

RESOURCES FOR CHRIST-LIKE LIVING

prayer

“To ask the question ‘why pray?’ is a bit like asking the question ‘why breathe?’ One is essential to physical life; the other is essential to spiritual life. We pray to stay alive as Christians. We breathe the oxygen of God’s presence and love.” (John Pritchard, “Beginning Again”, 2000, SPCK).

different people pray differently!

We need to allow ourselves to find a style of prayer that goes with our personality. Often Christians feel inadequate about their prayer life simply because they’re trying to force themselves to pray in ways that don’t feel comfortable. So allow yourself the luxury of time to explore the suggestions that follow. Some you’ll dismiss instantly as not you. But some may turn your praying into the conversation of angels!

SIMPLE STRUCTURED PRAYER

Having a clear shape to our prayers can help, creating a strong sense of flow and allowing us to relax with a familiar pattern that covers lots of ground with ease. Try these ways:

- A.C.T.S.—begin with Adoration (delight in God’s presence, enjoy God); move to Confession (imagine a film of your last 24 hours, what went wrong, what bad thoughts did you have? Say sorry and let God forgive you); now Thanksgiving (thank God for today’s little blessings and move on to the big things); last Supplication (put people and situations into God’s hands).
- T.C.P.—Thanksgiving; Confession; Supplication (asking God to help).
- Five Fingers—your hand can help you pray! Look at your index finger (the one that points) - pray for people who guide and help us. Look at your middle finger (the tallest) - pray for those in important



positions of power making key decisions. Look at your ring finger (the weakest) - pray for those depending upon the compassion of others. Look at your little finger (the most modest) - pray for yourself. Look at your thumb (strongest) - pray for the most important things in your life like family, friends, work.

- Browse the bookshops for books of prayers. Many are published all the time. You can read a page or two each day to feed your prayer life.

SIMPLE DAILY OFFICE

An Office originates in monasticism when prayer punctuated the day. There are many forms published. Here’s a simple version:

- Introduction—begin with a familiar call to worship such as “Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.”
- Psalm—either follow a published list of daily psalms like the Lectionary (ask Neil for a copy) or work your way through the psalms (but only read 20-25 verses a day of the long ones!).
- Bible Reading—either from a Lectionary or your own daily Bible reading (see the handout about reading the Bible). After reading have a time of quiet to reflect.
- Prayer—possibly using ideas from this handout.
- Offering—give yourself and your day to God.
- The Lord’s Prayer.
- Concluding Prayer—possibly “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with the whole Church evermore. Amen.”

PRAYING ON THE RUN

Some of us know that creating structured prayer time is unreal and impossible for us. Don’t feel guilty! God made us different so find a way of praying that fits your life, especially if life seems frantic! Try:

- Arrows—throughout the day simply shoot off a quick and simple prayer whenever you can. Examples might be: “Lord, help her.” “Help, I’m stuck!” “Lord, have mercy.” “God, thanks.”
- Triggers—allow events of the day to trigger simple prayer. Turn on the tap

and pray for those who don't have clean water. See a tree and thank God for creation.

- The Jesus Prayer—simply repeat many times “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Allow it to fit your breathing: breathe in the goodness of God and breathe out our negatives.
- Music—play a recording of a style of Christian music that moves you. Let it draw you into prayer.
- Practise The Presence Of God—a phrase coined by 17th century Brother Lawrence who found God in the monastery kitchen by simply being attentive to God's presence everywhere. Remind yourself often that God is with you.

TAKING A WALK WITH GOD

Simply go for a walk, or turn your walk to the train into this form of prayer. As you walk (perhaps slightly slower than usual) chat to God about whatever is on your mind. Or maybe enjoy silent companionship. Allow what you see and feel to become part of your conversation.

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

If you enjoy letting your imagination run try these forms of prayer:

- Praying the day—imagine the day past is captured in a photo album. Imagine looking at photos of people you met, things you did, places you went. See each picture in the light of God's presence. Each picture tells a story. What does it say, and what do you want to say to God about each one?
- Encountering Jesus—if you are praying for others, imagine bringing them to Jesus. Give time to let yourself imagine how he responds to them. Does he listen or touch or embrace? Let that image be your prayer.
- Letting yourself be loved—Teresa of Avila taught people to imagine Jesus looking at them lovingly and humbly. Imagine Jesus looking at you. Feel God's love and acceptance. You are precious.
- The Caim—this Celtic form of prayer



imagines the circle of God's love being drawn around those we pray for. You can trace the circle with your finger in your palm as you pray for someone. Imagine such a circle drawn around our church, or your street.

- Artistic Prayer—many ways are possible. Use modelling clay as you pray. Write poetry. Paint a picture. Hold a pebble. Light candles. Allow your imagination to overflow into your praying.

MEDITATION

Prayer for some can be about deep reflection and mulling over of things. Meditation can involve chewing over a passage in the Bible, or another book, or an image, or situation and allowing God to draw close as we do so. Lectio Divina (see Bible handout) is a good way of doing this. Another is to buy one of the many superb books of meditations and read short sections each day. Try:

- Henri Nouwen, “The Genesee Diary” (1995, DLT).
 - Brother Roger of Taize, “His Love Is a Fire” (1990, Chapman/Mowbray).
 - Anthony de Mello, “The Song of the Bird” (1984, Doubleday Image).
 - David Adam, “The Cry of the Deer” (1987, Triangle).
- And don't forget some of the classics like:
- “The Imitation of Christ” by Thomas a Kempis (15th century).
 - “Revelations of Divine Love” by Julian of Norwich (Middle Ages).

SILENCE

Silent prayer can be a quiet looking towards God, a gentle longing, a reaching out in the darkness. For some of us it can become very important. You may find pools of silence within your day, or you can create a time of silence. You might begin with just a few minutes and find that this grows longer. You can allow silence to grow within you by allowing yourself to relax and opening yourself slowly to God. A simple phrase repeated often can help the silence deepen and bring you back if your mind wanders. You might try: “Be still and know that I am God.” A lit candle, a cross or stone to hold, or a picture to look at can help. Silence is not easy, but can be well worth it!