



The Practice of Prayer

Experiences of Prayer

Reproducible Prayer Activities

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2. Prayer is. . .
3. Prayer is Relationship with God.
4. Prayer is Opening Our Lives to God.
5. Prayer is Being Changed by God.
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Children Activities

There are 4 pages of prayer activities designed for children that can be combined with other prayer activities or used as part of a children's program and home activities.

1. Prayer in My Life
2. Jesus Prays
3. Learning to Pray
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Prayer in My Life Today

What is the role of prayer in your spiritual life? Make time to reflect on your prayer life. You can answer all of these questions in one sitting, or you can answer them over time, one a day or a few each day. Write your answers to these questions so you can return to them whenever you feel the need. This might be a

good time to start a prayer journal with your reflections and insights as you grow in the practice of prayer.

F How is your prayer life today?

- When do you pray?
- Where do you pray?
- What do you do during your prayer time, e.g., read the Bible, contemplate, listen to music, be silent, or recite traditional prayers?
- What do you pray for or pray about?

F How has your prayer life changed or grown or evolved over the course of your life? What was your prayer life like when you were a child? a teenager? a young adult? a parent? a midlife adult? a grandparent? an older adult? (Answer as many as apply to you.)

F Have you ever felt “stuck” in your prayer? When? How? What do you do about it?

F Has there ever been a time when you couldn’t pray, but felt sustained by the prayers offered on your behalf?

F When were the prayer times when you felt closest to God? Why?

Prayer Is...

*I have come to realize more and more that prayer is just being in the presence of one who loves you deeply, who loves with a love that will not let you go, and so when I get up in the morning I try to spend as much time as I can in the sense of being quiet in the presence of this love. It's like I'm sitting in front of a warm fire on a cold day. I don't have to do anything. All I have to do is be there. And after a while, I may have the qualities of the fire change me, so I have the warmth of the fire. I may have the glow of the fire, and it is so also with me and God. I just have to be there, quiet. (Archbishop Desmond Tutu in *The Life of Meaning*)*

F What does prayer mean to you?

F Which of the following meanings come closest to your own understanding? What would you add?

- ☐ Prayer is relationship with God.
- ☐ Prayer is opening our lives to God.
- ☐ Prayer is being changed by God.
- ☐ Prayer is being attentive to God and others.
- ☐ Prayer is living.

Prayer Is Relationship with God

To pray is to enter into a relationship with God and to have that relationship make a difference in my life.
(Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer*)

Simply put, prayer is all the ways in which we communicate and commune with God. The fundamental purpose of prayer is to deepen our intimacy with God. (Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*)

Establishing and developing a relationship is the nucleus of all Christian prayer. The bond is created with someone, and that someone is God. Our Source of Life continually bids each of us into a loving union. The process of prayer unfolds in a way similar to Jesus inviting his disciples to follow him into deeper relationship, a closeness that did not develop instantly. Prayer is a kind of companionship that develops step by step, as we are drawn into an ever-expanding oneness of love. (Joyce Rupp, *Prayer*)

The spiritual life has to do with how God relates to us and how we, in turn, relate to God. Prayer is the essential expression of this relationship. Like the spiritual life itself, prayer is initiated by God. No matter what we think about the origin of our prayers, they are all a response to the hidden workings of the Spirit within.

God's desire for us ignites the spark of our desire for God. God's guiding heart nudges forth our prayers to be led. Perhaps our real task in prayer is to attune ourselves to the conversation already going on deep in our hearts. Then we may align our conscious intentions with the desire of God being expressed at our core.

Prayer involves freely entering a relationship of communication and communion with God, for the sake of knowledge, growth, and mutual enjoyment. (Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*)

F What does prayer as a ‘relationship with God’ mean to you today?

Praying Is Opening Our Lives to God

To pray means to open your hands before God. It means slowly relaxing the tension that squeezes your hands together and accepting your existence with an increasing readiness, not as a possession to defend but as a gift to receive. Above all, prayer is a way of life that allows you to find stillness in the midst of the world, where you open your hands to God's promises and find hope for yourself, your neighbor, and your world. In prayer, you encounter God not only in the small voice and the soft breeze, but also in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in the distress and joy of your neighbor and in the loneliness of your own heart.

*In the end, a life of prayer is a life with open hands where we are not ashamed of our weakness but realize that it is more perfect for us to be led by the Other than to try to hold everything in our own hands. (Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands*)*

Prayer is not a competition, not an experience of winning or of accumulating good feelings and great insights. Prayer is about "showing up" with an open mind and heart, being willing and ready to grow and change.

(Joyce Rupp, *Prayer*)

F What does prayer as "opening our lives to God " mean to you today?

Prayer Is Being Changed by God

We pray so that God can change us. Those who pray prepare for the in-breaking of God in their lives.
(Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*)

Prayer is meant to “grow us.” Every divine encounter holds the possibility of transforming us. Genuine prayer is risky. It changes us, and we are never sure what those changes might be. We may not initially be aware of the alterations within ourselves because these movements are often imperceptible, but each authentic prayer brings our truest self a bit more to the surface of life. This transformation includes discovering our pre-eminent virtues and our most dismal compulsions, our finest qualities and our most embarrassing traits.
(Joyce Rupp, *Prayer*)

One Benedictine friend, a gentle, thoughtful man who has been in constant physical pain for years and is now confined to a wheelchair, says of prayer, “Often all I can do is ask God, ‘Lord, what is it you want of me?’” From him I have learned that prayer is not asking for what you think you want but asking to be changed in ways you can’t imagine. To be made more grateful, more able to see the good in what you have been given instead of always grieving for what might have been. People who are in the habit of praying—and they include the mystics of the Christian tradition—know that when a prayer is answered, it is never in a way that you expect. (Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace*)

F What does prayer as “being changed by God” mean to you today?

Prayer Is Being Attentive to God and Others

*Prayer is not doing, but being. It is not words, but the beyond-words experience of coming into the presence of something much greater than oneself. It is an invitation to recognize holiness, and to utter simple words—"Holy, Holy, Holy"—in response. Attentiveness is all: I sometimes think of prayer as a certain quality of attention that comes upon me when I'm busy doing something else. When a person—friend or foe—comes to mind, I take it as a sign to pray for them. (Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace*)*

F What does prayer as “being attentive to God and others” mean to you today?

Prayer Is Living

We pray to see life as it is, to understand it and to make it better than it was. We pray so that reality can break into our souls and give us back our awareness of the Divine Presence in life. (Joan Chittister, Wisdom Distilled from the Daily)

Prayer leads you to see new paths and to hear new melodies in the air. Prayer is the breath of your life that gives you freedom to go and stay where you wish and to find the many signs that point out the way to a new land. Praying is not simply some necessary compartment in the daily schedule of a Christian or a source of support in time of need, nor is it restricted to Sunday mornings or mealtimes. Praying is living. It is eating and drinking, action and rest, teaching and learning, playing and working. Praying pervades every aspect of our lives. It is the unceasing recognition that God is wherever we are, always inviting us to come closer and to celebrate the divine gift of being alive. (Henri Nouwen, With Open Hands)

Prayer is an attitude toward life that sees everything as ultimately sacred, everything as potentially life-changing, everything as revelatory of life's meaning. It is our link between dailiness and eternity. (Joan Chittister, Wisdom Distilled from the Daily)

A life with God is a life in which the rhythms of silence and listening alternate with rhythms of sharing and service. By praying with every part of who we are, the grace that pours from the well of living water trickles through all the aspects of our being, nourishing and hydrating that which was parched and diseased. (Daniel Wolpert, Creating a Life with God)

Some people think prayer is "saying a prayer"—speaking a particular intention to God. Prayer, however, can be understood more generally than that. Prayer, in a broad sense, links all aspects of our lives to God. God is present in all of life. We might set aside certain times and places for worship, but God is not absent from any time or any place. It is right and proper to pray at all times and in all places.

Prayer, broadly understood, is also the way we offer all of who we are and what we do in the dialog with God. Our spirituality is a part of our body, mind, feelings, and will. It is a part of our worship, work, play, and rest. As God seeks to be always present and everywhere present, so we seek to be always and everywhere present to God.

(Richard Beckman, *A Beginner's Guide to Prayer*)

F What does prayer as "living daily with God" mean to you today?

Prayer Takes Practice

Pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

For prayer to bring strength when we need it, we must pray regularly, even when we think we don't need it at all. Prayer is a habit of life that leads us to reflection, to the consciousness of God, to the hope that is the lighthouse of the soul guiding us always through all the dark places of life. (Joan Chittister)

*There are as many ways to pray as there are moments in life. Sometimes we seek out a quiet spot and want to be alone, sometimes we look for a friend and want to be together. Sometimes we like a book, sometimes we prefer music. Sometimes we want to sing out with hundreds, sometimes only whisper with a few. Sometimes we want to say it with words, sometimes with a deep silence. (Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands*)*

F It is important to remember that prayer takes practice and gradually, we find the rhythm and pattern of prayer that works for us and/or our family.

F How can you become more skilled at seeing God in everything you do?

Preparing to Pray

Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed. But Simon and his companions went out searching for him, and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." (Mark 1:35–37)

The news about Jesus spread all the more widely, and crowds of people came to hear him and be healed from their diseases. But he would go away to lonely places, where he prayed. (Luke 5:15–16)

At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God. When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them. (Luke 6:12–13)

A Prayer Time

Set aside a time for daily prayer. This is the single most important thing you can do. When we establish a regular routine for prayer, we will make sure that our prayer life is not done “on the run.” Ten minutes a day is a good start. Set aside a regular time: morning, noontime, before dinner, or before going to sleep at night.

F When will I pray?

F When will our household pray?

A Prayer Place

We can pray anywhere. We all find places that are special to us, that help us to pray. Jesus did give us wise advice, though, when he taught us to withdraw to our rooms to pray. A sacred space need not always be confined to inside your house or a church. Explore outdoor settings. Take a walk—in the morning, at lunch time, in the evening. If you drive to work, leave early and spend time with God, quietly sitting in the parking lot before going in or make every drive a unique time to meet with God by playing instrumental music as you pray.

F Where will I pray?

F Where will our household pray?

Contemplative Prayer Experience

O God, you are my God, and I long for you.

My whole being desires you; like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land, my soul is thirsty for you.

Let me see you in the sanctuary let me see how mighty and glorious you are.

Your constant love is better than life itself, and so I will praise you.

I will give you thanks as long as I live; I will raise my hands to you in prayer.

My soul will feast and be satisfied, and I will sing glad songs of praise to you.

(Psalm 63:1–5)

In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will. (Romans 8:26–27)

In contemplative prayer we seek to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of God's presence. In this prayer we open our minds and hearts to the presence of God within us. God calls us to friendship. In this kind of prayer we let go of the things that get in the way of our friendship with God. We wait for God as we would wait for a friend. It takes time to become intimate friends. Our relationship with God takes time, too. In this kind of prayer we do not use thoughts or words. Rather, we let go of any thoughts or feelings when they come to mind so we can make a space for God. The following steps will help you to pray in this way.

- F Choose a quiet space where you can be comfortable and where you will not be interrupted.
- F Once you are comfortable, light a candle, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Then set a timer for twenty minutes.
- F Close your eyes and recall your desire to just be in God's presence.
- F Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from Scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Good Shepherd).
- F When thoughts or feelings come into your mind, let them go. Distractions will come; this is normal. Think of this kind of prayer as the prayer of "letting go." Don't be surprised if you spend the whole prayer period letting go of thoughts and feelings. Over time you will experience a new sense of peace, a new awareness of God's great love for you. Be patient! Prayer takes practice.
- F Rest in the center of God's love. Trust that the Holy Spirit, who abides in the depths of your spirit, will connect you with God.
- F When your prayer has ended, slowly come back to the here and now.

Centering Prayer Experience

Have you ever had a friend with whom you exchange long intense conversations as well as comfortable periods of silence in which you simply enjoy each other's presence? Meditation is the intense conversation. Contemplation is the ability to be with God and to know that God is being with you at the same time. In meditation, the mind is working and actively seeking to understand something. In contemplation, the mind is at rest, simply drinking in the moment. Centering prayer is one path to contemplation, for it helps us to quiet ourselves down to just listen and be with God.

- F Choose a sacred word (or mantra) as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. A short one- or two-syllable phrase without strong emotional content works best. Possible choices might be: Abba, Jesus, Spirit, Wisdom, Peace, Home, or Shalom. Pick your own. There is nothing magical about this and no "best word." Use your intuition and choose a word.
- F Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Keep your back straight, not slumped. Let your head remain free—leaning against the back of a chair or other back support is fine, but do not lean the head against anything. Remain reasonably comfortable, so as to maintain the position effortlessly and not be distracted by it. Your hands can be in a palms-open position as a sign of receptivity, or folded in your lap, or open and extended. You may also choose to lie flat on the floor with your arms resting beside you.
- F Silently repeat in your mind and heart the word with which you have chosen to center yourself. The goal is to focus on the repetition of the word so that you are no longer paying attention to your thoughts or feelings. Sit (or lie) with a straight back and head free. Close your eyes and let go of what is going on around you.
- F When you become aware of thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.

Scripture Prayer Experience: Reflective Reading

*Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.
I will keep my solemn promise to obey your just instructions.*
(Psalm 119:105–106)

Speak to one another with the words of psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God the Father.
(Ephesians 5:19–20)

As Christians, we believe that one of the ways God is present to us is through the Bible. When we prayerfully read the Scriptures, we open our minds and hearts to the Spirit of God. We can be both challenged and affirmed by the Word of God. The following steps will guide you.

- F Choose a passage from Scripture, about five to ten verses in length. (See the list of Scripture verses by topic if you need help.)
- F Choose a comfortable place where you will not be interrupted.
- F Light a candle, if possible. Take a few moments to get your body in harmony with your spirit. Sometimes it helps to take a few deep breaths or stretch your body, then relax.
- F Acknowledge God's presence with you. Ask God to send the Spirit to be with you and guide you in this time of reflection.
- F Read the passage you have chosen slowly, out loud, listening carefully to it. You might want to pause after a sentence or phrase.
- F Say the words or phrases that struck you.
- F Read the passage a second time, slowly and prayerfully.
- F Consider the message the passage might have for you: a challenge, an affirmation, or an insight. If you are doing this with others, you could invite them to share what comes to mind.
- F Read the passage a third time, slowly and prayerfully.
- F Pause for about ten minutes of silence and allow the Spirit to speak to you. If no words or thoughts come, just sit in the silence. Sometimes God touches us in ways we cannot know.
- F Following your quiet time, consider how the passage calls you to action. Is there something you need to do to make the Scripture alive for you here and now?
- F Close with a brief prayer of thanksgiving or praise to God for the gift of the Spirit.

Scripture Passages by Topic

(You can use your own Bible or access these passages online from Bible Gateway by typing the verse into the search. Go to <https://www.biblegateway.com>. Select the NRSV translation.)

Affliction: Romans 8:18–25, 35–39; Sirach 2:1–18; John 14:1–3; Matthew 11:28–30; Philippians 4:12–13; 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.

Anger: James 1:19–21; Ephesians 4:26; Proverbs 12:16; Sirach 30:24; Colossians 3:12–13; Psalm 37:7–8

Charity/Love: John 13:1–15, 15:9–13; Romans 12:9–21, 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13; 1 Peter 4:8–10; 1 John 3:11–20; 1 John 4:7–12, 18–21.

Confusion about God: Isaiah 55:8–9; James 1:13–14; 1 Peter 4:12–13; James 1:2–3; Luke 6:22–23; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

Death: 1 Corinthians 15:19–22; John 11:1–44; Romans 5:12–15; Colossians 3:1–4.

Discouragement: Philippians 4:6–8; Psalm 138:7–8; John 14:1; John 14:27; Philippians 1:6; Psalm 94:18–19

Fear: John 4:18; 2 Timothy 1:6–7; Romans 8:15; Psalm 91:1–5; Proverbs 3:25–26; Isaiah 43:2; Sirach 34:14; Matthew 10:28

Forgiveness: Ezekiel 36:25–36; Matthew 18:15–18, 21–35; Luke 15:11–32.

Friendship: Sirach 6:5–17, 9:10–16, 13:1–13; Luke 10:25–37, 11:5–13; John 15:14–17, 20:11–18.

Happiness or Joyfulness: Psalm 4:8–9; Psalm 16:11; Psalm 34:6; Psalm 71:23; Isaiah 29:19; Acts 2:28; 3 John 1:4

Impatience: Romans 8:24–25; Psalm 37:7–8; Proverbs 25:15; Ephesians 4:1–3; James 5:8–10

Life: Isaiah 65:17–25; Genesis 1:1–2:4; John 15:4–7; Romans 6:3–11, Romans 20—23; Matthew 7:13–14; 1 John 5:9–13.

Loneliness: Psalm 25:16–17; Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 41:13; John 14:18; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 73:23–24; Revelation 3:20

Marriage: Genesis 2:18–24; Deuteronomy 24:5; Isaiah 62:3–5; Matthew 19:3–11; 1 Corinthians 7:3–5; Ephesians 5:22–33.

Peace: Ezekiel 34:25–31; Isaiah 2:2–5; John 20:19–26; Luke 24:36–43; Philippians 4:4–7; 2 Timothy 2:20–26.

Physical Illness: Psalm 103:2–3; Jeremiah 30:17; James 5:14–15; Exodus 23:25; Sirach 31:22; Matthew 10:1

Sadness: Sirach 30:21–23; Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 4:8–10; Ecclesiastes 7:3; Matthew 19:21–22; Isaiah 41:10; Proverbs 15:30

Temptation: Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15–16; 1 Timothy 6:9; Psalm 119:9–11; James 1:13–14; Ephesians 6:10–11

Thankfulness: Tobit 12:6; Psalm 107; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 30:13; Psalm 105:1; Psalm 118; Daniel 3:89; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Exodus 18:8–12; Psalm 111; John 11:41–42; Ephesians 1:3–6; Philippians 1:3–6.

Worry: Matthew 6:25; Matthew 6:34; 1 Peter 5:6–7; Philippians 4:18–19; Mark 13:11; Philippians 4:6

Scripture Prayer Experience: Imaginative Prayer

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, deeply believed in the value of fully engaging our imaginations in our reading and reflecting on the meaning to be found in the Bible. He called this practice the “application of the senses.” You apply each of your senses to the reading, using imagination to “hear” the words and sounds of the scene, to “see” the sights, to “smell” the smells, to “taste” the food, dust, and drink, and to “feel” textures, dirt, skin, etc. Select a Scripture passage from the list and then use the following steps will guide you.

- F **Settle down.** Take a few minutes to settle down in your place of prayer. Quiet yourself and be still. If possible, play some quiet instrumental music to set a prayerful environment.
- F **Pray to the Holy Spirit.** You are in God’s presence. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray and hear what the Lord is saying to you.
- F **Read the Scripture passage slowly.**
- F **Meditate on the Scripture passage.**

Observe. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples traveling with Jesus. What is happening? What kind of day is it? Who is with Jesus? What is Jesus doing? What does he say? What is the crowd or individual saying or doing?

Imagine yourself as the person who encounters Jesus. Why do you approach Jesus? What does Jesus say or do to you? What happens to you? What are your feelings? What do you do after your encounter with Jesus?

Reflect. What does this story mean? What is Jesus saying to you? What is his challenge to you? What strikes you as the main point?

Listen. How does this story or passage to your life? What is the message for you? Are you willing to listen to the message? Prayerfully ask, “What, Lord, are you saying to me in this reading?”

- F **Make a resolution.** Resolve to do something about the insights you have gained from this prayer experience.

Scripture Passages for Imaginative Prayer

(You can use your own Bible or access these passages online from Bible Gateway by typing the verse into the search. Go to <https://www.biblegateway.com>. Select the NRSV translation.)

The Young Jesus (Luke 2:41-50)

Temptation in the Desert (Matthew 4:1-11)

Calling of the First Disciples (Luke 5:1-11)

Calming of the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

The Woman in Simon's House (Luke 7:36-50)

Jesus Instructs the Disciples (Mark 6:7-13)

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

Miracle of Cana (John 2:1-12)

"Who Do People Say I Am?" (Matthew 16:13-17)

Curing of the Blind Man of Jericho (Luke 18:35-43)

The Miracle of the Loaves (John 6:1-13)

Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)

Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

The Woman at the Well (John 4:5-42)

The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)

Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44)

The Rich Young Man (Matthew 19:16-22)

Driving Out the Money Changers (Mark 11:15-17)

Washing the Apostles' Feet (John 13:1-20)

The Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39-46)

The Crucifixion (Luke 23:33-49)

The Disciples on the Way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Scripture Prayer Experience: Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. It dates back to the early centuries of the Christian Church and was established as a monastic practice by Benedict in the 6th century. It is a way of praying the Scriptures that leads us deeper into God's word. We slow down. We read a short passage more than once. We chew it over slowly and carefully. We savor it. Scripture begins to speak to us in a new way. It speaks to us personally and aids that union we have with God through Christ.

Use the Lectio Divina experience to guide you into a prayer reflection on a Bible passage and imagining how you will live the passage in your daily life.

Select a Scripture passage that you would like to reflect upon and pray with. This may be a story from the Old Testament, a Psalm, a passage from the Prophets, a Gospel story or parable, or a passage from one of Paul's letters. You can also select the Gospel reading from Sunday worship.

- F **Read:** Read the Scripture passage slowly and purposefully. Reflect on it silently for a few minutes to pray with it and to ponder what it might be saying.
- F **Meditate:** Read it a second time followed by a few minutes of silence. Discover a word or two from the passage that is echoing in your heart or stands out for you in any way.
- F **Pray:** What do you want to communicate to God? What emotions do you want to express to God?
- F **Act:** Reflect on how God is challenging you through this Scripture passage. What is God call me to do? What is the next step you need to take?

Scripture Prayer Experience: Visio Divina

The practice of praying with visual images is called *visio divina* or divine seeing. It is adapted from the sixth-century Benedictine practice of Bible reading called *lectio divina*, using both the text and art to help the reader encounter the living Word of God. The rhythm of *visio divina* ignites the senses to “hear and see” the Word of God as one listens, meditates, and prays with the sacred text. Studying a text of Scripture and the illustration involves uncovering layers of meaning. When we have discovered the “voice” of the text, we can bring its images and lessons into the present and discern its significance for our life situations.

1. **Read:** Read the following Scripture passage from the Gospel of Mark. Listen with the “ear of your heart” for a word or short phrase that God has for you this day.

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come. (Mark 4:26-29)

2. **Meditate:** What does the word or phrase you have chosen mean to you today?
3. **See:** Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that one part of the image that first catches your eye.



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4. **Contemplate:** Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so. Now, let your eyes gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of it. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
5. **Reflect:** What emotions does this image evoke in you? What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
6. **Pray:** What do you want to pray for today?

Scripture Prayer Experience: The Psalms

The Psalms are the Bible’s book of prayer. The Psalms have been used in worship for thousands of years. We often go to the Psalms today for prayer, personal devotion, and for communal worship. Select one of the Psalm passages below that you feel most comfortable with as the focus of this prayer experience. (You

can use your own Bible or access these passages online from Bible Gateway by typing the verse into the search. Go to <https://www.biblegateway.com>. Select the NRSV translation.)

- Psalm 8:1-7 "What is man, that you think of him?"
- Psalm 11:1-7 "I trust in the Lord for safety."
- Psalm 16:1-11 "I am always aware of the Lord's presence."
- Psalm 23:1-6 "The Lord is my shepherd."
- Psalm 25:1-14 "Keep your promise, Lord, and forgive my sins."
- Psalm 30:1-12 "Lord...I will give you thanks forever."
- Psalm 32:1-11 "Happy are those whose sins are forgiven."
- Psalm 62:1-12 "God alone protects and saves me."
- Psalm 63:1-8 "O God....My whole being desires you."
- Psalm 86:1-13a "Teach me, Lord what you want me to do."
- Psalm 103:1-14 "Praise the Lord, my soul!"
- Psalm 121:1-8 "Teach me, Lord, what you want me to do."
- Psalm 139:1-12 "Lord, you have examined me and you know me."

- F Read the Psalm passage you selected in quiet. Read every word, pausing when necessary in order to let every word present itself to you. Read the words as if you had never read or heard them before. Be open to new insights that may come. Read the words as if they were the words of your own prayer. Whenever you read "I," "my," "me," etc., read it as if that meant you.
- F From the passage you have read, select a phrase, a verse or two verses to be the words you will use to begin your own prayer.
- F Write those words down and then continue writing an additional sentence or two of your own continuing the thoughts and feelings begun by the words of the Psalmist.
- F Here are a few ways you can incorporate praying with the psalms in daily life:
 - Read a psalm as you rise each day.
 - Read a psalm as part of your evening prayer.
 - Read a psalm or part of a psalm as part of your meal blessing.
 - When you are experiencing strong emotion, like joy or grief or frustration, flip through the psalms and see which one reflects your own feelings then pray it.

Intercessory Prayer Experience

Do all this in prayer, asking for God's help. Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray always for all God's people. (Ephesians 6:18)

May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord, I say it again: rejoice! Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4, 6-7)

One of the time-honored types of prayer is that of intercession or asking God for what we and others need. Intercessory prayer invites us into God's care and concern for us, our families and friends, and the entire world. No concern is too trivial for God to receive with loving attention. Intercessory prayer, however, is not a means of manipulating heaven into doing our will. Rather, it is a way we become aware of God's prayer for a person and join in that intercession.

Consider keeping a household prayer list on wipe-off board and placing it where everyone will see it. Encourage everyone to write brief notes about problems or situations for which they would like the household to pray, as well as the names of people for whom they would like everyone to pray.

Pray now for...

- F the needs and concerns of your family/household and friends**
- F the needs and concerns of people in your local church and community**
- F the needs and concerns of people around the world**

Praise Prayer Experience: Psalm 103

We give praise to God for divine goodness, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to simply praise God for being God.

Read Psalm 103 as a Prayer of Praise. (You can read Psalm 103 from your Bible or go to Bible Gateway: <https://www.biblegateway.com> and look up Psalm 103 NRSV version)

The Psalm has four main parts:

1. Personal blessings received from God (1-5)
2. National blessings received from God (6-14)
3. A reminder of our human frailty and utter dependence upon God (15-18)
4. A declaration that all creation praises God (19-22).

Use Psalm 103 to write your own psalm of praise to God. Use the four-fold structure of Psalm 103 to write your own prayer of praise.

F Inspired by Psalm 103 offer your own prayers of praise.

Praise Prayer Experience

F Read Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7.

Come, let us praise the Lord!

Let us sing for joy to God, who protects us!

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and sing joyful songs of praise.

Come, let us bow down and worship him; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

He is our God; we are the people he cares for, the flock for which he provides.

(Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7)

F Take several minutes to compose one or more prayers of praise. Here are a few examples:

- “God, you are good and wonderful. We praise you.”
- “God, we praise you for the mystery that is you.”
- “God, we believe that you are holy and awesome.”
- “We praise you for your majesty, O God.”

F Offer your prayers of praise during your prayer time today. Make a prayer of praise part of your daily prayer time.

Thanksgiving Prayer Experience

*How good it is to give thanks to you O Lord, to sing in your honor, O Most High God;
to proclaim your constant love every morning and your faithfulness every night,
with the music of stringed instruments and with melody on the harp.
Your mighty deeds, O Lord, make me glad; because of what you have done, I sing for joy*
(Psalm 92:1–4)

We are grateful to God for the many gifts God shares with us. It is good for us to reflect on the many good things that are ours, which we enjoy and sometimes take for granted, and give thanks to God for all we have and are. It can be a challenge to thank God for what we need even before we have it, trusting that God will provide for our needs in ways that are best.

Offer your thanks to God.

F **We are grateful for...**

F **We give thanks for...**

Online Resources for Daily Prayer

Try one or more of the following apps or daily email to incorporate prayer into your daily life.

3-Minute Retreat

3-Minute Retreat invites you to take a short prayer break right and spend some quiet time reflecting on a Scripture passage.

Online: <https://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer/>

App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

Abide

Abide is a Christian meditation app to stress less and sleep better. Listen to stories based off the Bible. Wake up with the daily meditations that will fuel your mind for the day.

Online: <https://abide.co>

App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

Daily Prayer

Daily Prayer is an experiential app designed to develop long lasting spiritual rhythms of prayer and scripture reading. Join in prayer and read scripture in the morning, midday, and evening,

Online: <https://www.rethinkme.com>

App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

Pray As You Go

Pray As You Go is a daily prayer session, designed to go with you wherever you go, to help you pray whenever you find time, and lasting between ten and thirteen minutes with music, Scripture and questions for reflection.

Online: www.pray-as-you-go.org

App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

Sacred Space

Sacred Space is a daily online prayer experience in six movements including preparing your body and mind, and culminating in reflection on a Scripture passage chosen specially for the day. Each stage is a kind of exercise aimed at helping you get in touch with God, and God's presence in your life.

Online: www.sacredspace.ie

Society of Saint John the Evangelist

Society of Saint John the Evangelist offers daily prayer via email and seasons prayer activities, as well as the opportunity to join the Brothers online for prayer.

Daily and Seasonal Prayer: <https://www.ssje.org>

Soulspace

Soulspace meditation app has been created to help anchor your thoughts to the love of God and the way of Jesus. Soulspace seeks to rid the soul of fear and stress while filling it with truth and life. This creates the opportunity for true and lasting wholeness.

Online: <https://soulspace.co>

App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

Praying through the Day Experiences

How can we connect with God's presence throughout the day? We can weave moments of prayer and reflection into the fabric of everyday life. This prayer activity invites you find a few moments at the beginning of your day, in the middle of the day, and at the conclusion of your day to be attentive to God's presence in your life, and open your heart to God. Through a visual image you will focus on an issue or situation in your life in which you seek God's wisdom. You can do all of this in a few minutes throughout your day. Before long it will become a habit you won't want to do without.

Morning Prayer

- F Take a quiet moment to reflect on the new day.
 - What are feeling as you start your day?
 - What are thinking as you start your day?
 - What is the important "work" of your day—people, tasks, commitments?
- F Capture your feeling or thinking or "work" of the day in an image.
- F Spend a moment in reflection:
 - Where is God in this picture?
 - How can you bring God into this part of your life today?
- F Find a Bible verse that reflects your visual image for the day. Use the list of themes and Bible verses to find a Bible verse for your day.
- F Conclude in prayer or with a scriptural inspiration or with your own spontaneous prayer for your day:

Gracious God open my eyes that I may see. Open my ears that I may hear. Open my heart and mind that I may understand. Be with me as move through my day. Amen.

Loving God bless me with your life-giving love this day, so that my lips may praise you, my life may bless you, and my prayer may give you glory. Amen.

Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path. (Psalm 119:105)

When I called, you answered me, you increased my strength within me. (Psalm 138:4)

So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom (Psalm 90:12)

Be merciful to me, O God, for I have taken refuge in you, in the shadow of your wings will I take refuge (Psalm 57:1)

I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for he is speaker peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him. (Psalm 85:8)

During the Day Prayer

- F Take a moment during your day to view your visual image of the day.
- F After a moment of quiet reflection, ask yourself: How is this image reflective of my day—what I'm feeling or thinking.

F Take a moment to read again the Bible version of the day.

F At midday ask yourself: Where is God in my life today?

Evening Prayer

F At the end of your day take a few moments to review your day.

F After a moment of quiet reflection, ask yourself:

- What was the high point of the day? What was the low point of the day?
- What am I most grateful for today? least grateful for?

F Consider your image and Bible verse

- How did my image reflect the experience of the day?
- How did my Bible verse reflect the experience of the day?

F Finally reflect on how God was a part of your life today.

F Close in prayer:

Dear God,
I do not know where you are leading me.
I do not even know what my next day,
my next week or my next year will look like.
As I try to keep my hands open,
I trust that you will put your hand in mine
and bring me home.
Thank you God for your love. Amen.
(Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*)

Life Themes & Bible Verses

You can use your own Bible or access these passages online from Bible Gateway by typing the verse into the search. Go to <https://www.biblegateway.com>. Select the NRSV translation.

- Affliction:** Romans 8:18–25, 35–39; Sirach 2:1–18; John 14:1–3; Matthew 11:28–30; Philippians 4:12–13; 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.
- Anger:** James 1:19–21; Ephesians 4:26; Proverbs 12:16; Sirach 30:24; Colossians 3:12–13; Ps. 37:7–8
- Charity/love:** John 13:1–15, 15:9–13; Romans 12:9–21, 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13; 1 Peter 4:8–10; 1 John 3:11–20; 1 John 4:7–12, 18–21.
- Confusion** about God: Isaiah 55:8–9; James 1:13–14; 1 Peter 4:12–13; James 1:2–3; Luke 6:22–23; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10
- Death:** 1 Corinthians 15:19–22; John 11:1–44; Romans 5:12–15; Colossians 3:1–4.
- Discouragement:** Philippians 4:6–8; Ps. 138:7–8; John 14:1; John 14:27; Philippians 1:6; Ps. 94:18–19
- Family:** Colossians 3:18–21; Mark 3:33–35; Acts 2:42–47; Joel 2:15–16; Deuteronomy 31:12–13; 1 Corinthians 12:12–26.
- Fear:** John 4:18; 2 Timothy 1:6–7; Romans 8:15; Psalm 91:1–5; Proverbs 3:25–26; Isaiah 43:2; Sirach 34:14; Matthew 10:28
- Forgiveness:** Ezekiel 36:25–36; Matthew 18:15–18, 21–35; Luke 15:11–32.
- Friendship:** Sirach 6:5–17, 9:10–16, 13:1–13; Luke 10:25–37, 11:5–13; John 15:14–17, 20:11–18.
- Happiness or joyfulness:** Psalm 4:8–9; Psalm 16:11; Psalm 34:6; Psalm 71:23; Isaiah 29:19; Acts 2:28; 3 John 1:4
- Hatred:** Psalm 25:18–20; Deuteronomy 31:6; Jeremiah 1:8; Psalm 18:1–4; Psalm 25:1–2; Proverbs 16:7; Proverbs 24:17; Luke 1:69–71
- Impatience:** Romans 8:24–25; Psalm 37:7–8; Proverbs 25:15; Ephesians 4:1–3; James 5:8–10
- Life:** Isaiah 65:17–25; Genesis 1:1—2:4; John 15:4–7; Romans 6:3–11, Romans 20—23; Matthew 7:13–14; 1 John 5:9–13.
- Loneliness:** Psalm 25:16–17; Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 41:13; John 14:18; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 73:23–24; Revelation 3:20
- Marriage:** Genesis 2:18–24; Deuteronomy 24:5; Isaiah 62:3–5; Matthew 19:3–11; 1 Corinthians 7:3–5; Ephesians 5:22–33.
- Peace:** Ezekiel 34:25–31; Isaiah 2:2–5; John 20:19–26; Luke 24:36–43; Philippians 4:4–7; 2 Timothy 2:20–26.
- Physical illness:** Psalm 103:2–3; Jeremiah 30:17; James 5:14–15; Exodus 23:25; Sirach 31:22; Matthew 10:1
- Sadness:** Sirach 30:21–23; Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 4:8–10; Ecclesiastes 7:3; Matthew 19:21–22; Isaiah 41:10; Proverbs 15:30
- Temptation:** Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15–16; 1 Timothy 6:9; Psalm 119:9–11; James 1:13–14; Ephesians 6:10–11
- Thankfulness:** Tobit 12:6; Psalm 107; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 30:13; Psalm 105:1; Psalm 118; Daniel 3:89; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Exodus 18:8–12; Psalm 111; John 11:41–42; Ephesians 1:3–6; Philippians 1:3–6.
- Worry:** Matthew 6:25; Matthew 6:34; 1 Peter 5:6–7; Philippians 4:18–19; Mark 13:11; Philippians 4:6

Closing the Day: The Prayer of Examen Experience

The Prayer of Examen helps us look for traces of God's actions in our daily life, individually or as a household. It is usually done in the evening, looking back over the day, or it can be done as a household at the evening meal. Allow between five and fifteen minutes for this spiritual exercise. Eliminate distractions during this time: no TV, radio, phones, social media, etc. This is a time of quiet to spend alone or with each other in the presence of God.

F Note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks for all God's gifts and benefits.

Pause for reflection.

F Ask God that this reflection be a time of special grace and revelation. You can use these words:
Be near us now Lord. Let us look together at the day.

Pause for reflection.

F Review the day with God. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which not? What does God want to say to you about both?

Pause for reflection.

F Give God thanks and ask for forgiveness for any failure or omission, and for healing from their effects. Use these or similar words:

Gracious God, everything is a gift from you.

I give you thanks and praise for the gifts of today, such as

I ask your forgiveness and mercy for

I ask your healing in

Pause for reflection.

F Look forward to the next day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God's desire for your life. Ask for the graces you desire for tomorrow.

Lord God, continue to be present with me in my life each day.

Pause for reflection.

The Prayer of Examen for Children

1. Quiet the children before bedtime.
2. Ask them what made them happy over the past day.
3. Ask them what made them sad over the past day.
4. Ask them what they look forward to tomorrow.
5. Remind them to thank God for what made them happy, ask for God's help when they are sad, and pray for God's presence in the coming day.

Praying in Families with Children

Prayer needs to be modeled and taught in very simple ways at home. All of the prayer activities in this chapter can be used in a family over the course of a year with increasing intensity and depth. For example, one family joins hands every night before the evening meal. Their prayers are simple, acknowledging God's presence during that day, giving gratitude for good grades, good weather, good food, good playtime; offering intercessions for those who are in need; and asking to recognize God's will for each family member. Sometimes this prayer is preceded by a short reading from the Bible or other book of prayers, and is usually followed by a simple song.

Although prayer time takes only a few minutes, its daily repetition acknowledging God's presence within the family is important and nurtures everyone. At bedtime one family member can lead a short prayer with each child and give a nighttime blessing. Sometimes children like to talk about their problems and concerns; the family can also ask for God's assistance and for the strength to live as God wants us to.

Prayer is a way of connecting our lives with God's life and God's will for us. Here are several help suggestions for guiding your children in their prayer life:

- F Pray as you can in the midst of your busy day.
- F Call the child's name in prayer so they know they are important to you and to God.
- F Establish patterns of prayer in family life that nurture the practices of prayer in your child from the earliest ages.
- F Help children learn to pray by imitation—by watching you pray and imitating you.
- F Remember that the repetition of prayers nurtures familiarity and security in children.
- F Teach children to use their own words in prayer.
- F Encourage children to pray anytime, anywhere, under any circumstance, and to say anything to God they want to say.
- F Guide children in experiencing a variety of prayer forms—praise, thanksgiving, spontaneous, petition, and contribution.

Children's Prayer Activities

Prayer Collage

The natural creativity of young children means they enjoy expressing their feelings and ideas through art. Provide of a variety of art supplies. Invite the children to use the materials to create a collage that expresses a prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer of praise, or a prayer of petition or intercession. You can invite the children to ask you to write a prayer on their collage that they dictate to you. You can also use pictures cut from magazines to make a prayer collage. You can preselect pictures or allow the children to find pictures that represent their prayer: thankfulness, praise, petition or intercession.

Materials: art supplies such as colored construction paper, crayons, markers, scraps of lace, ribbon, trim, sequins, colored chalk, paper doilies, glue, scissors, transparent tape, magazine pictures, etc.

Prayer Banner

The banner may be a prayer of adoration. You might talk first about parts of God's world that reminds the children of the greatness of God. Then, each child may make his or her own banner selecting one of these things as the center of the design, or you may incorporate several ideas into a group banner. The banner may be a prayer of thanksgiving. This naturally follows conversations about things for which we are thankful. They may be people, God's world, experiences, foods, etc. Help children become more aware of God's blessings by writing a title such as "Thank You, God, for..." at the top of a large sheet of paper (newsprint or butcher paper). Encourage each child to draw pictures or write the names of things for which they are thankful. The banner may be a prayer of petition or intercession. Concern for others can be a center focus of a banner. This becomes an intercessory prayer. It may follow a study of persons in another country or people in need in your own community.

Materials: butcher paper or newsprint, pencils, crayons, markers, glue, magazine pictures, scissors, etc.

Prayer Mobile

A prayer mobile is a useful experience in prayer that can be taken home and serves as a reminder as the child prays each day. Young children will need assistance in assembling a mobile, but they can take part in the selection of the items to make up the mobile. A prayer mobile may have objects or pictures that are symbolic of the subjects for which the children will pray, or it can be made up of the words that will be used in the prayer itself. If you are drawing pictures or using symbolic objects, talk about what the objects or pictures tell us about the subject. Young children may search for pictures to cut out that remind them of what they want to pray about. If you are using words, encourage the child to think of his or her own words. A prayer mobile can combine prayers of praise, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession.

Materials: coat hangers, string or yarn for hanging objects, construction paper, scissors, glue, etc.