



experiencing **life** in relationship with **God**

by John Ryeland

At **The Christian Healing Mission**, we have been exploring the connection between healing and the presence of God.

Some years ago, a lady asked for prayer at the end of a meeting. One by one she explained all the areas of her life that needed healing. This took quite some time! In fact, by the time she had finished there were only a couple of minutes left to pray and trying to decide which of her many needs was the most pressing was impossible. All I had time to do was to thank Father God for loving her, remind her that Jesus had heard her prayers and invite the Holy Spirit to bring healing. Any detailed praying was out of the question – and yet she had a most amazing sense of being in God's presence while he tended to her needs. Afterwards she seemed like a different person – somehow lighter and very encouraged.

Over the years we have developed an approach to prayer along these lines. We call it 'Encounter Prayer' and it can be used in many different ways - in private prayer times, with small groups, in prayer ministry and in church services.

I remember another lady sharing her story. She had been worshipping Father God for his love for her when she had a sense that Jesus was behind her, touching her neck. She asked him if he was healing her bad back and he replied, "It is done". As the Holy Spirit touched her, she found that she could bend, touch her toes and move easily with no problem at all.

At the heart of it is a focus on each person of the Trinity in turn.

This might seem rather simplistic but it encapsulates three amazing truths:



The reality of the Father's love for us



Taking seriously the presence of Jesus with us



Inviting the power of the Holy Spirit to come to us.

1 Father



We are invited to enter into the most glorious relationship possible – being a child of Almighty God himself.

This isn't just about beginning our prayers with the word 'Father' but is more about our attitude as we pray. It's easy to feel as though God tolerates us, but deep-down we suspect he wishes we were more like other people. In fact, this couldn't be further from the truth! We need to recognise that he views each of us as his unique and cherished child – valuing our individuality and rejoicing that our sins have been dealt with and forgiven by Jesus so that there is nothing to stop us enjoying his company.

The last verse of Jesus' prayer to his Father in John 17 sums up the extent to which we can enjoy our heavenly Father's love. Jesus says:

"I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them"



In other words, Jesus was saying that he wants us to experience and enjoy the Father's love in just the same way as he did.

If we are loved to the same extent as Jesus was loved, then the words the Father spoke over Jesus in Luke 3.22 are also words he speaks over us:

"You are my Son (or daughter), whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Other translations put it slightly differently:

"You are my dear Son; in you I take great delight." (New English Translation)

"You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy." (New Living Translation)

"You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life." (Message)

So when we begin our prayers by focussing on Father, it is not so much about the words that we use, but rather the attitude that we are dearly loved children who matter to our heavenly Father – so of course he will welcome us and treat us with care and compassion.

2 Jesus



Jesus said that he would always be with us (Matthew 28.20) but often we completely overlook his presence - so what can we do to change this?

In our Encounter Prayer, we like to ask people or groups this simple question:

“Where is Jesus for you right now?”

It's a good question because it assumes that he is present just as he promised, but it allows him to reveal himself in a unique way to each individual. There is no right or wrong answer and people may experience the presence of Jesus in any number of ways.

Sometimes he seems to be a physical presence in the room - not necessarily visible but somehow people are able to sense he is there. A lady told us:

“I sensed that Jesus was standing behind me with his hands on my shoulders. ‘Am I going in the direction you want to me to go?’ I asked him. But then I realised that he is always there behind me so that he can steer me. I can't go wrong!”

Some are reminded of a place that is special to them and go on to sense that they are there with Jesus. It might be a beauty-spot, a peaceful building or even on a boat...

“I sat in a boat on the sea shore with Jesus. He told me, ‘I want you to love yourself’. For a few seconds I did, and felt blessed in 3 ways: i) I love the sea ii) I love Jesus and iii) I loved myself. All in all, I experienced a bit of heaven.”

Many people become aware of a feeling of peace. When the prophet Isaiah spoke about the coming Messiah in the Old Testament, one of the titles he gave to him was ‘Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9.6) so no wonder many people sense peace when Jesus is near.

“I felt a tremendous sense of peace and rest.”

These are only a few examples of how people have sensed Jesus and there are many other ways.

It can be tempting to wonder where Jesus is and then immediately rush on without allowing space to really consider this. However, it's worth persevering as gaining a deeper sense of his presence is incredible - it's not just a comforting feeling but an opportunity to engage with the one who gave up his own life for us.

So as we become aware of the presence of Jesus, we need to take it seriously! What is it that we want to bring to him? This is exactly what Jesus said to Bartimaeus in Mark 10.51:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

It might seem strange that Jesus would ask a blind man what he wanted, but Jesus was inviting Bartimaeus to be honest and to bring to him anything he wanted. In this case, he wanted to see – and Jesus restored his sight.

For many people, prayer ends at this point; we bring our requests to Jesus and leave them with him. However, an important part of this Encounter Prayer is asking what it is that Jesus wants to say to us – a two-way conversation. Jesus does speak, but perhaps the reason we panic and often miss what he says is that we expect his voice to be different from how it is. We might expect his voice to be audible, when actually it may come to us in the form of a random thought that pops into our mind, a Bible verse that we suddenly remember, a song or simply a picture that occurs to us.



Also we may overlook the voice of Jesus because we expect his message to us to be of such magnitude that it will change the course of our life forever, when he may simply be wanting to reassure us of his love and care.

Let a conversation develop.

Find the presence of Jesus with you, speak to him, listen for his response and then reply to him; what more do you want to say to him and what else might he want to say to you?

3 Holy Spirit



In one sense, the Holy Spirit has been at work all through this time of encounter with Jesus, but there is more that he has for us.

The work of the Holy Spirit is vast and includes some activities that we can call upon:

He is always with us and always active. When Jesus spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit, he said:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever”. (John 14.16)

Other versions of the Bible translate the word ‘advocate’ as ‘comforter’ or ‘helper’. In other words, we are never alone and we have someone who constantly comes alongside us with comfort and help.

The Holy Spirit is also the source of so many of the things we need. Look at these verses:

“...by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God.” (Romans 15.19)

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15.13)

“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” (2 Timothy 1.14)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5.22-23)

Although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a gift from God, and Paul calls us temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6.19), we are also encouraged in Ephesians 5.18 to ‘be filled with the Spirit’. It is often pointed out that the way this phrase is structured implies an ongoing filling, a regular intake of his presence.

For this reason, calling upon the Holy Spirit to fill us afresh every day seems a logical means of receiving the things that we need from him.

Try It Out for Yourself

If you can, set aside a few minutes to encounter God every day. You can do this on your own, or you might find it helpful to meet with a friend so that you can both share your experiences and encourage one another. Here's a summary to remind you of the steps:

Father



Worship him for choosing you to be his child and for loving you so much.

Jesus



‘Where is Jesus for you right now?’
What do you want to bring to him?

How does he respond?

Holy Spirit



Invite him to come and fill you afresh and bring to you all that you need.