

“● *God, I want so to belong; teach me to accept.
 I want to be close; teach me to reach out.
 I want a place where I am welcome; teach me to open my arms.
 I want mercy; teach me to forgive. . . .
 I want life; show me how to die.”*

TED LODER

WELCOMING PRAYER

Desire	to welcome Jesus into every part of my life, body, circumstances and relationships
Definition	Welcoming prayer is a way to detach from my need to be secure, liked and in control, and attach to the presence of Jesus instead.
Scripture	<p>“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)</p> <p>“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Matthew 7:1-2)</p> <p>“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:37)</p> <p>“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” (Matthew 16:25)</p>
Practice Includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doing a body scan and inviting Jesus into the tightness, numbness and pain held in the body • practicing three movements of letting go and one movement of acceptance <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I release my need to please people in this situation. Welcome, Jesus, welcome. 2. I release my desire for security in this situation. Welcome, Jesus, welcome. 3. I release my need to control this situation. Welcome, Jesus, welcome. 4. I receive what is. I let go of my desire to change reality. Welcome, Jesus, welcome.
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increases awareness of triggers and the things that drive and control you • ability to let go of the agenda and risk on God • surrender of control • growing awareness of the presence of Christ in the events of your life • growing emotional health

WELCOMING PRAYER

MANY YEARS AGO I WAS INTRODUCED to welcoming prayer in a workshop taught by Mary Dyer. My memory of the workshop is negligible, but the prayer has stayed with me in life-transforming ways. Though the words *welcoming prayer* are not in Scripture, it is in fact at the heart of the Lord's prayer. "Your kingdom come [in me now], your will be done on earth [by me] as it is in heaven."

Welcoming prayer invites God into the ordinary events and relationships of life with all their busyness, triggers, muscle tension and heartache. It is a way of becoming attentive to God in what is happening now—while I fix dinner, sit in a traffic jam or talk to a colleague.

Welcoming prayer addresses three fundamental needs hardwired into our psyches. The need for

- affection and love
- security and safety
- a sense of agency or power

Without love, we fail to thrive. Without security, we resort to fight-or-flight, or freeze. Without control, we live someone else's reality, deny our needs, attack, withdraw and so on. If we feel we don't have enough affection or security or control, we often fall out of freedom into trigger reactions and compulsive habits. When this happens, it is ego rather than the Spirit of Jesus that is at work in our psyche, soul, and body. In ego mode freedom evaporates—and rationalization, denial, and blame take over. We become self-referenced, overly sensitive and reactive. When people don't do what we want, we take offense. If we are corrected, we cringe and project our flaws onto others.

Welcoming prayer lands us—in the middle of our hot mess—with Jesus so his kingdom can come and his will be done. The prayer releases and accepts. It is a small death expressed in four movements that give room to Jesus and not just our ego. In this moment we say,

- Jesus, I let go of my need to be safe and secure. Welcome.
- Jesus, I let go of my need to be accepted and approved of. Welcome.
- Jesus, I let go of my need to control this person or event. Welcome.
- Jesus, I let go of my need to change reality and receive it as it is. Welcome.

Welcoming Jesus can bring our experience into focus. But what if we aren't aware of how we experience something? What if everyone but us sees how stressed, upset, frustrated and tired we are? How do we get around the coping structures that defend us and keep us unaware? That's when having a body and not just a mind is a gift.

Conscious thought represents a tiny fraction of brain activity. But our body often manifests what is bubbling under the surface of our mind. When your heart races, your jaw clenches, your shoulders get tight or you can hardly breathe, it's your body trying to alert you to something about your experience! If we pay attention, our body will let us know how tense, tired, angry, impatient, unsafe or nervous we are.

Awareness of body sensations can actually lead us into welcoming prayer where we take every thought and imagination captive to Christ. The moment we feel our heart race or jaw clench, we lean into prayer: "I let go of my need to. . . Welcome, Jesus, welcome."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When are you most likely to feel the need for security? What happens when you feel that need?
2. When are you most likely to want to control an event or person? What happens to you when you want to control?
3. When are you most likely to need others' acceptance or approval? What happens to you when you don't get it?
4. What makes it hard for you to receive reality as it is?
5. What happens when you start to judge reality, yourself and others?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. This week make a point to notice when you are triggered by a person or event. Invite Jesus into the event with the words "Welcome, Jesus, welcome."
2. Do a body scan from your toes to the top of your head. Feel any tension, tightness, ache or pain? As you name that place say, "Welcome, Jesus, welcome," and let the tightness go. Breathe deeply. Release.
3. In the morning scan through your day. Anticipate the events and what will be good or hard. Welcome Jesus into these events before you enter your day and in the midst of the day.

RESOURCES ON WELCOMING PRAYER

This website has booklets on welcoming prayer: www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/welcoming-prayer