



# Contemplative Outreach

***Heart Intention with Presence to Others***  
**with David Frenette**

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**Transcript**

So Heart Intention involves presence, presence to the Divine presence, by whatever name or image or symbol we use for this ultimate reality of God that Centering Prayer and other formless kinds of meditation or contemplative prayer, open to -- the formless God of mystery and presence. That same relationship is cultivated in activity through Heart Intention in this inspired rooted-ness in the Prayer of the Heart heritage, in Christian mystical contemplation, and for this approach of Heart Intention, we can open up to the presence of God in other people, in activity too, with this same prayerful, meditative awareness. Being attentive to the breath, to the God anchoring in our body, with greater awareness, while we're engaged with other people, because it is us centered in God, God in us relating to God in other people, us in God relating to all of us in God, that is the inspiration of unity consciousness, our mutual awakening that the Heart Intention cultivates.

So here in this little segment of video, I want to explore how Heart Intention can cultivate greater awareness to God in us, but also God in another person through our ordinary relationships, our ordinary exchanges. And this especially important, because in our time we are so distracted in our relationships, and with the technology that conditions our interactions with other people. Perhaps you've had the experience of talking to someone on a smartphone, and you have the sense from the way they're interacting with you that on the other end of that conversation, the other person on their smartphone has also somehow switched to answering texts, or reading their email. Or perhaps you've done that yourself when being overwhelmed by the incoming texts and emails, *you* in a conversation with another person on your smartphone have switched and are dual tasking, multitasking.

But of course, research has shown that multitasking does not preserve a quality of attention to any one task. How important that is in our exchange with other people, if we can stay attentive to this one singular task of being present in the moment to God, not only in me, not only in the world, but embodied in this other person here and now, through, in this exploration that we're exploring here, Heart Intention practice. So that means bringing attention back over and over

again in a simple, gentle way to the name of God that anchors us into our breath, into our body, into the area behind our navel at the bottom of the breath cycle. That's called "Omphaloskepis" in Greek, in the heart space, or that presence released into pure awareness. The presence of God in pure awareness, generalized in uniting us with the other person. In the subtlety in between, and beneath, and beyond the words that we're speaking, or the words that we're hearing. We're present to God as the ground of being in this relationship, in this conversation over the phone. And this of course is what we're doing in Centering Prayer, or whatever form of contemplative practice we're doing, when we take time in the morning, in the afternoon, and periodically on a retreat to sit still and consent to pure being, to the mystery of God, to the presence and the action of God here and now.

Heart Intention once again brings that similar type of consent, joins it with attention and awareness in activity. So one of the early patriarchs of the desert, one of the early desert fathers, Evagrius Ponticus said, "How can one expect to be in a relationship with another person when your mind is not focused on the conversation with them? And how much more important this is with God, not just with another person but with God." So here, Evagrius is using the metaphor of relationship with another person, and the need to be attentive in that relationship, focused, present here and now. And he's saying that same kind of focus needs to be present in our relationship with God. Well, Evagrius, if he were alive today would be perhaps not able to use that metaphor of a relationship with another person, because we are so unfocused and so distracted so easily.

And thankfully, Jesus doesn't seem to have had that problem 2,000 years ago. There's no indication that at the last supper, if you can imagine some of those paintings that depict the last supper, that his disciples were bowing their heads not in prayer, but over an illuminated screen because they were watching not God, but Netflix or texting or emailing! So in our time then, it's even more and more important for us to be present to God in all things, and also present to God in other people, in all things at all times, or as much as possible. And again, we need a practice. The value of a practice for doing this.

So for example, I practice Heart Intention when I am aware and awake and alive to an exchange with a person in spiritual direction. And this just involves me being present to my practice, to a prayerful returning to the name of God, rooted in my breath and in my body and in this moment. "Yeshua, Yeshua." While they are speaking, while they are present to what they're going through, I am present to God, calling on the name of the divine, "Life. Life." And bringing awareness and attention into the body, into this body, into this moment, this very incarnational form of meditation. "Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ." And then I am open, more open, more available to the person, to the mystery of the exchange in the moment, and also to God in the other person.

How wonderful that is, that to call upon the name of my revelation, the revelation of God to me in the moment opens me to God in another person, present in another person. This is because God is in us, and we are in God, as Father Thomas Keating says. God is indwelling in us, and we are dwelling in the mystery of God that is interpersonal. We're woven in a net of divine connectivity, and our problem is that we're absent or half present from that awake alive-ness to the interpersonal beauty of the divine life. So come back again, and again, and again, to the

name of God, the intention, the word that reflects the deepest purpose of your existence. Your God. Call upon God in the moment by remembering the name of God and joining that name with the movement of consciousness in your body, your breath anchoring in the heart as you breathe and open into the heart space, into pure awareness, releasing into silent presence. And when thoughts come back in a demanding way, or an emotion comes up, or feel that you need to say something or do something, say it. Do it. And then come back again to the simple presence of the Divine. [pausing, breathing] "Yeshua. Life. Lord Jesus Christ." Whatever name or quality reflects your experience of the Divine, remember that name as the ground for all exchange in your life. And this is what the contemplatives in the tradition of Christianity, contemplative Christianity, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Teresa, would always remind her followers or her listeners to serve Christ in other people.

How do we serve Christ, how do we serve God in other people if not by being present, starting with the simple presence of sacred attention? In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "They who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit. They who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." The Divine is always with us, but we are not awake and alive and present to that Presence very often. So return *conscious* presence, attention, awareness, calling upon the name of the Divine.

And this is the dynamic of Heart Intention practice, is that the words that express the deepest meaning of our life, such as the name of the Divine, the name of God or the quality of sacred life, that word, that intention is joined with an inner movement of consciousness, in this case such as we're speaking of now, with attention to the moment. Attention to the ground of the moment. So in trust, I trust, I abandon myself to this sacred present moment in which I trust that God is present to the other person, and that is the best ground for interacting with another person.

So think of your own experience, what it's like to be present to another person. I mean really present. To see a child when they're truly a child playing in joy, radiating joy in life. To be present in compassion and attention, not wrapped up in your own agendas and concerns about how to be present even, just practicing and returning in trust to God, and being present to serve another person with full attention. The gift of our attention, the gift of our own prayer and our own meditative presence to another person hidden in the moment.

In spiritual direction, when I remember my Heart Intention practice, I don't talk about it! It's not a topic of conversation. Hopefully the gift of my practice, my attention, is that the other person creates, is held in this realm of heartfelt acceptance. What we need from other people is, first of all, presence. To be here and now and awake and alive. And the dynamic of a contemplative practice, Heart Intention or whatever practice we're doing, Centering Prayer and sitting meditation, is that we continually forget. We continually forget, and get lost in the details and the agenda, and the distraction in the absence of life. But to remember through a simple practice that the anchoring in the breath, in the name of God is always here and always now, available. And that for Heart Intention as it expands and it develops in us, we move deeper into the phrase, into the divine attributes that are reflected in our Heart Intention phrase. "Life, radiating love in being." We move *from* life, presence to life, *into* radiating love, or "Hesed, Yeshua, Maranatha, Hesed, amen. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us, son of God. Amen." We

move deeper into love, into mercy, into forgiveness. All the qualities of the Divine that reflect the deepest interpersonal beauty that can't come from the false self, our false-self agendas. The kind of divine love and sacred presence that can only come from God, that forgives and recovers itself in me when I forget and I stumble and I make a mistake, or I say the wrong thing perhaps, or I get distracted and follow a train of thought. This is just human, to be distracted. Not so much by following an email, but to follow my inner email, my train of thought off into the future, into judgments about the past. I can always come back now to the Presence.

[breathing] "Life. Yeshua. Lord Jesus Christ." And trust that your own experience of the Divine is more and more present to you, not only in your solitary practice, in Centering Prayer, but also in activity and in every relationship that you have in your life, whether it's simply with the post office delivery man, the Amazon delivery that's coming to your door, or to your spouse, or to someone that you're tending to in service, trying to help from the depths of your heart.

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