

Hearing the Holy Spirit's Whispers



Creative Reflection II

Kathryn Yaxley

Background

*“We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.”
Song of Songs 1:4*

The first volume of Hearing the Holy Spirit’s Whispers - Creative Reflection was greeted with an unexpectedly enthusiastic response. It seemed like I had struck a chord. People responded to the simple, bite sized steps to engage in creative experiences of biblical reflection.

Now this second companion volume compliments and follows on from that first work. If you do not have the first volume, I recommend you start with that. Copies are available for a donation. Email me on kingdompm1@gmail.com to order a copy. My testimony on learning to hear God’s voice is also available, “Speak Lord for I’m trying to listen.”

In these pages is your second invitation to leave the busy, crowded highways of life in our 21st century for a while. Take time to tarry with the Lord in stillness and reflection. He beckons you to “take off your shoes, stretch out and relax in My shade.” As you rest and sup together in fellowship I pray that this soul food will satisfy your heart. Through these pages you may hear the gentle whispers of the Holy Spirit calling to you, in new and precious ways.

I am grateful for the ongoing support of a team of encouraging and skilled family and friends, making it possible to share my work with you. Thanks to each of you, as well as my prayer support team. Above all I “give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His love endures forever.”

*“I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.”
Song of Songs 2:3,4*



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Contents

Preparation for Reflective Experiences

Tips for Twos.....	3
Guiding Principles for Listening to God	4

Creative Reflections

Wander in God’s Garden	5
Enjoy the Fruit of the Spirit	8
Embrace the Wisdom of God	11
Exult in New Wine	15
Lift up the Name of the Lord	19
Admire the Lily of the Valley	23
Rejoice in the Oil of Anointing.....	27
Welcome the Hand of the Gardener	30
Give thanks for the Chief Cornerstone.....	33
Rest in the Shade of the Lord	36

Tips for Twos

The creative reflections in this booklet work well when done on your own. All the instructions you need are provided within each reflection. However, one of the ways I enjoy these reflections is sharing them with a friend. Why not try it for yourself? It will enrich your relationship. If you wish to share them here are some tips:

Time: Set aside extra time for feedback, joint reflection and shared prayer. One hour in total for each reflection should be sufficient.

Place and Equipment: Make sure you have enough equipment (sketch paper, coloured pencils, Bibles etc), table space and chairs for two. It does work to draw at the same table but allow plenty of personal space.

Process: Start in joint prayer (maybe use the prayer on page 4).

- You may prefer to read the Scripture focus together and then separate for the reflection/imagination and drawing/journaling components **OR**

- You may separate immediately after opening in prayer to work through the whole exercise separately. If you do this you will need two copies of the creative reflection.

It helps to give a rough time goal when you separate so you both know when to be ready to come back to share. This means the bulk of the exercise is done alone in reflective silence or with quiet music.

Sharing: A sharing time is included near the end of each reflection. Take turns to share your learning, impressions, journaling and pictures. This can be a valuable time for affirmation, appreciating what the Lord has shown each of you.

I have learnt that God loves to use us to convey His encouragement to others. Listening to Him in the quiet for each other can become a very precious source of encouragement. It helps us learn to apply our 'listening to God' skills for each other. It's also fun. I find it helps to swap pictures to do this (if you've drawn them.) Invite the Lord to share a word, Bible verse or amplify something of the other's picture that you can share to encourage the other. If you don't sense anything don't be concerned. Conclude in prayer for each other.

Guiding Principles for Listening to God

1. Find a quiet undisturbed place. Make this your sacred place with the Lord. Become still.
2. Come in prayer to the Lord, committing your time to Him, asking for His protection on this time and confessing any sin that He might show you that you need to repent about. [Sin separates us from hearing God's voice.] Ask for the Spirit of God to quiet you and speak to you.

Prayer: Lord, I commit this time to you asking for your leadership. I pray for your protection over myself and this time. Cover me by your grace and show me if there is any sin that I need to repent about (pause). Lord, please quiet me so I might hear you in new and restoring ways. Help me to recognise your voice. Please fill me afresh with the Holy Spirit, expanding me to contain all you have for me at this time. Protect, seal and use all of my senses including my imagination and I place these under your authority. In Jesus' name, Amen.

3. Sit quietly, expectantly in faith, and enjoy just being with God, working through the exercises.
4. Write down and reflect on any impressions or prompts that you sense. There are many ways God might be whispering to you - inner impressions or witness, a prompt to read a certain Bible verse or passage, through creation, through vision or image, picture, directly as you read and reflect on His Word, through others, through words of a Christian song, through dreams.
5. Always use the Bible as your measure, against which you assess what you sense, knowing the Spirit of the Living God doesn't contradict His own witness in Scripture.
6. Journal your thoughts and share them with a mentor or another if you wish.
7. Practise giving time to listen to the Lord.

Wander in God's Garden

"See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.

Flowers appear on the earth;

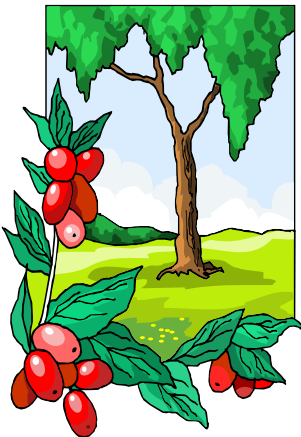
*the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves
is heard in our land.*

The fig tree forms its early fruit;

the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.

*Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one,
come with me."*

Song of Songs 2:11-13



Time

30-40 minutes

Equipment

Bible, notebook, sketchpad and coloured pencils, your garden (if you have one), instrumental CD and player.

Before you begin

Decide if you wish to ponder this reflection in the midst of your garden OR inside, then make yourself comfortable where you choose.

Call to Prayer

Leave behind your 'to-do' lists for the rest of the day, set aside your anxious thoughts and put them in the Lord's hands. Step out of busyness, place your hand in the Lord's and prepare to enter this fruitful garden of fellowship with the Lord.

Invite the Lord to open you to His fellowship, enabling you to rest and hear His Spirit. Pray these verses from Song of Songs 2:14 if you wish. Lord, 'show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.'

Background

The Lord loves gardens. Can you think of times when gardens figured in God's story?

There is the beautiful Garden of Eden where God loved to fellowship with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day.

A favourite place of Jesus to fellowship with His Father was a garden – the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus' resurrection occurred in a garden; His tomb was located in one.

The final chapters of Revelation describe a garden in the midst of the new heaven and new earth. God definitely loves gardens.

Reflect

Read the verses at the beginning of this reflection and picture the garden mentioned there. Enjoy for a time the scene, the scents and the peace that these verses evoke. Can you imagine the breeze wafting the fragrances on the wind? Can you smell spring in the air? Can you sense hope stirring?

Reread these verses again, but this time as though the Lord was speaking direct to you, inviting you to come with Him into His garden of delights. How do you feel? How do you respond to this invitation? Are you ready to go with Him for this time? The Lord treasures you. Are you aware of this? He highly values fellowship together with you, yes, you.

Wander in God's Garden

Outside: Take a walk around your garden for 15 minutes or so, as though hand in hand with the Lord. What do you notice that points you to God? What draws your attention? What do you feel, and experience of God in this place? Listen to what the Lord is placing in your heart. Soak up His presence.

Inside: If you wish to use music during this time, put it on. Take about 15 minutes and place your hand in the Lord's. Close your eyes, relax and let the Lord take you into the scene mentioned in the Scriptures. You might find that the picture develops. What plants do you notice? Are you in a field or what kind of garden? Are you aware of the Lord's presence? What does the Lord show you or speak to you?

Write or Draw

When you are ready reflect on this time in your journal OR you may prefer to draw what you experienced. What have you sensed the Lord speaking to you during this reflection?

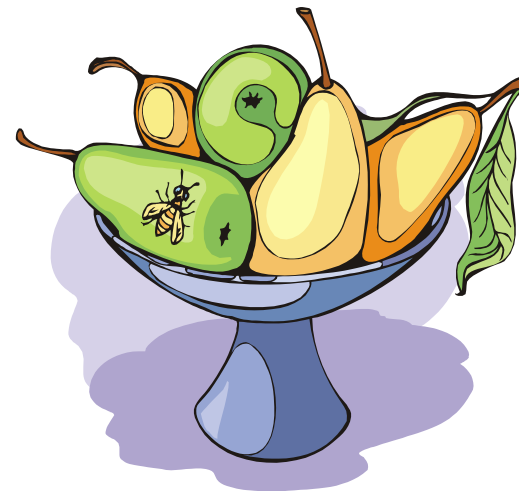
Share

Talk about what you have learnt about God. Share your drawings and journaling with each other. If you wish swap pictures and take a moment to listen to the Lord for each other. Does a picture, Bible verse or encouraging thought come to you that you might share for the other? Share the results of your listening. Finish in prayer.

Enjoy the fruit of the Spirit

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
Against such things there is no law."*

Galatians 5:22



Time

30 minutes

Equipment

Bible, several pieces of fruit from your fruit bowl, cane basket and clay pot (if you have them), your sketchpad, coloured pencils, reflective music and CD player.

Pray

Commit your time to the Lord in prayer. Invite the Lord to reveal Himself to you in new and living ways, refreshing you as you reflect on the fruit of the Spirit.

Read and Reflect

Pick up the pieces of fruit and the clay pot. As you handle each object slowly read the Scripture at the top of the page. Reflect that your life in God's Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit reside within your humanity (pictured by the clay pot). The indwelling Holy Spirit waters you every day as you depend on and trust Him, causing His life to grow in you. Marvel at the multi faceted fruit which is growing inside you, as a gift of God.

Imagine

Allow 10-15 minutes to enjoy this scene. Turn on the music if you prefer. Place the cane basket in front of you. Take the hand of the Lord in imagination and invite Him to lead you into the Scriptures in the following way.

The Lord invites you into His Holy Spirit fruit orchard. A river winds its way through this orchard. This is the river of God's life-giving Holy Spirit. Every tree has imbibed this life-giving stream and is watered from this river. On the banks of this river are fruit trees of all kinds. Each has direct access to this same river though each produces a different fruit. Here grows every type of fruit of the Holy Spirit. It's shady and full of life. Enjoy this place. Enjoy the river. Take time in this place.

After a while, turn your attention to one particular fruit tree in this Holy Spirit orchard.

Which fruit tree draws you?

Take your basket and pick its fruit.

What quality is this fruit?

Spend some time enjoying the fruit under that tree.

What do you notice about the fruit, its smell, taste and worth?

Ask the Lord to tell you about it and fill you with it.

Draw

When you are ready draw what you experienced.

Reflect

Think about the nature of the fruit of the Spirit you were drawn to. In what way is this particular fruit a bringer of life and a pointer to God? How does this fruit grow and develop? You might like to read John chapter 15 for an answer. Does your answer change the way you think about the role and presence of the Holy Spirit in you? How?

Share

Share your learning. If you wish, swap pictures. Invite the Lord to show you something that might encourage your friend, about the particular fruit tree (quality) they were drawn to. Wait on the Lord for a few minutes in stillness. If a picture, verse or encouraging thought comes to you share it with the other. If nothing comes to mind encourage each other in prayer.

Pray

Thank God for the fruit of the Holy Spirit growing in you. Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you growing in His life so the fruit of His Spirit might flow out of you in increasing measure to those around you.

Embrace the Wisdom of God

*“Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars.
She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;
she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls
from the highest point of the city.”*

*“Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to
those who lack judgment.*

*“Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.
Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the
way of understanding.”*

Proverbs 9:1-6 and 10



Time

40 minutes

Equipment

Bible, journal, sketch book, colouring pens and pencils.

Pray

Commit your time to the Lord, inviting Him to still your heart, meet with you as Wisdom and speak to you through your time together.

Invitation

Read again, slowly, the Bible verse at the beginning of this reflection.

It paints a vivid and compelling image of wisdom. Wisdom is personified as a solid, secure house, whose doors are flung open in hospitality, prepared to entertain and impart her gifts of life and understanding to all who will come inside, sit down, sup and enter in.

*“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.”
Proverbs 24:3,4*

These treasures of wisdom here are described as strong enough to build, establish and fill a home. We can live by wisdom.

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch [Jesus] will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord – and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:1-3a

The glorious Spirit that rests on Jesus is first of all the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. Jesus is the font and revelation of God’s wisdom.

Matthew 7:24-29 tells of the wise and foolish builders. In the same way that wisdom opens her doors and beckons, we are invited to come to Jesus and enjoy fellowship, including supping at His table. We are also challenged to listen to Him, accept His words of truth and build our lives upon them. As we do we will be established, solid and secure, like a house on rock.

Reflect

Select one of the Bible verses mentioned that speaks to you in particular and think about what it teaches you of wisdom, of God and of yourself. Do you value wisdom as these verses charge you to? What new thing have you learnt? Does anything surprise you?

Imagine

Reread again the verse at the beginning of this reflection but this time think of Jesus as the wise One inviting you to table, prepared to entertain you. Invite the Holy Spirit to help you enter in to wisdom's house and sup at the feet of Wisdom, Jesus, crucified and risen.

What do you notice in this place? What do you see, feel and think about at this table? What do you notice about the Lord, this table and about yourself? Enjoy this scene and enjoy being with the Lord. (Take 10-15 minutes or so.)

Write or Draw

When you are ready write down those impressions you wish to record in your journal OR you may prefer to draw what you experienced. How has this reflection changed your understanding? What action will it lead you to take?

Share

Share your learning. If you wish, ask God if He has any verse, word of encouragement or insight for the other concerning God's wisdom. It might be easiest to swap pictures (if you both drew one) and use that as a basis to listen to the Lord for each other.

Pray

Pray in response to this reflection. You might like to use Solomon's prayer for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:7-12) as a base for your own.

Exult in New Wine

*“Then he told them,
“Now draw some [water] out and take it to the
master of the banquet.”*

*They did so,
and the master of the banquet tasted the water that
had been turned into wine.”*

John 2:8,9



Time

30 minutes

Equipment

Bible, journal, wine goblet or glass with wine or juice, glass of water.

Pray

Invite the Holy Spirit to come and enliven this Scripture portion to you.

Begin

Arrange the glass of water and wine goblet in front of you.

Background

Weddings were a great social occasion in the Jewish culture and often these celebrations lasted a week. Large numbers were invited and those attending came to stay. It was expected that a feast, including wine, would be provided for the duration. To run out of wine was an acute social embarrassment. Jesus was invited to one such wedding celebration in Cana when indeed the wine ran out.

Read

Read the miracle of Jesus changing water to wine (John 2:1-11). As you do, sip your water and then wine, noting their distinct properties and consider this miracle.

Reflect

Imagine the shock and horror of the master of the banquet when he realised the wine had run out, still with the celebrations in full swing. Perhaps he would be liable for not pre-ordering enough or not managing supplies better over the days.

Running out of wine wasn't a secret since Mary knew of the situation. John records this as the first of Jesus' miraculous signs, so Mary has yet to see Jesus in action. However her faith is strong that Jesus can act in this disaster. Despite Jesus' own caution, she prepares the servants. This is bold faith, but it's also a discerning faith that senses that the time is right for Jesus to intervene.

What follows is exuberant extravagance that must have totally confounded the servants. (It may have changed their lives and who knows, they may have become followers.) At Jesus' request gallons and gallons of water top up six huge ceremonial washing jars (the symbolism of the rituals of the law). Right in the midst of taking a sample to the master of the banquet this water turns into perfectly aged, superb wine (symbolic of freedom, liberality and life in the Spirit). The best has been saved till last and the wedding celebration is saved.

Engage

Pick one of the central characters: master of the banquet, the servants who followed Jesus' instructions or Mary and slowly reread this miracle from their perspective, as though you stand in their shoes.

Reflect on the emotions involved, fears, reactions to events and feelings about Jesus.

What do you relate to about this perspective?

What have you learnt?

What surprises you?

Journal or draw your experience if you wish.

Share

Talk about your new perspectives with each other. You might like to use the creative prayer idea to pray for each other.

Reflect

I love that Jesus took part in helping save the day at this wedding, as this first declaration of His glory. It reminds me that God's love is extravagant, generous and liberal. It also reminds me that Jesus came to pour out New Wine, the precious Holy Spirit. It also reminds me of the coming wedding celebration of the Lamb at the end of time. (Revelation 19:9)

Creative Prayer

Take up your empty wine goblet and ask the Lord to help you come before Him. Imagine Jesus pouring out new wine from one of those large stone pitchers into your life, into your wine cup. Come to Jesus in faith and expectancy, inviting Jesus to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit, reinvigorating you where you feel you have 'run out'. Let this time lead you into praise.

Lift up the Name of the Lord

*“Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.”*

Song of Songs 1:1,2



Time

30-40 minutes

Equipment

Bible, notebook or journal, bottle of fragrance.

Pray

Read Psalm 8 as you commit this time to the Lord. Let this whole reflection lead you into praises to God.

Begin

Slowly read the verses at the beginning of this reflection. Open the fragrance you have chosen, enjoying its wafting perfume. Consider God's name as a fragrance to enjoy and savour, which reaches into the highest heavens. Enjoy this image.

Read

Hearing one's name spoken with love is a potent thing. Have you thought that when you praise God's name in love that it is a pleasing fragrance to Him? Here are some ways that the Psalmist used to praise God's name.

“Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.” Psalm 34:3

“Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!” Psalm 66:1,2.

“Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds – his name is the Lord – and rejoice before him.” Psalm 68:4

“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.” Psalm 96:8.

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” Psalm 115:1

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Psalm 145:1.

This time as you reread these verses you might like to make them your personal praise.

Reflect

Names in the Bible are tremendously important, often describing something about the character or purpose of an individual.

Angel to Joseph "...and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

Jesus' name (equivalent to the Old Testament Joshua) depicts His character and purpose as 'Saviour'. This great saving work is the reason our Heavenly Father has given the name of Jesus prominence above every other name.

"And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:8-11.

Reread these verses, taking a moment to reflect on the power of this precious name of Jesus. What does this mean for you now and for the future? Let it lead you into praise.

Going Deeper

'Those who know your name will put their trust in you!' Psalm 9:10.

God's name is also a rich fragrance you can enjoy, full of potent nuances of truth that build trust, as they reveal different aspects about His glorious character.

Choose one of the following to explore, with notebook and Bible in hand.

A Sure Foundation

List the attributes of a Sure Foundation.

Read and inwardly digest Isaiah 28:16 and Matthew 7:24-29.

What do you notice about God's name and word?

Is this true for your life? Why or why not? Ask God to increase the reality of this aspect of His name in your life. Savour the fragrance and strength of this name and praise God for it.

Wonderful Counselor

List the attributes of a Wonderful Counselor.

Read and ponder Isaiah 9:6 and 7 and John 14:15-31.

What do you notice about God's name?

Is this true for your life? Why or why not?

Ask God to increase the reality of this aspect of His name in your life.

Savour the fragrance and strength of this name and praise God for it.

Alpha and Omega

These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and mean beginning and end, totality, all sufficiency, the sum of all things.

What does it say about Jesus that He is called by this name?

Read and meditate on Rev 1:8, 21:6-7 and 22:12-13, Hebrews 12:2 and Phil 1:6. What do you notice about God's name and work?

Which of these attributes do you relate to or are thankful for?

Ask God to increase the reality of this aspect of His name in your life.

Savour the fragrance and strength of this name and praise God for it.

Write

Write your own Psalm of praise to the Lord based on the name of the Lord that you studied. Share it with the Lord.

Share

Share any fresh insights. You might like to read your Psalms to each other. Conclude with a joint time of praise to the Lord.

Further Study

You may like to research the other names presented in this reflection at another time.

Admire the Lily of the Valley

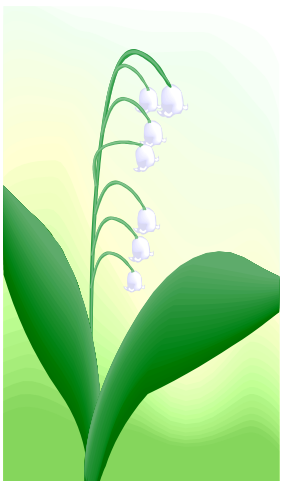
“I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.”

Song of Songs 2:1

“Awake, north wind, and come, south wind!

*Blow on my garden, that its fragrance
may spread abroad.”*

Song of Songs 4:16



Time

30 minutes

Equipment

Bible, sketchpad, coloured pencils, reflective instrumental CD and player, flower (if you have one).

Pray

Commit your time to the Lord. You might like to use some of the words of Song of Songs 4:16 to invite the Holy Spirit to come and blow open to you something of Jesus' fragrance during this time.

Reflect

Take hold of a flower and examine it carefully. Note its beauty in design, texture, colour and composition. A flower is a testament to perfection at the hand of its Creator.

The fragrance of a garden comes from the perfume of its flowers and shrubbery. Each flower exudes a unique scent.

There is nothing so beautifully dressed as a flower. Jesus says, *“See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.”* Matthew 6:28b,29 We know Solomon was considered the most wealthy and richly adorned king.

One of the names used to adore the Lord Jesus is the name of a flower: Lily of the Valley or Rose of Sharon. These names are used to help describe something of His unique loveliness, fragrance and splendour in the eyes of the beholder.

To call Jesus by the name of a flower is to designate Him perfect, exquisite in nature, splendid in character and beautiful beyond compare, beloved by the one who worships in adoration.

Imagine

Turn on the music if you wish. Close your eyes and take 5-10 minutes to step into stillness, this garden of peace, grace and love where Jesus, like a Lily of the Valley, grows. Ask the Lord to help you capture something of the splendour, beauty and grace of His person in this metaphor as Lily of the Valley.

What do you notice or sense of Jesus' person? Can you sense the fragrance of His Spirit? Be still and rest in that place. As you do, adore Him, telling Him what you love, value and appreciate most about Him.

Draw

Allow 10 minutes to do this. God has created you to reflect something of His image. Take a moment to ask God to show you how He describes you in terms of a flower.

What flower comes to mind to describe your character?

What colour, size and shape are you?

Are you one colour or several?

Are you at bud stage, a young flower or fully open?

Can you tell where you are growing? Is it rocky ground, in hills, in a plain or in a garden? Are you near other flowers, or alone?

Reflect

Take a look at what you have drawn. Do you like what you see? Are there any surprises? Consider that you are God's creation whom He delights in.

Share

Share your discoveries including your drawings. If you wish, swap pictures. Invite the Lord to give you something (a word or Scripture or picture) to encourage each other. It might be that God draws your attention to one aspect of your friend's picture and highlights something. Don't be afraid to share the results of your quiet listening with each other.

Creative Prayer

Sit with your own drawing as though in the garden, surrounded by its beauty. Invite the Lord to look at this flower with you, sharing His pleasure in this flower. Commit yourself to Him. Enjoy this time taking pleasure in each other.

Rejoice in the Oil of Anointing

"...fine oils have been poured upon me."

Psalm 92:10

*"You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.*

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

*Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,*

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Psalm 23:5,6



Time

30 minutes

Equipment

Bible, journal, olive oil, if you have it, or else any oil.

Begin

Commit your time to the Lord in prayer, inviting His leadership and protection. If you wish, take some of the oil and pour out a small amount. Move your fingers through it and feel its texture. How would you feel if this was poured out over your head?

Background

Pouring oil over someone, as in these verses, was the customary treatment of an honoured guest at a banquet. Luke 7:46 speaks of a time when this was not done for Jesus by his hosts. The oil traditionally used was olive oil, plentiful in Israel.

Special anointing oil was also used to consecrate people for a particular task (kings, priests), symbolising holiness and separation to God. (1 Samuel 16:1) Anointing was symbolic of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was only key people who received the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The anointing oil that consecrated kings and priests was a special blend of olive oil and fragrant spices.

It is a beautiful Old Testament symbol pointing to the coming anointing by the Holy Spirit which began at Pentecost. There, ten days after Jesus' ascension the Holy Spirit was poured out on ALL the gathered believers. God's precious life could be experienced by EVERY believer in the community of faith. He has been flowing to His people ever since.

As modern day believers, we too have also been consecrated to God as a kingdom of priests, through the anointing (not of olive or anointing oil) but by the Holy Spirit.

Reflect

Take 15 minutes to reflect, draw or write. In the light of this background, read again those verses at the beginning of this reflection. Picture yourself as the subject of them, sitting at table, served and anointed by the Lord.

What are you thankful for? In what ways have you experienced God's goodness and love recently? Reflect on the favour you have received as a redeemed child of God. Give thanks that God has poured out His Holy Spirit on you, marking you as His own. Journal or draw your thoughts and experiences.

Ponder

The Old Testament anointing oil included these costly ingredients: liquid myrrh, fragrant cinnamon, fragrant cane, cassia (dried flowers of the cinnamon tree) and olive oil. Can you imagine the scent of such a mixture?

The elements of this fragrant oil included extracts from the sap, bark, roots, flowers and fruit of different trees. Each element first had to be crushed, pulped or extracted to obtain their yield. In the same way, Jesus also had to be bruised, crushed, and killed before His precious life could be poured out to all believers.

Jesus, in John 7:37-39 speaks of this order *"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. *Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

It's the glorious resurrected life of Jesus which has been poured out on us, through the Holy Spirit, made possible because He first laid down His life for us. What does this truth mean to you?

Share

Talk about your learning together. You might like to share the creative prayer idea.

Creative Prayer

Invite the Lord to anoint you afresh with the oil of His Holy Spirit. Sit expectantly and enjoy the fragrance of the Holy Spirit. You may even feel the tangible presence of joy or blessing.

Welcome the Hand of the Gardener

*"I am the true vine,
and my Father is the gardener.....
you are the branches.
If a person remains in me and I in them,
they will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing."*

John 15:1,5 (paraphrase)



Time

30 minutes

Equipment

Bible, journal, sketch pad and colouring pens and pencils, secateurs and gardening gloves (if you have them).

Pray

Commit your time to the Lord in prayer and welcome His presence.

Background

Vines were a common crop in Israel through Biblical times. Preparation of the vineyard was labour intensive. It often involved terracing the hillsides and clearing the stones from the field. These were used to build retaining walls to protect the young vines.

The young vines were carefully tended by hand. When any branches dropped into the mud on the ground they were carefully washed (John 15:3) and tied up to trellises so their fruit would grow free. Pruning occurred annually.

A watch tower was placed in the midst of a vineyard. During summer, which was harvest time, the labourers and the owner of the vineyard (and family) lived in the vineyards, staying in the watchtower overnight, to protect the harvest from thieves.

Visit the Vineyard

Read John 15:1-8. Allow 10 minutes in this image, which is in several parts. In this protected vineyard Jesus is the true vine. Can you picture Him, His grace and strength and willingness to give life to all that grows in this place? He is the stock for all that grows in this vineyard. Sit with this scene for several minutes.

You grow here in this vineyard, as a branch attached to Jesus, the True Vine. Can you picture yourself growing as a branch? How are you growing? Are you strong and healthy, growing upright or have parts of you fallen in the mud? Are you aware of Jesus' presence and strength and life flowing in you? Sit for several minutes with this image. What do you sense?

Pick up the secateurs and gloves. Consider that this vineyard, including your branch, also has a Gardener. Our Heavenly Father, our Gardener, tends, cleans and prunes all that grows here. Without a Gardener the quality of this vineyard would deteriorate. Vines by their very nature need maintenance and yearly pruning.

Ask God to show you what He as Gardener is doing in your life at the moment. What season are you in? Are you in a pruning time? Are you being washed and cleaned? Are you in a growth spurt or fruiting time? What circumstance is God using to trim the shape you are growing? Which old habit is God challenging? Sometimes we are threatened by changes when in fact they bring very helpful pruning to our lives. Sit for 5 minutes with this image.

Draw or Write

When you are ready you might like to draw this scene and what you sense OR if you prefer, write down your thoughts. What have you learnt about yourself, Jesus, the Heavenly Father? What have you learnt about your attitude to the season you are in?

Share

Talk about your learning and share your journaling or drawing if you wish. You might like to pray for each other, according to what you have both learnt.

Pray

Thank God that Jesus is your True Vine and source of your life. Pray for increased reliance on Him and help to live in His love. Thank the Heavenly Father for His gardening work in your life including His cleansing. Thank Him also for those pruning experiences you can currently identify.

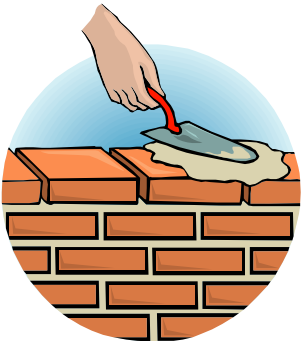
Give thanks for the Chief Cornerstone

*“You too like living stones,
are being built into a spiritual house...”*

1 Peter 2:5

*“Consequently,
you are no longer foreigners and aliens,
but fellow citizens with God’s people and
members of God’s household,
built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”*

Ephesians 2:19,20



Time

20 - 30 minutes

Equipment

Bible, journal, sketchpad, colouring pencils, textas, instrumental CD and player.

Pray

Come into the Lord’s presence offering yourself to Him, inviting His Spirit to meet with you and help you hear His whispers.

Reflect

Turn on the background music if you wish. Have you ever considered that God is building His house and you are being fitted as a part of it, like a stone into a wall? This is a spiritual house, not seen with human eyes and it stretches across all of time. It too has structure and foundations. The spiritual foundation for this house is not cement but the living words of apostles and prophets, inspired and laid down in Scripture. You are being built into a great living work of God, His spiritual house. You are part of His household across time.

Slowly read again the verses at the beginning of this reflection.

Are you aware that you, as a living stone, are part of something great? Have you considered that God is shaping you and setting you into His living house? What does this thought affirm about your faith, about God and about your connection to other believers?

The cornerstone is the most important stone of the whole building from which all else take their orientation. It is a large stone used to anchor and align the corner of a wall (often at its foundation). There it serves to determine the design of the entire building from which all else take their reference. Jesus is the chief cornerstone for this house. Without Jesus this house would not be in correct alignment.

Draw

So what shape is your stone in?

Can you imagine where it fits in the wall, in God's house?

What is the Lord currently doing with your stone?

Is the Lord currently shaping you, cutting off rough edges, cementing you in to relationships or changing those you connect to?

How do you feel about your stone and God's current work in your relational connections?

Reflect with the Lord about these things. You might like to ask Him what He is doing and just listen to Him for a time. When you are ready you might like to try drawing what you sense or write a letter to the Lord talking about this image and what you feel and think. Allow 10 minutes.

Share

Spend time sharing your insights. Do you have a sense of what God is currently doing with each other's stone? You might like to listen to the Lord for a time for each other. Share any encouragement you sense from the Lord.

Praise

Read Psalm 118. The capstone mentioned in verse 22 could also read 'cornerstone'. Jesus picks up this reference and applies it to himself in Matthew 21:42.

What do you want to thank God for at this time? What can you thank Him for about your stone, the foundations of the spiritual house and the cornerstone or capstone? Turn your thanks into your own psalm of praise. If you like write it down.

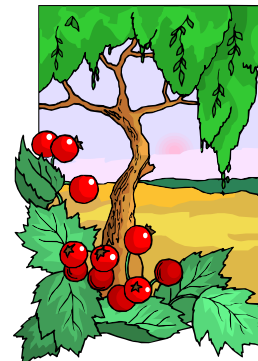
Rest in the Shade of the Lord

*"I delight to sit in his shade,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
He has taken me to the banquet hall,
and his banner over me is love."*

Song of Songs 2:3,4

*"The Lord watches over you –
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night."*

Psalm 121:5,6



Time

20 – 30 minutes

Equipment

Bible, notepad, umbrella. Decide if you wish to find a shady tree outdoors for this reflection (if the weather is suitable and you have one) and settle yourself under it. You might prefer to sit on a rug. Otherwise make yourself comfortable inside.

Pray

Pray using the verses from Song of Songs mentioned at the beginning of this reflection, asking that through this time the Holy Spirit might help you experience something of the precious shade of the Lord and the covering of His loving care.

Begin

Take up your umbrella and fold it out. As you look at it think about its ability to shelter you. In hot weather an umbrella blocks the sun. In wet weather it will protect you from rain.

In the same way, Psalm 121:5 and 6 ascribe these protective attributes to the Lord. Reread them. God personally cares for you, covering you with the umbrella of His eternal love. His constant loving protection shelters and watches over you, wherever you go. What a great image of loving care.

Imagine

There are several parts to this time. Place the umbrella over yourself. As you do, imagine that it's the Lord's presence that covers you, close and personal. Invite the Lord to meet with you in this image. Can you sense His presence? Are you aware of His personal interest? He goes wherever you go, just like an umbrella. Enjoy this image for a while.

The shade of a tree provides similar protection from the elements. Read again the verses from Song of Songs 2:3,4. When applied to the Lord these verses evoke an image of the Lord as a tree, bringing deep fellowship, nurture and rest under His shade.

Ask the Lord to lead you into the following, meeting with you as you rest in His shade. You might like to lie down and close your eyes. Simply rest with this image.

Imagine the Lord as a shady tree under whose shade you are reclining. The canopy provides great cover and you can tell this is a tree laden with ripe fruit. This indeed is a restful place. The foliage of this tree is lush green, sheltering you fully as you recline on the rug. Soft breezes cool your skin on a summer's afternoon, carrying the scent of the choice fruits. You nibble on the fruit and it nourishes you as you recline at ease. An atmosphere of love and grace wrap around you. Here is perfect peace. Enjoy 10 minutes in this scene.

Reflect

What did you enjoy most about that time? Relaxing at leisure with the Lord in this way is not something we do often. However, this place is one you can return to when you wish, to enjoy the Lord and experience His renewing protective love.

Share

Talk about your experiences and what you found most valuable about this reflection. Share the remainder of this reflection together.

Read

Read Psalm 121 and personalise it. Put yourself and your situation into these verses. Let it lead you into prayer and praise.

Pray

Thank God for His great covering of love that is an ever present shelter for you. Praise Him for His infinite loving care. Praise Him for His warm fellowship.

Resources to Equip



Hearing God's Whispers

Speak Lord for I'm trying to Listen! Kathryn's testimony

Hearing the Holy Spirit's Whispers - Creative Reflection I, II and III

Spiritual Protection

Spiritual Protection for Home and Family – Biblical Principles

Companions: Spiritual Protection for Home and Family –Daily Prayers

Personal Spiritual Protection - Prayers to Maintain Christ's Victory

Spiritual Protection for Christian Leaders

Spiritual Protection for Intercessors

You Are Awesome in God's Sight - Prayers for Young People

Prayer

Just a Few Tent Pegs - *Build Your Kingdom Here* Tasmanian Prayer Tour 2015

Roll Out the Scroll Prayer Tour - wider Sydney Region 2016

As Family We Go - Tasmanian Encouragement & Equipping Tour 2017

Victoria Gateway Prayer Tour 2018

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Kingdom Presence Ministries is the ministry name of Peter and Kathryn Yaxley.

As a couple we are called to share the presence and goodness of the Lord with others. Our heart is to encourage, strengthen and empower the Body of Christ according to Eph 4:12, by providing practical, accessible, Scripture based resources. These materials reflect our experience of over two decades in ministry in Australia, providing helpful keys for Christian life and service.

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