

# THE POWER AND PRACTICE OF PRAYER

## Prayer Practices

The explanation of the following prayer practices is meant to be a guide, not a rulebook. The best way to understand prayer is to pray. The best way to know God is to spend time with God. There are many ways to pray. Here are some ways to pray that have been around for a long time. Try them out, experiment, explore. There's no wrong way to pray. God loves you and wants to be in a relationship with you. Here are some ways to deepen your relationship with God.

## Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer helps center your spirit and focus your mind on God. Often your mind will swing from one thought to another, creating constant chatter in your head and making it difficult to listen to anything else. Centering prayer helps you quiet your mind by focusing on a word or phrase that you repeat over and over.

Pick a phrase (like "thy will be done" or "let go and let God" or "Jesus give me peace" or "forgive me, O God" or "help me, O Lord"). Close your eyes. Say the first half of the phrase as you inhale, and the second as you exhale. Do this over and over again, slowly, focusing on the words, the rhythm, your breathing.

## The Examen

Is a prayer practice that seeks God in day-to-day life. Even though we may know intellectually that God is always with us, we are often unaware of His presence in our daily lives. This prayer practice helps us to become more aware of God's ongoing presence in our lives.

Choose a period of time to examine in prayer. This can be a day, a week, or a specific event. Allow your mind to wander through that period of time. Ask yourself one or more of these questions:

1. Become aware of God's presence.

*In him we live and move and have our being.* (Acts 17:28)

2. Review the day with gratitude.

*When the spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth.* (John 16:13)

3. When did you live out of love and freedom in Christ today?

*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence or if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* (Philippians 4:8)

4. When did you not live out of love and freedom in Christ?

*Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord.* (Lamentations 3:40)

5. Thank God for what is happening through this exercise, and ask for guidance and grace for tomorrow. *Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* (Ephesians 3:20)

It is helpful to write down what comes to you. As some answers to these questions surface, notice what this tells you about the future. How is God calling you into being or into action? Write down your reflections if you wish. Repeat this prayer at regular intervals in order to see how God is working in your life.

### **Lectio Divina**

Lectio Divina is Latin for “sacred reading” This process takes seriously the idea that the Bible is the living Word of God which still speaks to us today.

Have you ever read a passage of scripture and then forgotten it 15 minutes later? Lectio Divina helps us to deepen our relationship with God through reading a passage 3 times and letting the Word sink into our heart and soul. It allows us to savor the Word and digest it slowly. Here is the process: Select a short scripture passage.

- 1) Read the scripture passage out loud slowly and listen closely to what you are reading.
- 2) Allow for some silence to let the scripture sink into your heart and soul
- 3) Read the scripture a second time to yourself.
- 4) Allow some silence and notice the words or phrases that stand out for you in the reading.
- 5) Read the scripture a third time to yourself.
- 6) Allow some silence to ponder how this passage relates to your life today. What is it saying to you? What actions is it calling you to take?
- 7) You may chose to write down the words and phrases and the way in which this passage speaks to you.

### **Community Prayer**

Praying together means lifting our hearts to the unity of purpose of praying for one another. We pray for those we care about, the health of our loved ones. We pray for our neighbors, our governments, our schools. We pray for peace in the world. It is a deeply bonding experience. Shared prayer time is often soothing to the mind, calming to the heart and healing for the body. There are studies supporting the health-enhancing benefits of prayer.

It is a way that we as Christians bond and blend with other Christians. Together we strengthen the body of Christ. Alone or together, this ability to talk to our loving Creator is a gift and blessing which brings us closer to the very heartbeat of God.

### **Jesus Prayer**

In the book, “The Way of the Pilgrim” it tells of a Russian peasant who attended church one day and heard the words from I Thess. 5:17 to “pray without ceasing”. These words stayed with him and he wondered how someone could pray without stopping when they have other things to do to make a living. He went from church to church listening to sermons to find the answer to his question. Finally he met a holy man who said to him, “Ceaseless interior prayer is a continual yearning of the human spirit towards God.”

Then the holy man told the peasant to repeat the name of Jesus over and over again without stopping. The words of the prayer were taken from two passages of scripture: Jesus’ encounter with the blind man, Bartimeus who cried out to him as he passed by the city of Jericho, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.”(Luke 18:38) and that of the publican, “O God be merciful to me a

sinner.” The Jesus prayer combines elements from both in its longer form, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” The Jesus prayer has been used in the Christian east since the earliest days of the desert monastic communities.

You can use this prayer today in either its long form or its short form which is, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” With either form, simply pray half of the words on the in breath and half of the words on the out breath. Say the prayer over and over again in rhythm with your breath to quiet your mind and open your heart.

### **Walking Meditation**

Find a peaceful place to walk. Outside works best, but you can also do walking meditation indoors. Walk slowly bringing your attention to your breath and your senses. Begin by focusing on one sense at a time (for instance, begin with sight and notice everything you can see all around you, then move to hearing, etc.)

Also, become aware of your breath as you are walking. This grounds you in your body. After you’ve focused on each of the senses, allow yourself to become aware of them altogether. Whenever your focus shifts to thoughts or your “to do” list while you are walking, gently bring your attention back to your breath and to the sense you are focusing on. If you begin to walk fast, remind yourself to slow down and be in the present moment with yourself and with God.

### **Gratitude Journaling**

Write down all the things and the people in your life that you are grateful for. This can be a daily or a weekly practice. It is also very helpful to do at times when you are feeling discouraged or frustrated. You can also do this in the form of a letter to God or a dialogue with.

### **Writing a Letter to God**

Find a time that you can be quiet and free from interruption for at least a half hour. Take a piece of paper or a notebook and write a letter to God. Start the letter with “Dear God” or “Dear Jesus” and then write whatever is on your heart and mind; your feeling, your hurts, your struggles, your questions. After you have finished writing everything that’s on your heart, close your eyes and ask God to answer your letter. And then, listen. Listen for the words that come into your mind and write them down. If no words come to you the first time, try again at a later time. Be patient with this process and trust that God will respond in His own timing.

### **Having a Dialogue with God**

This exercise is like writing a play script. Write your name or initial on the left side of the page and then write what you want to say to God. Close your eyes and wait for God’s answer. Then record what you hear. Don’t try and guess what God would say, just let the words come to you. Go back and forth between writing what you want to say to God and recording what you hear God saying to you. Try to get your head out of the way and let your heart take over.