



Turning to the Mystics

The Cloud of Unknowing

Session 4
with James Finley

Jim Finley: Greetings, I'm Jim Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. Greetings, everyone. And welcome to our time here together. A turning for guidance to the teachings of the Christian mystic, anonymous author of the *The Cloud of Unknowing*. As we go through these mystics together, I think it's always helpful to remind ourselves that these texts were written as guidelines and spiritual direction. And particularly with respect to offering guidance for the person who's come to a very mysterious place, or for those of us who come to this mysterious place and our journey. At which our search for God and prayer and in life starts to become mystical. Meaning, it starts to take on a quality of infused contemplation. That it's God not gracing us with the graces of God and the gift of the earth, the gift of life, the gift of our relationships, the gift of our inspirations, all of that in response to which we respond in love to live this life of discipleship and so on.

Jim Finley: But rather is the point at which God begins to infuse into us God's knowledge of God. And infuse into us God's knowledge of who God eternally owes us to be, hidden with Christ in God forever and eternally calls us to be. And we passively receive this divine influx into ourselves. And because this is so mysterious, sometimes it's very intense. There can be visions or voices or, and very intense things can happen. But you see it's just the opposite. It's extremely subtle and delicate. So they're trying to help us discern the signs that it's happening to us, and also how to cooperate with it. And also, what I want to talk about this morning with you, sharing with you in this session. It isn't like a decisive point. Like all of a sudden it clicks in the mystical direction. But there's actually a very broad-based range in which the intonations of the mystical start moving in and out of our lives. And that's what I want to speak about here.

Jim Finley: And also, what's different with the cloud, why this is particularly helpful, I think, has noticed that in the previous mystics there's no method. Thomas Merton never suggests a way to practice contemplative prayer. Teresa of Avila doesn't do that, John of the Cross doesn't do that. Guigo doesn't do that. What they do is suggest that we start out in devotional sincerity with *lectio divina*, our reflective meditation, the prayer of our heart, our desire. And then at what point does that start to touch contemplation in how to respond? And so the cloud is different and it offers us a method, unlike these previous mystics. We'll see later when we do the Jesus prayer of the way of a Pilgrim, we also get a method. And so we might in getting this method think, "Oh, here's a method, I think I'll practice it."

Jim Finley: See, here's how you do this and do this. So I'd like to talk about practicing this way to contemplative prayer. Popularly known today as centering prayer. But as its experience and understood on this broad range, the spectrum of discerning where we're at and how we experience and respond to it. It's an inclusive invitation to anyone who's drawn to practice it. And then at the end, I want to talk in 74 and 75, chapter 74 and 75. I want to talk about where the author says, "This might not be for you." Gives the reasons why it not be for you, and because God's always waiting for you where you are, not to some mystical place you're supposed to be. And so we're always trying to discern where we realistically are to follow how God's one with us in our life.

Jim Finley: And therefore he says, "However, there are some who are called to kind of a singular mystical path of this love alone, of leaving behind all thoughts, all images, all and so on." And I want to speak specifically to those people also through this whole book, because it's hard for people who are being called to that to find help in understanding it. They wanted to find

help and how to conduct themselves and so on. So, that's what I want to focus on here. And this will be my last session on the cloud speaking alone, Kirsten will be coming on next with me for the session. We're asking questions like a dialogue, and then there'll be more where we'll be responding to your questions that you submit in and might be a couple of those. And so then we'll take a break and then we'll pick up later with the contemporary of the cloud. English, mystic 14th century, Julian of Norwich.

Jim Finley: Take a break. Then we'll go into the German mystical traditional, we'll look at Meister Eckhart. And then Mechthild of Magdeburg. So we just kind of keep moving along here as long as we do this. So I want to start then in the light of that with chapter eight. Again, he's talking to a directee in spiritual direction. And by implication, he's also talking to all of us to help us understand how this lines up with where we personally are in our life. He realizes this person or we been listening to these guidelines about leaving all thought behind, all thoughts of God, all images of God and cloud of unknowing, all thoughts of ourself, all thoughts of the earth, all our conceptualization of the cloud of forgetting.

Jim Finley: But the person's listening to this and has this question. "I'm listening to what you're saying here. I'm supposed to take this word and ground myself in that word, come what may, to use it as a defense, to protect me from thinking about the thoughts that arise, about the memories that arise, the feelings that arise. But now you say to me," this is us talking to the author of *The Cloud*. "How am I to judge these ideas, the pressing upon me as I pray, are they good or evil? And if they are evil, I'm amazed because they arouse my devotion so much. At times they are a real comfort. And even me weep for sorrow at Christ's passion in my own sinfulness. For other reasons too I'm inclined to believe that these holy meditations do me a great deal of good. So if they are not evil, but actually good, I don't understand why you advise me to abandon them beneath the cloud of forgetting?" That's a good question.

Jim Finley: You're going along. Let's say we go latter, you're practicing the sincerity of your lectio. Open the scriptures, God speaking personally to you in your heart. And this engages then in thinking, in reflecting on these insights and these thoughts and these images as a way to pray, or a way to engage in God's presence in your life, moving on to prayer and desire. And now you're apparently telling me not to do that. Then why is it so helpful? That's a good question. Next paragraph.

Jim Finley: Now these are very good questions and I'll try my best answer them. And here's what he is inviting us to do is when we set out to live on this contemplative path, we're really trying, moving towards becoming a contemplative person, a contemplative man or woman. A person who has a broad-based experiential self-knowledge, but the nature of our mind and the nature of our heart and relationship to God and relationship with others. And so now he's going to invite us to kind of reflect on this. Because we might say this, we think about many things. We think about this. We think about that, but we rarely think about thinking and the nature of thinking and the role thinking plays in our life. And at what point does thinking or attachment to thinking become a hindrance.

Jim Finley: "First of all," the author says, "you want to know what kind of thoughts they are." This is the first thing to ask yourself about these thoughts, "What kind of thoughts are they that are pretending to be so helpful?" To this I say, "These are the clear ideas of natural intelligence, which reason conceives in your mind. As to whether they are good or evil, I must insist

they're always good in themselves. For your intelligence is a reflection of the divine intelligence." In other words, he starts out first by affirming the holiness of the mind and the holiness of the capacity of the mind to think. Because we're created by God in the image and likeness of God. And so the divine intelligence is expressed and mirrored and reflected in the gift of our intelligence. Is part of the dowry of our being as persons to have a mind, to think. "Now, as to whether these thoughts that are always inherently good by nature as thought. As to whether these thoughts are good or evil, I must insist that they're always good in themselves, for your intelligence is a reflection of the divine intelligence.

Jim Finley: But what you do with them may be either good or evil. Certainly they are good when with God's grace they help you understand your sinfulness, the passion of Christ, the kindness of God, or the marvels he works throughout all of creation. So these thoughts are always that are inherently good, but our intention in how we use thoughts are good if they help us to be good." That is by reflecting on it, we're more deeply appreciative of God's goodness, the more appreciative of the gift of life, the sun moving across the sky, the darkness of the night, the people in our life. These thoughts we have about ourselves and people and God, it's all good if it helps us to be good and have the goodness of life.

Jim Finley: And so it is little wonder then that such reflections deep in your devotion, like keep at it, keep going good for you. But they become evil and inflated with pride, intellectual curiosity and egoism, they corrupt your or mind. And so for example, you can do deep Bible study, the Word of God, and you're going to take it very seriously. You get some biblical commentaries, throw in biblical commentary, the Anchor Bible, different ones. You get out your notebook, really get into the word. You start studying scripture, commentaries on scripture, and you start becoming a certain image of yourself. As a kind of a very gifted person in the knowledge of scripture, where you might devote yourself to the study of the mystic. You move on from these sessions to read the text, you outline them, you look at commentaries and you start to become very learned about it. But you start realizing how learned you're becoming as an image of yourself as this very learned person about the teachings of the mystical thing. And you've become kind of inflated it with pride, because obviously you understand these things much, much better than anybody around you.

Jim Finley: Also, intellectual curiosity, that is you're doing it just simply as a diversion. You know, T. S. Eliot says in *Four Quartets*, I think it is. He says, "I was distracted from the distraction by a distraction." And so it keeps us in the shallows in so far as we read it out of idle curiosity. We might go from curiously studying mystical traditions to taking up, to watching TV shows or something. It's just one more thing to occupy your my mind, see, because you find it fascinating. Then they corrupt the mind in the sense in which they lessen your capacity to be aware of and responsive to your destiny and God's love. And to your destiny to become who you deep down really are and are called to be. They cloud the mind over. See, for then you have put aside the humble mind of the scholar, the scholarly study of these traditions. If you're inclined to do that, to get into the text. The true scholar is humbled by it.

Jim Finley: You know the saying, the two theologian is the one who prays. That there's a kind

of a prayer knowledge that humbles you by the depth of these teachings, the beauty of these teachings, the richness of these teachings. The true master of theology in asceticism. And instead, you become like the proud scholar of the devil. Experts in vanity and lies, this thing about the image of yourself. “This, I say as a warning for everyone. Natural intelligence is turned to evil whenever it is filled with pride and unnecessary curiosity about worldly affairs and human vanities, or when it selfishly covets worldly dignities, riches, empty pleasures or flattery.” And I don’t think it means the normal kind of day by day we all kind of do this. But where we kind of get tricked by it or kind of caught up in it and we kind of lose our way in our own life.

Jim Finley: Now you ask, “If then these arts are not only good in themselves, but may also be used to good advantage, then why must they be abandoned in the cloud of forgetting?” So let’s say, “Well, actually in my prayer, when I sit there with the scriptures open or my spiritual reading, I’m actually turning to reflect upon these things, these meditations on these things, because they do deepen my relationship with God. That my intentions are good and they help me. And why must I abandon them beneath the cloud of forgetting?” See, so this directee, us, is still asking, “I want help here to really be clear about when I sit and pray, what you’re inviting me to do and how am I to understand this?”

Jim Finley: Let me begin by saying that in the church there are two kinds of life, the active and the contemplative. The active life is lower and the contemplative life is higher. Within the active life there are two degrees, a lower and a higher. And within the contemplative life, there are also two degrees, a lower and a higher. But these two lives are so complimentary that although they are quite different from one another, neither can exist completely independent of the other, where the higher degree of the active life flows into the lower degree of the contemplative life. So that no matter how active a person may be, it is also at the same time partially contemplative. And when he is fully contemplative, as he can be in this life, he remains to some extent active also.

Jim Finley: I’d like to reflect on this and kind of what he’s saying here. Because I understand it and sit with and see if it helps you, kind of get your bearings and where you are with this. Let’s say you’re saying that there are the day-by-day realities of our daily responsibilities. You get up in the morning, you have a life to live, and there are many things that require that you think about and figure out and engage in and think about those things. And thinking about it is your way of engaging in the gift of the day and the gift of the life, of your life.

Jim Finley: And also know that when you go to pray, you find it very helpful to turn to the scriptures to say the words of Jesus and take them as being God’s personally speaking to you in your heart. And they invite a reflective process. You think upon these things and you ponder them and they give you insights and they help you apply it to daily life and so on, what they call the special way of living the life. “But then what happens,” he says, “the higher realms of the active life.” That is where we’re reflectively thinking about God and about love and about eternity and about meaning, about fidelity, about these noble aspirations.

Jim Finley: What we discover is it takes on certain contemplative tone to it. That is we’re

thinking, but the thinking starts taking on a certain qualitative depth dimension of kind of reflectively pondering or quietly resting in an insight or a certain luminosity that comes and flows out of the thought that a certain moment kind of pauses you in the thinking to rest for a moment more deeply into what that a thought brought you to as an insight or a presence or a realization to rest in.

Jim Finley: I'd like to give two images of this and applying it to life, then applying it to prayer. What happens when we devote ourselves to anything and we commit ourselves to a daily practice, whatever it is, we devote ourselves to that? What we discover, not only does it deepen us in the moments we're devoted to that practice, whatever it might be. But we notice that somehow it starts filtering into underlying patterns of our mind in which it starts to illuminate incidental moments throughout the whole day is becoming habituated.

Jim Finley: I want to give two examples of this, or kind of contemplative dimensions of daily life, where the active life, it starts flowing into the lower levels of the contemplative life. I used to teach in the summers at Notre Dame University a program called Retreats International. Was founded by a Jesuit priest, Father Tom Gedeon, and father Tom Gedeon was very devoted to photography as a spiritual practice. He had a beautiful camera and he did, you could tell he really did his homework in terms of the aperture openings and speed levels and depth of field and so on. And so he just was there as a way to see, photography helped him to see the world.

Jim Finley: And once he and I, we were driving across campus at Notre Dame, it was a big, beautiful campus and I was driving, he was taking me to the other side of the campus. I think it was to speak to a smaller group for a talk or something, I can't remember. And there's a little lake there on the grounds at Notre Dame. And as we were slowly driving along this little road, along this lake, there was a little girl walking along and she had a loaf of bread under her arm. And she was breaking off hunks of bread and tossing them over her shoulder. And following her was a whole string of ducks following her like this. He stopped the car. He saw that, stopped the car, got out, reached into the backseat to about the camera, start taking a lot of pictures of her. So when he developed the picture and had it framed and matted, when we saw that little girl throwing the bread over her shoulder, it helped us to see her too.

Jim Finley: See, this is what artists do for us. They commit us to the discipline. And in committing to the discipline, it gives them the means of expressing the interiority of what they see and the interior dimensions of what they see when we gaze upon the work of art, they help us to see it too. Same with the voice of the poet, the voice of deep life-filled literature, so in film.

Jim Finley: I'm going to give another example. Maureen, when she first came out here, my wife, she first came out here to California reassigned by her corporation in New York. And she was a very serious alcoholic and she lost her job and she was having blackouts and so on. And started going regular to AA meetings, took it very seriously. It saved her life really. And it was kind of her grounding place in spirituality. And she told me that what she would do, she lived here in Marina del Rey. She would drive up the highway, headed north from here to this retreat house in Encino, or later she was to become a spiritual director, years later. And it goes to a mountain pass and it's this dry rock of California. This, you kind of go through this pass with this dry cliffs on either side. And along one cliff, part way up the cliff on this, which she would drive every week to this retreat she would go to, there was a bush clinging

to the rock on the side of that cliff.

Jim Finley: And she told me that when she was driving and she would look up for that bush and she saw it as the sign of the tenacity with which she was clinging to her higher power to save her life. And she saw the tenacity with which she was clinging to the higher power to save her life was an echo of her higher power tenacity of clinging to her and saving her life and transforming her life, see. Through the practice and through meditation, prayer and the life. And so what I want to get at here is that the higher levels of the active life when lived, whether this has to do with married love or being a parent or teaching students in a classroom or any endeavor, when you really commit yourself to it as your way to help humanity. At least to certain sensitivities, which are the lower levels of the contemplative life and that contemplative life, those innuendos or those implications of it, then drop back down in and enriching the practicalities of the active life.

Jim Finley: And the same thing then applies to prayer. We apply ourselves to prayer in the active life, through *lectio divina*, discursive meditation and prayer, it's active. And in that activity we are, in committing ourselves to this rendezvous with God, it takes a commitment to do it. And what it does, it enriches our awareness of the gifts of God, enriches the awareness of the goodness of God for God's gift, the gift of life, the gift of the earth, the gift to these people in our life, the gift of our health. I mean, whatever the gifts are, as well they should. And as it continues to deepen it, there are certain moments of gratitude where we pause and we see something shining through of a taste of the contemplative where we ponder it or where we kind of rest in it wordlessly in a kind of a clarity between thoughts, a kind of a subtle resting.

Jim Finley: And we go back and forth across the borderline between the active and the contemplative, mutually enriching each other. And I think actually, if we really look at it, it helps us to understand, this really helps understand how this often works in life, how this enriches our life, this practice. But now in the light of this, what starts to happen when as you go back and forth this way, what starts to happen is you start to enter into the higher forms of the contemplative life, and you don't plan this. You didn't expect it. So it's just like, to say it again, it becomes mystical because it's God. It isn't your graced activity of responding to God in reflective prayer and inspiration and the holiness of that discipleship.

Jim Finley: But rather, it's in the midst of God actively infusing into you God's knowledge of God and God's knowledge of who you are in God. And you passively receive it. Because it's divine, it's infinite. And in this influx of the infinite into this, there's this unexpected sincerity where there's a stirring of this event happening in you, and notice too, in the cloud we go back to the forward to the cloud. These momentary moments happen in the midst of the active life. There's this blind stirring of love. From time to time there's this blind stirring of love. It's innermost, it's not a stirring of an emotion. It's deeper than emotion. It's in this hidden place within us where God's sustaining us breath by breath, by breath. It's deeper than thought. And it momentarily flashes forth and we're quickened by it. And then it passes and it hallows or enriches our day-by-day devotional life, our day-by-day life.

Jim Finley: But what happens with some people, the singular way, is that these flashes these taste, they take up residents in our heart as a desire to abide there always. So this is a desire that you don't understand, for a union you don't understand. But you know, it's true because you fleetingly taste it. And you feel in your heart that you're drawn not to be satisfied with

fleeting glimpses of being divinized in this love unexplainably. But you're being called by God to surrender yourself over to it, that it might have its way with you. That it might become your habitual underlying way of experiencing this. It is really a way of, you're literally dying of love. Until there's nothing left of you but love. It's really, it's a foretaste of death. When we pass to the veil of death, we pass over into unmediated divinity and knowing God with God's knowledge of God, loving God with God's love of God, not in the glory that is to come. Because on this earth it's always very obscure, subtle, hidden, delicate, but very deep and true.

Jim Finley: And so the author of *The Cloud* is saying, "Yes, there is this broad-based way, it applies to everybody." And so some people, they read *The Cloud*. It's not an issue because it doesn't draw you. It's like, "I don't get it." But some people, they get it. They like it and they practice it. Anyone can practice this. But you'll know the fruits will reveal where you are because of how you experience the benefits of it. So some people will say, "Yes, I practice centering prayer, contemplative prayer. And it really does help me. I'm more centered. I'm more grounded. I'm more present, I'm more aware. I'm more humble. I have more empathy. I have more." And that's the gifts of God, that are the fruit of the active life. So this is a form of prayer that enriches you in your active life.

Jim Finley: Then there is a person who's saying, "Yes, all that's true, that's true, that's true. But that's not the thing with me," the person says. "There is in me a kind of a burning of this love where I feel God is unexplainably accessing me and drawing me forth, inviting me to surrender and give myself completely in a self-donating act of love in the reciprocity of God's self-donating love for me. So that in the word I ground myself in this, for this love alone. And so thoughts come by, they rise and they fall within me. But all these thoughts of God, they're like love letters of the beloved. The words of scripture, all these, he says. He says, "But it's not. I want the beloved, because the beloved wants me. And I'm drawn to this communion."

Jim Finley: And then the author of *The Cloud*. This brings us back to the beginning of the book, forward. There are some presently engaged in the active life who are being called by God to grasp the message of this book. I am thinking of those who feel the mysterious action of the spirit in their heart stirring them to love. I don't say they experience it all the time, the way experience contemplatives do. That is there are people who experience it all the time. But now and again they taste it. And then he says in chapter one, speaking to his directee, to this person who's being directed. "I see now that you live there, that is, I can tell when we're together in spiritual direction, the way you talk, you're being unexplainably drawn to abide. And in some way you're already abiding there. There's this longing you don't understand. And I want to talk to you about that."

Jim Finley: And therefore, the reason why then you sit there in this prayer grounded in this one word alone, in this, the self-donating love that you cannot and do not need to understand. Is because that's where you are, that's why. It's just, you're honoring the truth of yourself. And this is why he says, "You need to be very patient with this." It says in the second chapter, you remember? He says, "You need to be very humble and very patient with it." He says, "Because the thing is, you know you'll be miserable if you don't do this." This love act that you don't understand. I'm talking to that. And why is it important I think to single this out? I think it's because people who are drawn to this way, and it doesn't mean people who are drawn this way are holier than those who aren't drawn to this way. But it's a chrism that

they're drawn to this way.

Jim Finley: It's very hard for them to find somebody to talk to. And so, my experience of this is, for some reason, for me, when I was 14 years old, earlier, really starting very little, I was so touched by this wordless union, this thing. And when I started reading Thomas Merton's *The Sign of Jonas* at 14 to the four years of high school, all, it just got deeper and deeper. And I lived in the monastery with him in silence for nearly six years. And we would talk about this. See, he would introduce me to John of the Cross and these mystics, we would talk and the silence, I just surrendered myself to it. And he said to me, we were having one of these talks about this. He said, "Once in a while you'll find somebody with whom you can talk about such things." He said, "But they're hard to find, because there's many people."

Jim Finley: Sincere people living the Christian life who don't even know about this. Well, they know about it, but you can put it off until later. It's very hard to find somebody who, when you say it, you can tell, they know what you're saying. And they invite you to be faithful to the primacy of it in your life. And for me, my experience is when I left the monastery and started giving retreats these silent weekend retreats. So these are college students, married couples, divorced people, mothers and fathers, professional people living in the world. And they were drawn to come to a retreat because they heard it would be in silence. And the meals were in silence. Silent throughout the day. There were 20 minute periods of silent prayer and meditation. And the talks were about this, is what I'm talking to you about now. So these are people in the midst of the world who find this stirring for this longing to be a contemplative man or woman in the midst of the world as a vocation or a calling.

Jim Finley: And for the singularity, both the broad-based way, you know that fans out very broadly. However this helps you, all these sessions with all these mystics that's true. And the very fact you're moved by the beauty of these sessions or you're touched by it, your heart bears witness, you are being called to it or you wouldn't be moved by it. And so you're called to kind of discern your way. What is the way, where are you at with this? And this is why I think that if you are called to this more singular way, this is where we can treasure these mystics. Because even though the mystic is maybe dead for many years, their deathless presence shines in everything that they say, and goes right to your heart. This trustworthy guidance, because you know, you're subject to self-deception, to discouragement and so on. So I'd like to conclude then as a concluding thought recess after speaking this way. Chapter 74, *The Pastoral Sensitivity*.

Jim Finley: Because he knows who the directee is he's talking to, who's called to the singular way. But clearly he's also writing this for anyone whom might find it helpful, but he doesn't know who we are. He doesn't know people are coming at this at different frames of reference. And so he's laying down an important pastoral note, chapter 74. "Should it seem that the way a prayer I have described in this book is unsuited to you spiritually or temperamentally, feel perfectly free to leave it aside. And with wise console seek another in full confidence. In that case, I trust you will hold me excused for all that I've written here." In other words, "I realize now we're on page 143, I've taken up a lot of your time to kind of get to the point. This might not be for you after all."

Jim Finley: But he even going to say later, "I suggest you read it several times to be sure because it's subtle. Truly, I wrote only according to my simple understanding of these things, yet with

no other purpose of that of helping you. So read it over two or three times. The more often you read it, the better. For that much more shall you grasp of its meaning parts that seem difficult and obscured first perhaps become clear.” So it, maybe you’re not called in a singular way where it’s like your way. In which case you return back to your Lectio. Back to your devotional sincerity. This guideline, if it helps, do it. If it doesn’t help, don’t do it. But God’s always waiting for us where we are. But it’s good to know about this. And then in the broad sense you may practice it. Because it helps to be more grounded, more present, more whatever. So like to your own self, be true.

Jim Finley: And I think part of maturity in this path is learning to trust ourself in a humble way. We’re always open for input and to be open and all of that. But there’s a certain way of trusting the inclinations of our heart ,and by trial and error we find our way and find whatever resources we can to help us. It seems to me that anyone whom grace has drawn to contemplation will not read this book or hear it read to them, as I’m reading it to you now, without feeling that it speaks of something akin to his own spirit. Should you feel this way and find it helpful? Thank God with all your heart and for love of him, pray for me. I sincerely hope that you will do this, for I’m very serious when I ask you for the love of God. See, discern, discern, discern, be careful, walk your walk, be true to yourself, stay open, and so on.

Jim Finley: Chapter 75, the last thing I’ll comment on. “I’d like to make it clear that not everyone who reads this book or hears it read and finds it pleasantly interesting is therefore a call to contemplation.” Because he says, “The inner excitement that comes when you read it may just be through curiosity or may, no harm done. It doesn’t necessarily mean you’re called to it.” So what are the signs that you’re called to it? He says, “First of all, there is a commitment to love God and surrender to God’s love for you. And the Christian tradition is revealed in Jesus and the life of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus. That’s the main thing. Follow me in this love path. That’s the most important thing.”

Jim Finley: Next, “To know that if you are called to it, it doesn’t mean you’ll go continually feel the stirring. As a matter of fact,” he says, “what happens often, it goes away. As you’re sitting there in the subtlety of this simple love desire, grounded in the word with all your heart. And it evaporates on you. Like you look around, there’s nothing there.” And he says, “The thing is sometimes this happens because God wants to teach you that you can’t do it.” See, it’s God. And unless you get presumptuous in things that you’re doing it, God takes it away to show you, you can’t do it. Then once you realize that you just can’t do it, God begins to once again achieve it in you and you actively receive it and cooperate with it. He also says, “It doesn’t mean that sometimes there isn’t real struggle.”

Jim Finley: There’s a chapter in which he talks about struggling with distractions. And, let me find that chapter right here, chapter 32. But the fact it’s a struggle doesn’t mean you’re not called to it. But likewise, the fact you’re struggling also doesn’t mean you should stay there because you are called to it. So you have to really discern what’s going on. The fact you’re struggling, but you can feel in your heart you’re called to do it. You’re called to lean into it, and that the struggle undo your illusions that you’re even capable of doing it. You throw yourself upon the mercy of God and so forth.

Jim Finley: He says, “One of the most obvious and certain signs by which a person may know that he has been called to this work is the gratitude he detects in himself when he has founded again,

has found the lost gift of grace. For after long delay in inability to do this work, the dark night, see for John of the Cross and the sixth mansion with Theresa too, he feels his desire for it renewed with greater passion and a deeper longing for love. So much so that as I often think the sorrow he felt at its loss seems like nothing at all beside his joy he has in finding it again.”

Jim Finley: It’s almost as if God takes it away to heighten the desire so that when God returns the gift of this union, it’ll even deepen your gratitude and deepen your communion and your openness to God who’s transforming you into the life of God unexplainably forever like this. And by the way, as you start the meditation, as you listen to this prayer, the way we start the prayer, see, “Be still and know I am God.” We take one word off each time. See, but look at the levels of meaning. He be still. There, “Be still and know I am God.” It’s this kind of stillness where you’re kind of transfix in this transconceptual love, the stillness. See, you can see the contempt of mystical connotations of this passage of praying, “Be still and know that I’m God.” And also notice in Lectio and discursive prayer, the stillness as a reflective stillness. It’s a kind of quietly moving with the flow and tempo of grace as it rises and falls in your heart.

Jim Finley: You’re in this cadences of this stillness, which is a flowing presence of God moment by moment in our life. So with that, then we’ll sit in meditation. Invite you to sit straight, hold your hands and bow, “Be still and know I am God. Be still and know I am, be still and know, be still, be.”

Jim Finley: (silence)

Jim Finley: We’ll slowly say the Lord’s prayer together. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen. Mary mother of contemplatives, pray for us. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, pray for us. Julian of Norwich, pray for us. Blessings until our next time.

Speaker 2: Thank you for listening to this episode of *Turning to the Mystics*. A podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We’re planning to do episodes that answer your questions. So if you have a question, please email us at podcasts@cac.org or send us a voicemail at cac.org/voicemails. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We’ll see you again soon.