment from the week when silence or letting go brought clarity or difficulty. Compare notes on ways the spiritual heart nudges you beneath surface thoughts or ego-noise.

Support and encouragement: Revisit Episode 3's guidance – distraction, impatience, vulnerability and even subtle pride are part of the journey, not defects. How can the group gently support one another and normalise these as invitations to deeper trust rather than obstacles?

Additional ways of reflecting

These basic daily silence and discussion frameworks can be further adapted. In later stages, you may wish to explore journalling some time after silence. Creative expression through art or poetry may be fruitful. If you meet for contemplative practice in a group, consider a paired reflection in which two participants share more deeply. Each offers a different way of noticing and responding to the movements of the spiritual heart.

Final word

What matters first is not which path you 'choose', but that you become still enough to let the right one be given to you. Depth before width. Listening before choosing. In God's time, the path will find you. Rest assured that the Holy Spirit already knows you better than you know yourself.



Bibliography: Healing, Inner Turning, Transformation



This bibliography includes all primary sources cited the present and previous Episodes (3 and 4) except those in the Appendix below. Each entry has been reviewed for accessibility: either a book widely available from online booksellers or a reliable online source. This makes it easy for you to look up an author or source of a practice or method. Where applicable, a brief note or link has been added to help you locate the material directly.

Augustine. (1991). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

Bourgeault, Cynthia (2003). *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart*. Jossey-Bass.

Bourgeault, Cynthia (2004). *Centering prayer and inner awakening*. Cowley Publications.

Burrows, Ruth (1976). *Guidelines for mystical prayer*. Sheed & Ward.

Burrows, Ruth (2006). *Essence of prayer*. Continuum.

Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC). (2023, March 10). *Healing by grace* [Audio podcast].

Contemplative Outreach. (n.d.). *Centering prayer: A way of consent—Online guide*. Retrieved August 5, 2025, from <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/> Note: Contemplative Outreach is the world network that is home to Centering Prayer, founded by Trappist monk and Abbott Fr Thomas Keating (1923–2018), the Trappist monk and founder of Centering Prayer, and his Trappist and lay colleagues. The site is very rich in resources for self-help, inspiration, and networking.

Edwards, T. (1980). *Spiritual friend: Reclaiming the gift of spiritual direction*. Paulist Press.

Edwards, T. (1987). *Living in the presence: Spiritual exercises to open our lives to the awareness of God*. HarperSanFrancisco.

Evagrius Ponticus. (1981). *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer*. Cistercian Publications.

Evagrius Ponticus. (2003). *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer* (J. E. Bamberger, Trans.). Cistercian Publications.

Finley, James (1978). *Merton's palace of nowhere: A search for God through awareness of the true self*. Ave Maria Press.

Gregory the Great. (2007). *Pastoral Rule* (G. Demacopoulos, Trans.). St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Hesychios the Priest. (1983). In E. Kadloubovsky & G. E. H. Palmer (Trans.), *The Philokalia: Volume 1* (G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, & K. Ware, Eds.). Faber & Faber.

Keating, Thomas (2006). *Open mind, open heart: The contemplative dimension of the Gospel* (20th anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury

Keating, Thomas (2017, September 13). *The method of Centering Prayer – Part 1* [Video]. Contemplative Outreach. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FWvxwfnCE> Note: Many related teachings and first-person testimonies of practitioners can be found on this YouTube channel from Contempla-

tive Outreach ([contemplativeoutreach.org](https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org))

Laird, M. (2006). *Into the silent land: A guide to the Christian practice of contemplation*. Oxford University Press.

May, G. G. (1988). *Addiction and grace: Love and spirituality in the healing of addictions*. HarperSanFrancisco. Note: a 1999 edition also exists.

Merton, T. (1972). *New seeds of contemplation*. New Directions.

Palamas, Gregory (1983a). *The Triads* (J. Meyendorff, Ed.; N. Gendle, Trans.). Paulist Press. (Original work published 14th c.)

PseudoDionysius the Areopagite. (1987). *The Mystical Theology*. In C. Luibheid & P. Rorem (Trans.), *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Paulist Press.

PseudoDionysius. (1987). *The complete works* (C. Luibheid & P. Rorem, Trans.). Paulist Press.

Rohr, Richard (2019, December 15). *Divine therapy* [Daily Meditation]. Center for Action and Contemplation. Retrieved August 5, 2025, from <https://www.cac.org/>

Rush, S. (2018, December 13). *A prayer for living and dying* [Daily Meditation]. Center for Action and Contemplation. Retrieved August 5, 2025, from <https://www.cac.org/>

Shalem Institute. (2016, November 22). *Collaboration as a quality of contemplative leadership*.

Shalem Institute. (2019). *Annual report 2018–2019*.

Shalem Institute. (n.d.). *SOCp script: Presence through body, breath, and mind*. Retrieved August 5, 2025, from <https://www.shalem.org/>

Theophan the Recluse (1995). *The art of prayer: An Orthodox anthology* (I. I. Kontzevitch, Ed.; E. Kadloubovsky & E. M. Palmer, Trans.). Faber & Faber. Note: He is the Russian Orthodox bishop and Hesychast spiritual guide, (1815–1894).

Theophan the Recluse. (2010). *The spiritual life and how to be attuned to it* (A. Schmemmann, Ed.; A. G. Kovalevsky, Trans.). St. Herman Press.

Theophylact of Ohrid. (2007). The explanation of the Gospel of Luke (C. R. Williams, Trans.). Chrysostom Press.

Unknown author. (2017, July 6). From being driven to being drawn [Daily Meditation]. Center for Action and Contemplation. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

World Community for Christian Meditation. (2011). Christian meditation [PDF].

World Community for Christian Meditation. (n.d.). The eleventh step in AA [PDF]. Retrieved August 5, 2025, from WCCM.

World Community for Christian Meditation. (n.d.). Young meditators retreat [PDF]. Retrieved August 5, 2025, from WCCM.

World Community for Christian Meditation. (2023). Returning to the heart [Spiritual letter].

World Community for Christian Meditation. (2023). The gift of tears [Weekly teaching].



APPENDIX: Some Resources to support healing & transformation of the self by Grace

1. Contemplative Outreach,

Centering Prayer is a Christian contemplative meditation practice, a crystallisation of tradition into a simple but radical method. A practice called the Welcoming Prayer is also promoted at Contemplative Outreach

At Contemplative Outreach, Centering Prayer (CP) meditation is taught as a simple, faithful way to allow grace to reshape the constructed self. Their online guide and downloadable booklet outline a daily practice of silent prayer—typically twenty minutes—using a sacred word to gently return the attention whenever thoughts or distractions arise. The sacred word isn’t a technique for control, but a symbol of intention: a thread leading us back to stillness and the quiet presence of God. The practice is not about subduing the ego through effort, but about consenting to the healing action of grace. Over time, Centering Prayer fosters a quiet interior availability, shifting the spiritual journey from self-improvement to self-surrender.

This practice initiates a deep, interior process of transformation. As Thomas Keating notes, it often involves the gradual surfacing of emotional material stored in the unconscious—what he called the “unloading of the unconscious.” Newcomers may find this surprising: instead of immediate peace, stillness sometimes reveals emotional turbulence or discomfort. What appears to be emotional “reactivity” may in fact be the psyche’s way of revealing old wounds or patterns long buried. This is not failure, but evidence that healing is underway.

In this context of ego surrender and the emo-

tional unravelling that sometimes accompanies healing, the Welcoming Prayer is particularly useful when unconscious patterns surface as strong emotional reactions, offering a way to consent to grace in the very moment those patterns are activated. Developed within Contemplative Outreach, the Welcoming Prayer extends the fruit of Centering Prayer into the stream of daily life. It invites us—when emotion flares up—to pause, feel the sensation in the body, welcome it as an opportunity for divine encounter, and gently let go of the ego’s need for control, security, or approval.

Cherry Haisten, a long-time teacher of the practice, writes: “Dismantling the false-self system is not a project for a rainy afternoon... It’s a lifetime proposition... Our job is to consent to cooperate by practicing our practices.” The Welcoming Prayer becomes, in this light, a way to carry the consent of Centering Prayer into the active field of relationships, triggers, and choices. It does not suppress emotion but welcomes what arises—trusting grace to do the deeper work of healing.

Further resources and practice guidance are available at: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org>

2. Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC)

At the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC), wisdom is presented in an accessible, grounded way. Podcast episodes like “Healing by Grace” with Richard Rohr (b. 1943), the Franciscan priest and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, focus on gratitude, honest self-watching, and letting go of emotional entanglements.

Healing the ego is seen as a gentle, daily

“returning”—sometimes by noticing your emotional triggers, sometimes through journaling or compassion-based prayer, including self-compassion.

Achievement isn't the goal. Instead, it's about living into openness—developing habits of surrender, humility, and trust that slowly untangle the knots of ego. Grace does the deep work, often in subtle, unexpected ways. (Rohr, 2023)

3. World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM)

The World Community for Christian Meditation opens doorways to transformation by grace.

Laurence Freeman reminds us, in “Third Level of Consciousness,” that transcending the ego isn't about heroic effort—it's about “a free gift—an opening in the wall of selfhood.” Healing happens through patient, repeated silent meditation. Each session is a gentle loosening of old identities, an opening for grace to move.

John Main, in “Returning to the Heart,” says, “Silence gives our spirit room to breathe... to become the silence.”

Here, mantra meditation is not about performance, but about settling, repeating a holy word, and letting inner tensions unwind.

WCCM also honours the “gift of tears.” These moments of emotional softening often arise in prayer when old patterns begin to break open. Allowing grief, remorse, and longing to surface—and meet grace—becomes an essential step toward restoration. These are not signs of weakness, but signs that the heart is healing. Regular silent prayer helps move pain into the horizon of forgiveness and acceptance. The false

self is gradually led into release and the embrace of love.

4. The Shalem Institute

The Shalem Institute brings wisdom of both spirit and body.

Their “Presence Through Body, Breath, and Mind” resource encourages presence as a habit—where aligning breath and body becomes a daily portal for grace.

Healing is not just mental work—it's about surrendering with your whole being.

Twenty minutes of attentive breathing and simple body awareness invite contemplative availability—that is, a gentle interior openness in which we release the need to analyse, fix, or perform, and simply become receptive to the quiet movement of grace. Rather than trying to generate a spiritual experience, we let go of expectations and allow the divine presence to meet us in stillness and simplicity.

Tilden Edwards, the Episcopal priest and founder of the Shalem Institute, in “Collaboration as a Quality of Contemplative Leadership,” reminds us that healing arrives as we surrender the urge for control and open to divine collaboration.

He writes, “Divine Spirit has a way of lightening inhibiting forces... when we are willing.” Inner transformation doesn't have to be orchestrated or willed into being; it starts with willingness.

From Shalem's Annual Report: “Through the medicine of grace, the eye of our heart is healed...”

Contemplative awareness gradually dispels the

illusion of separation. Regular practice and openness to grace patiently soften the false self, restoring us to deeper integration and union.

-O-

Bibliography for these 4 organisations, with guide to practical online resources

Contemplative Outreach Ltd. (n.d.). Centering prayer: A way of consent—Online guide. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

Rohr, R. (2023, March 10). Healing by grace [Audio podcast]. Center for Action and Contemplation. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

Freeman, L. (n.d.). Third Level of Consciousness. The World Community for Christian Meditation. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

Main, J. (n.d.). Returning to the Heart. The World Community for Christian Meditation. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

The World Community for Christian Meditation. (n.d.). The Gift of Tears. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

The World Community for Christian Meditation. (n.d.). Christian Meditation (PDF guidance). Retrieved August 5, 2025.

Shalem Institute. (n.d.). SOCP Script: Presence Through Body, Breath, and Mind. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

Shalem Institute. (2019). Annual Report: Contemplative awareness gradually dispels the illusion of separation. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

Edwards, T. (2016, November 22). Collaboration as a Quality of Contemplative Leadership. Shalem Institute. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

-o-

Jesus answered,

*“Very truly I tell you, no one
can enter the kingdom of God un-
less they are born of water and
the Spirit.*

*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but
the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*

*You should not be surprised at
my saying, You must be born
again.”*

John 3:5-7

