

The Jesus Prayer



The summertime is one of my favorite times of the year, especially fresh, sunny mornings on the deck with my Bible. For me, prayer seems easier when I'm surrounded by flowers, singing birds and a warm breeze. I love to start the day this way—before I'm consumed by the distractions

of my to-do list and job.

My morning time gets me grounded and ready for whatever the day may bring. **However, I've noticed how easy it is to "lose" God in the busyness of the day.** It's not that He goes anywhere—He's still there; it's just me who has moved away. Lately, I've decided to be more purposeful about bringing God into all of my day—not just the mornings. As I was thinking about how to do this, I came across the Jesus Prayer in a book I was reading on spiritual disciplines. The Jesus Prayer is not a new idea; rather, it's been around as a practice since the 5th century and has its origins in the Bible.

The Jesus Prayer is a simple, short prayer that says, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," or "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." It probably sounds familiar to you if you've read the gospel of Luke lately where the tax collector is praying in chapter 18, verse 13 "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Or perhaps you've read the story of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar who called out to Jesus in Mark 10, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd tried to shush Bartimaeus (I wonder; have I ever discouraged anyone from following Jesus? I hope not!), but he just yelled all the louder. Jesus blessed his faith by healing him and giving him his sight!

The Jesus Prayer is explained in an ancient book called the *Philokalia*, which had hundreds of pages of ideas on how to practice this prayer—rather surprising when you consider the brevity of the prayer! An anonymous Russian pilgrim in the middle 1800s also wrote a book about his experiences with the prayer and how it changed his life. This book is called *The Way of a Pilgrim*. Both books are still on the market, so if you want to read more about the Jesus Prayer, these would be some in-depth reading for you.

But, if you're ready to jump in and start practicing this discipline, it's very simple. **To help you focus, start practicing this prayer in a quiet place.** Breathe in and pray, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God," and then breathe out and pray "have mercy on me, a sinner." Try to tune out any distractions, thinking about the words and praying them from your heart. The whole idea is to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice for us. Reminding ourselves that we are sinners is not meant to put ourselves down, but rather to help us not take for granted what Jesus has done for us and continues to do for us. Some people like to use prayer ropes to keep track of how many times they pray the prayer each day. To me that seems to become almost legalistic, but do what feels comfortable to you. As you become accustomed to praying the prayer, you can pray it wherever you are throughout your day to ground you and draw you closer to God.

That's what I like about this short prayer. I think that praying the Jesus Prayer will help me not "lose" God as I go about my day, but rather help me to focus on Him—wherever I am.

What do you think? Do you think the Jesus Prayer is a practice you'll try? I'd love to hear your thoughts!

Pray on!

Jane