

# Explorers in Prayer – Lesson Four Handout

## The Place of Scripture and Icons in Prayer

1 Corinthians 13: 12 “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

In his book, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*, by Henri Nouwen, he looks at four icons and reflects on them. Icons are not objects of worship, they have no supernatural power. They are simply an aid to visualising God’s presence in our lives more vividly. Nouwen writes, “Icons are painted to lead us into the inner room of prayer and bring us close to the heart of God...They do not immediately speak to our senses. They do not excite, fascinate, stir our emotions, or stimulate our imagination. At first, they even seem somewhat rigid, lifeless, schematic and dull. They do not reveal themselves to us at first sight. It is only gradually, after a patient, prayerful presence that they start speaking to us. And as they speak, they speak more to our inner than our outer senses. They speak to the heart that searches for God.”

The mysteries of God are not easy to see. What we can see has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit and is just the smallest tip of the iceberg. Over the centuries people have spent a huge amount of time going deeper into the mysteries of God, and I doubt any have found it an easy journey to make. Because we are all made differently, we will need different tools or environments to help us on that journey. I, personally, like as much silence as I can get when trying to focus my attention on God. Others will find having something like an icon to focus on is very useful. Either way, the aim is the same, to expand our experience of relationship with God in order that it may grow deeper.

“As God’s house is called ‘the house of prayer’ because prayer is the most important of its holy offices, so by the same token the Bible may be called the Book of Prayer. Prayer is the great theme and content of its message to mankind.” E. M. Bounds

“The Word of God is a great help in prayer. If it be lodged and written in our hearts, it will form an out flowing current of prayer, full and irresistible. Promises, stored in the heart, are to be the fuel from which prayer receives life and warmth, just as the coal, stored in the earth, ministers to our comfort on stormy days and wintry nights. The Word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong. Prayer, like man, cannot live by bread alone, ‘but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” E. M. Bounds

**Individual Exercise:** Use a different prayer each day from the following list of Scripture passages. Read the passage and listen for the words that speak to you, then let these words lead you into your own prayer. **Alternatively**, spend the 15 minutes gazing at the icon you have been given (or another icon if you have one) and allow what comes out of that time to lead into a prayer.

Day 1 - Jacob wrestles with the Lord: Genesis 32: 22-30.

Day 2 - Moses forbidden to cross the Jordan: Deuteronomy 3: 21-29.

Day 3 - The Lord appears to Elijah: 1 Kings 19: 9b-18.

Day 4 - Nehemiah’s prayer: Nehemiah 1: 4-11.

Day 5 - Jeremiah’s complaint: Jeremiah 20: 7-18.

Day 6 - Daniel’s prayer: Daniel 9: 4-19.

Day 7 - The believers prayer: Acts 4: 23-31.

Read chapters 10 & 20 of the course book.

**Prayer Triplet Exercise:** Each person in the triplet will read out loud the prayer of David: 2 Samuel 7: 18-29. You should allow a few minutes gap between each reading. Again, listen for the words that speak to you, then when the half an hour is coming to an end let these words lead into a time of prayer.

**Here is an extract from a book by Henri Nouwen, *Adam - God's Beloved*. It tells the true story of Adam Arnett, a severely disabled young man who lived in a *L'Arche* community called *Daybreak* in Ontario, Canada. Adam could not speak, he was prone to seizures, and was able to do almost nothing for himself. Nouwen met Adam when he joined the community in 1985.**

“About a year after I had become the full-time pastor of Daybreak and had moved into our little retreat house and chapel called Dayspring, a middle-aged priest arrived for a sabbatical. Father Bruno had just finished his eighteen-year term as abbot of the Camaldolese monastery in Big Sur, California, and he needed a time away from his community. He was a tall, thin man with a short beard, gentle eyes, and a peaceful disposition, very soft-spoken, but mostly silent and a little shy. A true monk. Why had he come to us? He had heard about Daybreak and thought it might be a good place for him to make the transition from carrying authority to being an ordinary monk again. He wanted to share in the life of handicapped people. During his three months with us he lived in the New House. Soon after he arrived I saw him often on the lane and on the public road pushing Adam in his wheelchair. Since he was not an ordinary assistant but a long-term guest, he had lots of extra time and had decided to spend much of it with Adam. The two of them seemed to enjoy just being in each other's company.

As I saw them together I thought, ‘What better companion could Adam have than this quiet, peaceful monk! Isn't Adam's life similar to his? Peace is speaking to peace. Solitude is greeting solitude. Silence is dwelling with silence. What a grace!’

One day Bruno dropped by my room for a visit. I asked, ‘How are you doing with Adam?’ Bruno looked at me, full of wonder and delight. He said, ‘Adam is truly a gift to me. He is teaching me how to be a better monk.’ I answered, ‘I think I know what you mean but please try to explain it to me.’

Bruno wasn't a great talker. He felt things deeply and preferred to remain silent about them. Nevertheless, he wanted to explain what he was experiencing with Adam. He said, ‘For many, many years I have tried to live a spiritual life and have tried to help others live it as well. I always knew that I had to become empty for God, gradually letting go of thoughts, emotions, feelings, and passions that prevented the deep communion with God I desired. When I met Adam, I met a man who has been chosen by God to lead us deeper into that very communion. As I spend long hours with Adam, I find myself drawn into an ever deeper solitude. In Adam's heart, I have touched a fullness of divine love.’

I couldn't avoid thinking about Adam and how his truth and his life had been cause for Bruno's extraordinary spiritual experience. An abbot, a father of monks, had found a guide, a spiritual master in the person of Adam.”