

## Digging deeper into prayer

Over four weeks you will have the opportunity to look at different aspects of prayer and our relationship with God in Christ. Prayer is a foundational part of our life with God. Prayer is where we build a relationship with God. As with anyone, the more time we spend with them the more we get to know them and the more they get to know us. Prayer is not just another item on the check list for the day, any more than a conversation with my children is. Sometimes we need to just tell God what is going on, to make a list of what is going on in our lives, to share with God what is happening to us. At other times we have the opportunity to kick around ideas, issues, concerns that are part of our life and growth in our faith. As you participate in this study you are invited to dig deeper in to your life of prayer.

Each week will have five reflections on aspects of prayer (Monday through Friday). On Saturdays, you will then have an opportunity to try out a form of prayer. Sunday's will give you an opportunity to consider how some others have viewed prayer. I encourage you to take some time during the week to reflect on what you are reading and perhaps write your reactions, responses, and experiences.

## Week 1- Monday

It's Monday and you've gotten up and moving. The whole week is ahead of you. It may be a good week, or not. There are any number of things that you are planning to do: places to go, people to see. You will be communicating with them by phone and text and email and conversation. For some of those you meet you will be able to "read" their body language; it will tell you if they are happy or agitated or depressed. Others will be more difficult to understand. So what does all of this have to do with prayer? What is prayer anyway? In thinking about prayer I've come up with a list.

- Prayer is the place we become fully who we are, completely known, completely cherished.
- Prayer is a place of healing, revelation (of ourselves and of God to us) and of a centered and balanced life.
- Prayer is a deliberate act.
- Prayer is where we can place things that are complex, overwhelming, hopeful, emerging, possible, or painful in God's hands.
- Prayer is a conversation with God.
- Prayer is a discipline and can become a habit.
- Prayer is a conscience choice and can become an inner and constant place of being.
- Some prayers use words, others actions, other images, and others go beyond all three.
- Prayer is as individual as each person and each time of our lives. Like any relationship, our time in dialogue with God changes and reflects who we are at any moment.
- Prayer is both speaking and listening.
- Prayer is the most intimate of acts. Prayer involves vulnerability.
- Prayer is the place where our thirst for Christ is quenched and increased.
- Prayer is holy and set apart, and at the same time part of every moment of our lives.
- Prayer encompasses our whole life. Nothing is too trivial, bad, unworthy, or insignificant to be part of prayer. If it is part of your experience, your life, it is an appropriate subject for a conversation with God.
- Prayer is entering into the presence of God. In that encounter we are transformed like Moses on the mountain.
- Prayer is an exchange between lovers. As the Trinity can be thought of as an exchange between love, the beloved, and the lover, so too our interaction is encompassed in love.

Over the course of the next several weeks, we'll have a chance to consider some of these aspects of prayer, and to try some of them out. There are a few things to keep in mind on this journey:

- There is no "right" or "wrong" way to pray.
- Some ways of praying will work for you, some may not.
- God cherishes you and desires your company.

Let us pray

Almighty God whose Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, taught his disciples to pray through words and example, grant us open hearts and teach us to pray, that we might come closer to you. Open us to the wonder of

your constant presence with us, that we might bring others into your presence. Though Jesus Christ our Lord, our great high priest, and the Holy Spirit, who prays with us and through us. Amen.

## Week 1- Tuesday

Let's consider some things that prayer is not.

1. Prayer is not a requirement that we need to fulfill.

There is a tendency to look at the spiritual life as a series of tests we need to pass, or obligations we need to fulfill in order to be "worthy" of God's attention. God's longing for a relationship with us is not built on our actions. Instead it is grounded in God's abiding love for us. Therefore prayer is NOT a requirement but an opportunity to engage in a dialog with someone who cherishes that time with us.

2. Prayer is not a way to appease God.

As prayer is not a requirement, it is also not a way to keep God from punishing us. God is not looking for ways to punish us if we step out of line. This long held image of God as a harsh ruler, just waiting to catch us out in any infraction does not square with the loving one that Jesus addresses as "Abba" (Aramaic for "Daddy"). Prayer then is not done to mollify a vindictive ruler, but to build a relationship with someone who loves and cares for us.

3. Prayer is not a way to manipulate God into doing what we want.

My younger son is fascinated by ancient Egyptian life and mythology. This summer we had the opportunity to visit the British museum with its huge collection of Greek and Egyptian artifacts. Throughout the exhibits there were objects that were offered to the gods in an effort to obtain their favor. It's an idea that is easy to fall into: "God, if you will do this for me, I will do that (or not do that) for you." This kind of thinking reduces our relationship with God to an almost commercial interaction or a show we put on. God desires relationship, a conversation that can deepen and broaden over the years.

That said, let's begin our reflection on what prayer is.

1. Fundamentally, prayer is a conversation with God and as with any conversation it involves both speaking and listening. How, when, where—all the other questions about prayer are founded on this: when we pray we are interacting with God. (We will look at the names we use for God later. Please feel free to change this to Christ, Jesus, Holy Spirit or whatever works for you.) Prayer is about building our relationship with God. As with any relationship, the more time we invest in it, the more that relationship is bound to deepen. There are times we stumble into prayer, when the sunset takes our breath away or when we are in the doctor's office waiting for the diagnosis. Yet most of the time, prayer takes a deliberate act on our part. We need to take the time, to place ourselves in God's presence.

2. Because prayer is part of our relationship with God, prayer changes us. Any relationship changes us. Every once in a while I'll become aware of uttering a phrase and I will realize where I had heard it. It will bring back memories of friends, or co-workers, or family members. They were the ones who had said that phrase first. It was from them that I had learned it. Part of them is now part of me. So, too, the more time we spend in God's presence the more we will be changed. That is both the wonder and the unease of prayer.

Lord God, who sent your Son to be among us as one of us, grant that we may know the wonder of being in your presence, and the delight of knowing you. Through your Son Jesus, who knows the life we live and the Holy Spirit who knows our hearts. Amen.

## Week 1- Wednesday

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

Matt. 7:7 NRSV

Our prayer life, like the rest of our life, is never static. Our circumstances change and the demands on us change, and we change. When, where and how you pray will change throughout your life. Prayer for me began with a list. It was a list of all the people and circumstances that I had been asked to pray for. Written in the back of my Bible, it was a reminder to pray. In college I found I couldn't sit still and pray (too often I would fall asleep), so I took to walking. Many mornings I would walk into the hills above campus away from everyone and set out to pray. I would try to remember all the things on that list back in my dorm room. Sometimes I would end up just walking among the eucalyptus trees. The walk would settle me down and the scent of the trees would somehow remind me that God was present. As an adult, my life changed again and I was introduced to meditation. I was lousy at it. I couldn't figure out how to deal with my over-busy mind and relax. Then I took up swimming. The rhythm of my breathing as I swam lap after lap allowed me to find that center where I could just be present to God, without a list. My life changed again with the birth of my first child. Gone was the time for walking or swimming. I contented myself with quick snatches of prayer, whenever and wherever I could find a second, even while doing something else. Along the way I've had several companions in prayer; from one of them I learned to use my imagination as I prayed, imagining myself in a story from the Gospels or just in the presence of Christ. Throughout all of this, for shorter or longer times, I've tried to say daily prayer from one or another of the prayer books I own. Recently, I've discovered several websites that enable me to say daily prayers with others around the world. Some kinds of prayer work only for a time, some may never work for you. The most important thing is to keep trying, keep praying, keep opening yourself to the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will help you to pray and lead you to the kind of prayer you need to sustain and enrich your life in God.

So here is the question, what works for you? How do you find the time, the place or the way of praying that can help you to connect with God? Throughout this study you will have a chance to try a number of types of prayer. Some may be just what you need. Others may leave you flat. Still others may point out something you need to work on, or may work at some other time in your life. As my husband often points out, "Anything worth doing, is worth doing badly." Prayer is worth doing, even if you feel that you are doing it "badly." In actuality, we all do it badly—and we all do it well. Prayer is building a relationship with God and we all fumble as we seek God. Yet God is always seeking us, so no matter how we blunder along, God meets us where we are, and rejoices in our attempts.

O Lord, teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me when I seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you first teach me, nor find you unless you first reveal yourself to me. Let me seek you in longing, and long for you in seeking. Let me find you in love, and love you in finding. Amen

## Week 1- Thursday

### Naming God

In Douglas Adams' great book The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, he mentions an imaginary book written by an inhabitant of another planet, entitled, Who Is This God Person, Anyway? I've always wished I could read it. It touches on this question of naming God. Who is God? How should we address God? It seems that any attempt to give God a name or title always falls short. It's a tricky proposition, this naming of God. Moses met God in the burning bush and demanded to know by what name he should address God, and God replies YHWH. Any translation from Hebrew into English fumbles around with this verb, usually coming up with something like, "I am who I am" or, "I am becoming as I am becoming." Judaism looks at this name as too sacred to be uttered, substituting "Lord" in place of the name that is given to Moses. Later, Jacob wrestles with God and demands God's name. He is never given God's name but instead gets a new name himself. Jesus addresses God like a small child addressing his father: "Abba."

So we address God many ways, none of which encompass who God is, all of which fall massively short of the mystery of the Divine Being. Yet we need a name, we need some way to connect with the one whose presence we desire. Many of the names we use reflect our relationship with God more than God's essence. In my life of prayer God has been Father, Lord, Creator, Brother, Jesus, Friend, Beloved, Holy Spirit, and Ru'ah (Hebrew for wind or breath). Each of these names creates an image of God. Consider some of the other images that occur in the Bible: shepherd, warrior, judge, mother, baker, seamstress, potter, healer, builder, farmer, bridegroom, midwife, mother bear, and mother hen. There are others as well that come from the early church and the mystics: light and darkness, grandmother and grandfather, and wind and fire. Each image gives us one perspective on the nature of God and our relationship to God. Yet each of them is inadequate in itself to contain who God is. In addition there is another problem.

### The problem of God and gender

English has three singular pronouns, he, she and it, which creates difficulties when we are speaking of God. Is God a "he"? No, God is not male. Is God a "she"? No, God is not female. Is God an "it"? No, God is a person, not a thing. So we are stuck. The limits of our language frustrate our attempts to speak about God, but not to God. As much as I would like to have another option, I will be using the male pronoun for God. It seems the least jarring of the choices we have.

There are as many names for God as there are people who pray. In the Islamic tradition, it is said that we know 99 names for God, because we can never know them all. So as you pray be attentive to the name you use in prayer. What kind of image does that name carry for you? Is there another name that would help you expand your relationship to God? Does the way you address God create barriers or pathways for you? What name is God inviting you to use? Allow God to guide you along this path.

Beloved one, who comes to us in language and image, yet is beyond both, lead us to you, guide our thoughts and imagination, so that we might enter more deeply into our relationship with you, by the one who died and rose and carries us to you. Amen.

## Week 1- Friday

I've moved many times, both as a child and as an adult. Each time I moved I was faced with questions. How would I make friends? How would I fit into this new situation? Sometimes I found many people that I now count as friends, who have continued to be a part of my life despite time a distance. There have also been instances when I failed to connect with anyone. Like any relationship, friendships require some work. They do not just magically appear in my life. I must be willing to take the time to get to know the other person. I need to spend time with them, listen to them, learn to enjoy who they are. I also have to be willing to reveal myself. I have to take a chance, to let them in, let them know who I am, what I think, what I feel. It's a risky business that can end badly . . . or wonderfully.

"I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." John 15:15

Like building a friendship, in prayer we need to take the time to nurture our relationship with God. In some ways this is far easier than cultivating a relationship with those around us, because we don't need to negotiate a time and place to meet. We don't need to worry that we will be accepted by God, or that God will take offence by the way we dress or look or talk. All we have to do in this relationship is show up. Showing up only requires that we acknowledge that God is present with us. It can be that moment, as you are climbing into the car, when you catch a whiff of the coming rain in the air. It can be when you hear yet another tragic story on the radio, and your heart goes out to those who are suffering. It can be when you feel overwhelmed by the decisions you must make. Anne Lamont, in her book [Help, Thanks, Wow](#), reflects on the essence of prayer with those three words: help, thanks and wow. Those quick moments of prayer are the beginning of our friendship with God. The more time we choose to spend with God, the more we have the opportunity to deepen that friendship.

There is another challenge to our friendship with God: we have to put down our masks and bring our true selves to the table. Revealing all of who I am to anyone, even to myself, is a lifelong task. We rarely divulge our innermost thoughts, the ones that live in the shadows of our minds. We live carefully edited lives. It's not necessarily that our shadow selves are bad or evil, in fact, that hidden place can hold the things that are most precious to us, hopes and dreams that we wish to protect from denigration and ridicule. In developing our friendship with God, we build a relationship of trust. As we learn to trust God, we come as we are: happy, angry, frustrated, delighted, disillusioned, contented, confused, terrified, or just plain tired. Coming to God "as we are" means that nothing is too huge or too trivial to discuss. Coming to God "as we are" means that we can talk, for the umpteenth time, about that relationship that we're still struggling with. Coming to God "as we are" means that sometimes we just run out of words and the silence is OK. Coming to God means that we can, and should, bring to this friendship everything that is on our minds and hearts. Each of us has a standing invitation to come

spend time with God, any time of the day or night, any place where we find ourselves, and no matter the state of our heart or emotions. All we are asked to do is show up.

Be present, be present, Lord Jesus, as you were present with your disciples at the breaking of the bread.  
Be present, be present, Lord Jesus, and be gentle with us as we seek to reveal our hearts to you.  
Be present, be present, Lord Jesus, and open our eyes to your presence with us. Amen.

## Week 1- Saturday

Today take time to pray.

Over the following weeks you will have the opportunity to try a number of types of prayer. Try the following several times today.

Standing prayer

This prayer uses your body to pray.

Stand<sup>1</sup> and raise your hand above your head.

Place yourself in the presence of God.

Place your crossed arms in front of you with your hands on each shoulder.

Invite God's spirit into your heart and soul.

Open your arms to each side.

Pour out what God has given you to the world around you.

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<sup>1</sup> It is easily done sitting if standing is difficult.

## Week 1- Sunday

Find some time today to enter into the presence of Christ.

"I have, O Lord, a noisy heart. And entering outward silence doesn't stop the inner clamor. In fact, it seems only to make it worse. When I am full of activity, the internal noise is only a distant rumble; but when I get still, the rumble amplifies itself. And it is not like the majestic sound of a symphony rising to a grand crescendo; rather it is the deafening din of clashing pots and clanging pans. What a racket! Worst of all, I feel helpless to hush the interior pandemonium. Dear Lord Jesus, once you spoke peace to the wind and waves. Speak your shalom over my heart. I wait silently . . . patiently. I receive into the very core of my being your loving command, 'Peace, be still.' Amen." " – Richard Foster, Prayer from the Heart

## Week 2 - Monday

We have to start somewhere. There is a temptation to want to make every prayer perfect—Perfectly formed, perfectly said, perfectly in line with what I “should” be praying for. We want God to hear us and to respond to us, so of course we need to know how to prayer the “right” way. All this concern can keep us from starting. Like the student who spends an hour sharpening pencils and getting the light just right, we distract ourselves from doing the task at hand. Don’t worry about the right words, or the right topic, or the right time, or the right place. Just talk to God. Richard Foster, in Prayer: Finding the Hearts True Home, calls this simple prayer. I think of it as the “getting to know you” prayer. When I meet someone whom I want to get to know, we sit down and have a conversation. The conversation is rarely deep. Mostly it consists of “beginning” kinds of things: Where did you grow up? Do you have siblings? Where did you go to school? What did you study? Where do you work? Are you married? Do you have kids? You know that conversation. It’s the one that lays the ground work for moving forward into a friendship. Christ is certainly aware of all things about us, yet talking about them, about the ins and outs of our daily life, is a way of bringing all of our current life into the world of prayer and into the presence of Christ. If your mind is anything like mine, it is filled with the endless list of the things you need to do, the people you need to connect with, the places you need to be and the things you’re currently worrying about. Here is your opportunity; every time your mind skips to that list, turn it into a prayer. You can pray blessing and peace and wisdom on the mom and the toddler throwing a tantrum in the grocery store. A prayer for creativity and wisdom and help can center you and reduce your anxiety about the next project at work. You can pray for the latest disaster or frustration that pervades the latest news cycle. These are not long and involved prayers. Some folks refer to them as “arrow prayers”. They are quick shots of prayer that lift the situation up to Christ.

While it is often fairly easy to pray for others or a specific situation, we need to also pray for ourselves. In praying for ourselves, we lift ourselves into Christ’s presence. There is a temptation to shy away from this type of prayer, to assume that praying for my hopes and dreams, my frustrations or desires, is in some way selfish and unworthy of prayer. Remember we are building a relationship here. Relationships, friendships, are built on sharing who we are with the other person. It is that sharing that creates trust. If I limit my conversation with Christ to “acceptable” topics and edit my interaction, I also limit the depth and breadth of my friendship with Christ. If you have any doubt about what is an acceptable topic, take a look at the Book of Psalms. In those 150 psalms the writers yell at God, beg God, ask God to strike down their enemies, praise God with giddy delight, and ponder what it means to follow God. The writers of the psalms get it right and get it wrong and they struggle through all that life throws at them, all in the presence of God. So find a beginning, a place, a moment, a space to enter into the presence of God. Just do it!

Lord Christ, It comes the very moment I wake up each morning. All my wishes and hopes and fears for the day rush in like wild animals. Help me to lift that menagerie up to you and shove it back, so that I can see from your point of view. Help me to hear your quiet whisper over the clamor of the growls and roars. Make me aware of your Holy Spirit this day, strengthening me, guiding me, and allowing your life to flow through me. Amen.

## Week 2 -Tuesday

While we most often think of prayer as our talking to God, as with all relationships there is also an aspect of listening. J. Philip Newell refers to this as “listening for the heartbeat of God.” It’s an image that has stuck with me. To listen to someone’s heartbeat you have to be close to them, held by them. To listen to a heartbeat you have to be silent, and the other person must also be silent. This kind of silence does mean that you are closed off from one another. In fact, often there is a sense of intimacy that words can interfere with. This kind of silence is dynamic; it carries within it the desire to connect, to place oneself in the presence of God. It also takes practice.

Our world is crazy busy . . . and loud! In fact there is hardly a moment when I am not surrounded with some demand on my attention. There is music in the store and in the car. The computer beeps with yet another reminder and the cell phone pings with a message as well. There is a notice from my child’s school and one from the dentist. I write another note to try to remember what I need to bring tomorrow and check the calendar to make the next list. I wonder where the silence went, and crave a moment to gather my thoughts. I can barely hear my own thoughts much less the heartbeat of God. Silence takes time, and time seems to be in short supply. Yet, silence is essential. I need the time to listen for the heartbeat of God. I need to be able to discern the presence of God in my life and in my soul. So this takes us to the practicalities of prayer, the where and the when and the how-do-we-find-the-time-for-one-more-thing of it. It’s not easy. It’s not easy to find the time or the place. It’s not easy to put away my mental list and just sit, even for a moment. It’s also not easy to stop beating myself up over not doing it well or not doing it properly. None of those activities are very helpful. What we are seeking is to fall into the arms of God. We are looking to take a moment to exhale all the tensions and frustrations of our lives and breathe in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

So here is something you can do—here, this moment, wherever you are.

Listen for all the sounds around you: the whirr of the furnace , the rush of the cars going past, the music in the next room, the footsteps of those walking around you, listen to them all and let them go. Let them recede into the background.

Listen now to your breath. Hear it as it fills you and leaves your lungs. Let it too recede into the background.

Now listen for your heartbeat. Let the sound go.

Sense now the presence of God here with you. Silent, embracing you, hear the heartbeat of God. . . .

Slowly become aware of all those sounds around you, your breath, the footstep passing by, the traffic outside, the computer in the next room.

It really doesn’t take all that long. It’s something you can do whenever you have the chance. You will get better at it the more often you do it. The more often you slip into God’s presence the more often it will be a comfortable place.

May the grace of night's stillness be mine.  
May the grace of the moon's guidance be mine.  
May the grace of heaven's vastness be mine.  
To renew my soul in sleep,  
to enlighten my dreams in the night,  
to open my spirit to eternity,  
until the angels of light awaken me,  
until the morning angels awaken me.  
"Sunday night prayer," J. Phillip Newell, Celtic Benediction

## Week 2- Wednesday

Praying can be a fearful thing. After all we are entering into the presence of God; that alone can seem to be an audacious thing to do. Then there are the other fears. Am I doing it right? What if God rejects my prayer? What if I'm not a good enough person for God to pay attention to me? Is what I am praying for too petty or too self-serving to merit God's attention? The list can go on and on. It's an understandable desire, to present to God only our best. The flaw in it is that God wants all of us. Yes, even the stuff in the back of the closet that we tucked away so long ago, or the mystery item molding the container in the fridge. God want to share your secret dream to be an artist or climb Everest or run for congress. So put away your fears. Nothing is too joyful or too petty or too nasty to include in your prayers.

There is a difference between a fear that leads us to avoid God and the awe that we find when we are in the presence of one who is the Lord of all. Fear disables us. Fear cripples our ability to have a relationship. When we live in fear we try to hide those things that we sense are inadequate or unfit. Fear causes an anxiety that disables us and causes us to distance ourselves from others. Fear of the ocean means we avoid swimming in it. Fear of failure or embarrassment keeps us from signing up for the class or presenting the new idea. Fear cripples us and prevents us from being what we could be. Viewing God with terror prevents us from opening up our hearts and minds to the presence of God. Being with God then becomes something to be avoided. What is it you fear about being with God? What is it about being in the presence of God that brings up that terrible anxiety? Is there something about the way you understand God to be that keeps you from desiring to be in God's presence? If this kind of fear is an issue, consider being very deliberate about changing the name by which you address God. You also may want to reflect on your primary image of God. Are you being invited to contemplate another aspect of God? Whatever you do, set aside fear.

Awe, however, should always be part of our relationship with God. Awe is the realization that God is God and we are not. Awe enables us to take delight in the fact that God, yes the creator and sustainer of the universe, desires our company. Awe draws us into a relationship and creates a space where we can appreciate the wonder of our time with God. All this may sound ethereal and unworldly. Yet awe can sneak up on us in the most mundane of places. We can experience awe and delight as we watch a toddler discover the wonder of putting a lid on box. We can look up in awe at the clouds meandering across the sky while we are stuck in traffic. We can encounter awe when we watch a cat leaping from a fence. Each time we are aware of a sense of awe it is an invitation to recognize that we are in the presence of God, in the presence of the one who shapes our world and our souls.

Fear alienates us. Awe connects us. Prayer brings us into the presence of God, and being in the presence of God inspires both fear and awe. There is no getting around it. We bring into that relationship both things that we love to display and things that we would much rather keep hidden. Prayer requires trust. We need to trust that God is a loving God. We need to trust that God looks upon us with love and kindness and delight.

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve. Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things

of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits of mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP p. 234)

## Week 2 Thursday- Boots on prayer

“There’s nothing wrong with having a form of words composed by somebody else. Indeed, there’s probably something wrong with not using such a form. Some Christians, some of the time, can sustain a life of prayer entirely out of their own internal resources, just as there are hardy mountaineers (I’ve met one) who can walk the Scottish highland in their barefeet. But most of us need boots; not because we don’t want to do the walking ourselves, but because we do.” N. T. Wright, [Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense](#)

I love this image of “boots on prayer.” It helps me to integrate the different ways I pray. Sometimes I can pray a “barefoot” prayer, putting into words my thoughts and concerns, my desires and petitions, in ways that are comprehensible. At other times I need help. I can’t seem to tame my hyperactive things or find the words for what is going on. Having a prayer that is thoughtfully crafted helps me to focus. A prayer like that also helps me to include the things I’m likely to forget (and those that I would just as soon leave out). Written prayers—and especially, for me, the office of Morning Prayer<sup>2</sup>—helps me to tame my wayward mind and to expand my prayers for the world.

There are any number of resources for daily prayer. Most of them make use of a format that incorporates both prayers and scripture reading. Like Sunday morning worship, portions of Morning Prayer remain constant (for example The Lord’s Prayer and the intercessions) while other portions, including the scripture reading and the canticles, change from day to day or season to season. Although the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer (Morning Prayer begins on page 75 of the BCP, Evening Prayer on page 115) were designed for community worship, they can be used by individuals. I find that participating in Morning or Evening Prayer with an online community helps me to pray, by being part of a group of people praying.

Below are a few options for online daily prayer that you may want to try out.

[www.dailyoffice.org](http://www.dailyoffice.org) – This website provides both versions of daily prayer based on the American and New Zealand Books of Common Prayer. While similar, there are some significant differences.

<http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/offices/how-to-use-daily-office/> - This website offers daily prayer based on that used by the community on Iona. Many of the prayers used are based on ancient Celtic prayers.

[www.thetrinitymission.org](http://www.thetrinitymission.org) – If you would rather listen to the service while you read along, you may find that this website is the most useful for you.

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP p. 100)

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<sup>2</sup> For some people Morning Prayer works well, for others Evening Prayer, and for others sometime in the middle of the day. The rhythm of your day and your personal rhythm will determine what might work best for you. God is always there, so it’s up to you to figure out what works.

## Week 2- Friday

### The Psalms

The traditional structure of daily prayer includes large portions of the Psalms. If you were to pray both Morning and Evening Prayer, you would read through the Psalms every eight weeks. There is no other portion of scripture that is read with such intensity. The Psalms are both prayer-book and hymn-book for Jews and Christians alike. Even through the changes of the Reformation, churches retained the use of the Psalms both for private and public worship.<sup>3</sup>

The Psalms provide a way of pushing us to include those difficult parts of ourselves in our prayers. They can give voice to the things we would rather not say and to the situations we would rather not deal with. For example; throughout this week I have been praying for a number of people in contentious situations. This morning I prayed Psalm 140<sup>4</sup> as part of my morning prayer. This psalm enabled me to give a greater depth and breadth to my prayer for those stuck in these difficult situations. This psalm allowed me to voice the frustration and anger that comes with those circumstances. It also reminded me of other places where justice was needed. Reading Psalm 140 helped me to expand my prayer beyond my immediate surroundings and include people and places that God brought to mind. It doesn't always happen. There are times I read it and it leaves me cold. There are no apparent connections, in fact sometimes I find the Psalms difficult and sometimes disturbing. They are full of praise when I'm not. They trumpet death and destruction to the evildoers just as I am most aware of my failings. Yet just as often the words echo what I need to say. All scripture is like that. We struggle with it, we rejoice in it, we are left bored and cold. Praying the Psalms places us with thousands of years of others who have prayed them as well, and allows us to join with them in listening to what God wishes us to hear. Not an easy task, but one that invites us into another place where we can deepen our relationship with God in Christ.

### Psalm 150

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his holy temple; Praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him for his excellent greatness.

Praise him with the blast of the ram's-horn; praise him with the lyre and harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with strings and pipe.

Praise him with resounding cymbals; praise him with loud-clanging cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah!

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<sup>3</sup> Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Presbyterian Church, the a capella singing of psalms was the only music allowed during worship.

<sup>4</sup> I have said to the LORD, "You are my God; \*  
listen, O LORD, to my supplication.  
O Lord GOD, the strength of my salvation, \*  
you have covered my head in the day of battle.  
Do not grant the desires of the wicked, O LORD, \*  
nor let their evil plans prosper. Psalm 140:6-9

## Week 2 - Saturday

Today, I invite you join me for Morning Prayer at [www.dailyoffice.org](http://www.dailyoffice.org) .

## Week 2- Sunday

To pray, I think, does not mean to think about God in contrast to thinking about other things, or to spend time with God instead of spending time with other people. Rather, it means to think and live in the presence of God.

Henri Nouwen

## Week 3-Monday

Long ago, so long ago I refer to it as “BC” (Before Children), I was on a retreat in the mountains of Pennsylvania. One night at dinner a number of women were sitting with one of the retreat leaders. The discussion turned to our difficulties in trying to pray in the midst of all the demands on our lives. For some of us it was work, for others children, and others the 24/7 demands of being a clergy person. No matter what the responsibilities, it was difficult for us to find the time to sleep, much less adding a prayer time to our overloaded lives. The retreat leader, our elder by many years, told us a story of when her children were little. At one point she had 5 children under the age of 10. There was no way she could stop and take time apart to pray—that was to court disaster. Instead she found a way to incorporate prayer into whatever she was doing at the moment. Putting clothes in the washer, reminded her to be thankful for the clothing they had, and to pray for God to cleanse her thoughts and motives. Picking up the toys, she prayed for the ability to delight in all that God had placed around her. Making dinner, she prayed that God would help her provide food for her families’ souls as well as their bodies, and on and on it went until it became a constant undercurrent to her days.

Incorporating prayer into our daily lives is not a new idea. In his 17<sup>th</sup> century classic book on prayer, The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence tells us,

“He (God) does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act or sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces, past and present, He has bestowed on you, in the midst of your troubles to take solace in Him as often as you can. Lift up your heart to Him during your meals and in company; the least little remembrance will always be the most pleasing to Him. One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think.”

To quote an old commercial, “it is the thought that counts.” It is the thought, the moment of turning to God in the middle of whatever we are doing that makes us conscious of the presence of God in our lives. Whatever can help you pause for that briefest of seconds and remember to acknowledge God’s presence is prayer. How and what you use to help you pause for that moment of prayer is entirely up to you. One friend of mine carries a small rock in his pocket as a reminder of God’s constant presence. There are other ways to remember. You could use a screen saver with a photo of clouds to remind you that God is over all, or use music, or keep a plant on your desk, All of these practices are “little remembrances” that help you to connect throughout the day with the presence of God in your life.

Our lives can be overwhelming. Our lives can also give us the means to stay connected with the ground of our being, and the source of life. It is in the middle of the demands of our daily lives that we can find ways to pray.

Beloved one, who is the source of our life, open our eyes to the reminders of your presence that surround us. Make us aware of you, and help us to open our hearts and lives to your Spirit in everything we do. Through Jesus, who lived as we live. Amen.

## Week 3- Tuesday

I recently stumbled across a show entitled “Art Everywhere.” It got me thinking about the creativity of the people I know. Most of them would deny that they were in any way “artists.” They would hem and haw and claim that what they do is nothing extraordinary, just something that anyone can do. I disagree. Not everyone can think up a wonderful dinner party and have everyone there relaxed and laughing. Not everyone can look at something in a thrift store and know just what to do to with it to give it new life. Not everyone can take a block of wood, or scrap of paper, or yard of fabric and turn it into something wonderful. Not everyone (certainly not me!) can create a garden. Yet everyone has that spark of creativity, that urge to create something, to care for something. That creativity has the potential to be a form of prayer.

I know it sounds a bit farfetched to call the creative process a form of prayer, but consider this: often when we are creating something we give our whole selves to the project. We are immersed in the project. We are shaping the items at hand into what they can become. It is a process that can be done as prayer. The Rev. Charles Barton reflects on this kind of prayer: “All the concerns with which I might have wrestled took flight as I worked at the jewelry bench. Such work is prayer for me as my first spiritual director pointed out. It is worth taking time to make things—as much for the process as for anything I might produce. I feel grounded when I work with my hands.” I resonate with that kind of prayer. I’m one who can’t sit still without doing something with my hands. The rhythm of the knitting needles can become a counterpoint to my prayer. It can become a prayer in and of itself. In our act of creating we are communicating. In making something, whether it is as permanent as a piece of furniture or as transitory as a party, we are connecting with others. We also have the opportunity to offer our creation to God, and as part of that offering to share our creation with others.

The act of creation connects us with our God, who is ever creating. Often we are most aware of prayer as words. We speak the words to God and we are praying. The prayer of creation most often is a prayer without words. It is a prayer of action. It comes in the whole action of creating: the concept, the planning, the construction or performance, and the sharing of what has been created with others. It is a prayer of work, because creating is work, restorative work, yet work none the less. In my experience many of the most creative moments are moments when we are limited. Having limitations forces us to find new ways of creating and communicating what we want to say. The limitations may take many forms. We may only have so much time to devote to the task. We may have limited supplies or limited funds. We may be limited by our knowledge or skill. Each of these limitations pushes us to find a new way to create, to make something pleasing that conveys what we wish to convey.

As prayer, what we create challenges us to bring our best selves to what we are making. It pushes us to bring all of our skill into the conversation. The prayer of creation is one we rarely recognize. We tend to undervalue our ability to create, and we fail to see that the very act of creation can be prayer. Creation becomes prayer when we recognize the art in what we do and offer it to God. There is joy, delight, and contentment in creating. And as our creating becomes prayer, our prayer is bathed in joy and contentment as well.

O God of life, who chooses creation over chaos, and new beginnings over emptiness. We bring to you the creations of our hearts and lives. Create in us a desire for you and allow your gift to flow through us, that the grace of creativity may bring hope and healing to our broken world. Amen.

## Week 3- Wednesday

We live in a culture at war with our bodies. We are alternately encouraged to ignore our physical needs or to indulge every desire that we have. We get little sleep in favor of work, and we eat to compensate. We drive everywhere to save time, even to the gym. There is a disconnect going on that seems impossible to overcome.

For some of us, one path to bringing more balance into our physical and spiritual lives is to bring them into closer proximity. You have already had the chance (Saturday of Week 1) to try using your body in prayer. I invite you to think now about some of the other ways that our bodies can help us pray.

1. Kneeling and standing. Our posture when we pray has an effect on our ability to focus on our prayer. Kneeling has traditionally been associated with prayers of penitence and humility. Kneeling can help us to recognize our relationship before God as humans in the presence of the divine. It can also reinforce our sorrow for our offences against God and others, as we look to right those wrongs and repent.

Standing is perhaps the oldest posture of prayer. Standing with hands raised, palms up, is known as the “orans” position. Frescos in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Catacombs of Priscilla show a person using this standing position in prayer. Traditionally, this position is connected with both celebration and petition. You see this in the position of the priest at the consecration of the elements during the Eucharistic prayer.

2. Walking and swimming. For me, both walking and swimming have been ways in which I could bring my body into my prayer. Walking at a steady pace can help create a rhythm in my prayer. Each step carries me to the next step and the next thought in my prayer. Many people have found that walking a labyrinth is helpful in this type of prayer. The practice of walking a labyrinth as a form of prayer first appears during the thirteenth century. Such labyrinths were sometimes constructed as part of the grand Cathedrals, including a famous one at Chartres in France. With only one entrance and a defined center, a labyrinth differs from a maze in that it has only one defined path in and out. It is thought to mirror our path to God, because it is a path in which we cannot get lost, although it has many twists and turns. For many years I tried to tame my over-busy mind to focus in prayer. Sitting still didn’t work. Walking required too much attention to where I was going. Focusing on my breathing left too many places for my mind to wander. One day while swimming laps I found myself praying. The discipline and rhythm of my breathing and the limitations of swimming laps proved to be the perfect way for me to allow myself to slip into prayer.

3. Yoga and Ti Chi. For many people, these disciplines have provided a useful path to incorporating their bodies into their lives of prayer. Their focus of breath and attention can help to center your heart and mind on the task at hand and to become aware of God’s presence in that moment.

However you pray, you will be using your body. Your physical self is part of your prayer, so paying attention to that aspect of yourself will enhance your life of prayer. Whether standing or lying down or swimming or moving through the poses of yoga, your physical self can help you to pray.

Creator of all things, we stand before you in the glory of the bodies you have given to us. Tired or energized, filled or hungry, content or in pain we walk into your presence and ask for the blessing of

your love and grace. Let us know the touch of your caress upon our hearts. Through your Son, Jesus, who walked the hard earth and knows the joys and limitations of all things physical. Amen.

## Week 3-Thursday

Going through the motions doesn't please you,  
a flawless performance is nothing to you. Psalm 51:16, *The Message*

We are people with emotions. We have good days and bad days. Sometimes I'm on cloud 9 and other times I have to climb out of a hole just to function. It's all part of who I am, part of being human. Throughout the gospels we get hints of Jesus' very human emotions: his frustration with his uncomprehending disciples, his annoyance with the Pharisees, how he enjoys dinner with his friends and, famously, his anger at those exploiting the poor in the Temple. We have a tendency to label our emotions. This one is good. This one is bad. This one is acceptable. This one is not. Because of these labels, we revise what we feel. We put on a mask and pretend, sometimes even to ourselves, that what we are feeling is not what we REALLY are feeling. I'm not really angry, I'm just hurt. I'm not really devastated by what has happened, I'm just a little upset. It's hard to pray about those difficult parts of our lives if we are masking what is actually happening. There is a tendency to want to temper all those "negative" feelings as if doing so will make them go away, or at least make it all more manageable. Facing up to them is a difficult task. We need to find a way to sit still with what we are feeling long enough to be able to lift those feelings up to the presence of God. Anger, sadness, depression, hopelessness, resentment, grief, uselessness, and futility can and should be part of our life of prayer. Look to the psalms, there you will find echoes of each of these emotions.

Likewise our lives also contain days of brightness and joy. We delight in the sun on our face on a cold winter day. A small hand in our large one brings a smile. We relish the success of projects that we have worked long and hard on. We savor the achievements of our children, and of those we have mentored. Usually, it is easier to share these positive emotions. But there is a sneaky voice in our culture that puts a crimp in even these delightful occurrences. For some reason, it seems to speak particularly loudly to women. That voice cautions us to not be boastful. That little voice tells us to not enjoy life too much, because to do so is to risk being too full of oneself. To do so is not "productive." This kind of thinking is a trap, a trick to get us to box up our joy and leave it on the closet shelf.

To be truly human, we need all of our emotions. We also need all of those emotions in our prayers. Bringing all our emotions into the presence of God helps us to bring the whole of ourselves into that relationship. We have the opportunity to use our joys and sorrows as part of our prayer. Try the following exercise.

1. Number a page with the hours of the day, beginning with the time you woke up yesterday. (6am, 7am, 8am. . . .)
2. Next to each hour list the predominant emotion you experienced (tired, annoyed, content. . . .)
3. Bring each emotion into God's presence.
4. What did you experience? Where were you most aware of God's presence?

God of Joy and sorrow, we gather the scattered range of our emotions and place them in your loving hands. Look with mercy and gentleness on our lives and guide us into a deeper awareness of your

presence. Through Jesus Christ, who lived as we live and loves us more that we can ask or imagine.  
Amen.

## Week 3- Friday

At one point in my life I discovered that praying in words was leaving me cold. Somehow the process of gathering up what I wanted to pray about, and organizing it and putting it into words was just took too long and was too involved. The thoughts and words got tangled up. I was stumped, until I discovered that there were ways I could use my imagination as prayer.

Now there are a number of ways to use your imagination as part of your prayer. As with all forms of prayer, some may work for you, others not, and others may require some practice and effort before you are comfortable with them. Here are a couple of ways to use your imagination as prayer.

### 1. Using Imagination to pray for others or for a situation.

Imagine the situation, or person, or concern you want to offer up to God. Use that as a prayer. In fact, the interaction of your imagination and prayer can help you “walk around” the concern. The more detail you can include in your imagination-prayer the better. (One caution, with an emotionally charged issue be careful to not relive the painful situation. Try to look at the situation or person from a distance.)

### 2. Imagine yourself into a Biblical story.

This is a form of meditation on the scriptures.

Read the story.

Read it again, slowly; note all the details, time of day, place, who is present.

Now imagine yourself as a person in the story. Notice everything around you. Is anyone speaking to you? Who is interacting to you? What is going on around you? How do you feel about what is going on? What might be different if you were a different person in the story?

### 3. Walking with Jesus

See yourself on a pathway.

You are going to a place that you enjoy, someplace peaceful and refreshing.

Notice everything on your walk, the feel of the air on your face, the sky—is it cloudy? Sunny? Warm? Cool? How does the ground feel under your feet? What scents do you perceive as you walk? What do you see?

When you arrive you are greeted by Jesus. What does he say to you?

Continue the conversation until you are ready to leave.

Walk back along the path.

All of these forms of prayer take you into the presence of God. By using your imagination you have the opportunity to move beyond just the words of prayer and incorporate more of who you are. Did it not work for you? Maybe this is just not the type of prayer for you, or perhaps you need some practice, or maybe it's not the right time in your life for this type of prayer.

Today we end with a quote from St. Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century woman of prayer: “Prayer is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with (God) who we know loves us.”

Lord God, May we know today the delight of being in your presence. Amen.

## Week 3- Saturday

Praying in color

Get out your paper and some crayons or colored pencils.

If you can't find crayons or colored pencils, just use an ordinary pen or pencil and get set to doodle.

Today's practice comes from a the book [Praying in Color](#), by Sybil MacBeth.

The concept is simple. We put a circle in the center of the page. Write in the circle the name you use to address God (or Christ, or the Holy Spirit—whatever works for you).

Next draw a shape next to the circle. As you add it, think of the person or event you wish to pray for. Add a word that indicates what or who you are praying for. As you color it in or fill it with your doodles, lift that person/event up in prayer. You may find you use words, or you may not. It doesn't really matter. When you feel you are finished with that one, move on to the next concern. Continue as long as you need to.

Below is a YouTube video that may help you as well.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2WiqoKhhqM>

## Week 3 Sunday

All great art is a visual form of prayer.

-Sister Wendy Beckett

Good art is a form of prayer. It's a way to say what is not sayable.

-Frederich Busch

Creating art as an act of prayer is an embodied, active prayer. It recognizes that every thought and action that we undertake, if it is done with a spiritual awareness, will have a spiritual effect. In this light, creating art is the channel through which an artist's prayers are manifested. Art is not prayer because of a particular imagery or symbolism that is used. Art as prayer is a conscious connection to the Creator. As described by one artist, "when I go into my studio, I tell myself, this is my temple. This is where I worship. I am always conscious of striving to perfect my art and in the process of this striving, I am coming closer to God." In an artist's attempt to perfect their work, they slowly perfect their life in the process and bring their work and their life one step closer to reflecting the divine.

-Erika Hastings

## Week 4 - Monday

We are surrounded by sound. Music in the stores, and the car, and the coffee shop acts like a movie score for our daily routines. We are always alert to the pings and dings of our phones and tablets and laptops. Even in the dead of night there is the hum and gurgle of the refrigerator and the rumble of the furnace. We are inundated by the demands of those sounds around us. We often seek to continue the soundscape with the words around us. There are printed words that ring in our minds. Then there are the conversations that circle around in our heads, the ones that repeat words and scripts from events long past. All of this can get in the way of our attempts to pray.

Prayer can be filled with words as well. There are the printed words of a book of prayers. These give us a structure to hang our prayers on; they can also widen our circle of compassion. They are the words that we give voice to as we pray. Yet there are times when we have no words that can give voice to what we wish to say. There are times when the words we have are inadequate for the situation, and times when we just don't know what to pray.

These are the times when we are invited to sit in silence, to pray the prayer of being present. External silence is difficult, but achievable. Internal silence requires practice. To be silent is to allow all those mental prompts and conversations to be set aside. It is not something that has come easily to me. By nature I'm constantly on the move, making lists and planning the next project. For me the first step in being silent requires that I let go of all those lists. They will keep. Next I have to dismiss the constant critic that resides somewhere in the back of my brain, the critic who is my constant detractor and demands continual attention. Muzzling that heckler is difficult, but essential. I imagine myself placing all my lists, projects, and demands in God's hands. Next I take that jumble of disapproving thoughts and negative emotions and also place them in God's hands. There all those things will stay while I have a chance to enter into the presence of God.

So here I am—here we are—in the presence of God. There is no agenda. Here no words are needed, or even any images. As concerns arise we can place those in God's hands, too. Here is a place of silence. It can be a place of comfort. It can be a place of rest, where we can put down to struggles of the day. It can be a place of anticipation, where we open ourselves to God's presence. It can be a place of healing for those deep wounds that drag us down. It can be a place of joy where we delight in God's Spirit within us. Silence in prayer is a gift and an invitation. It takes some work to walk into that quiet soul space where we can be in God's presence. It is well worth the walk. I invite you to find some time to be silent in prayer.

O Lord Jesus, your words to your Father were born out of your silence. Lead me into this silence, so that my words may be spoken in your name and thus be fruitful. It is so hard to be silent, silent with my mouth, but even more, silent with my heart. There is so much talking going on within me. It seems that I am always involved in inner debates with myself, my friends, my enemies, my supporters, my opponents, my colleagues, and my rivals. But this inner debate reveals how far my heart is from you. If I were simply to rest at your feet and realize that I belong to you and you alone, I would easily stop arguing with all the real and imagined people around me. These arguments show my insecurity, my fear, my apprehensions, and my need for being recognized and receiving attention. You, O Lord, will give me

all the attention I need if I would simply stop talking and start listening to you. I know that in the silence of my heart you will speak to me and show me your love. Give me, O Lord, that silence. Let me be patient and grow slowly into this silence in which I can be with you. Amen.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from Genesee*.

## Week 4- Tuesday

You should know that there are two sorts of prayers—the one tender, delightful, amicable, and full of sentiments; the other obscure, dry, desolate, tempted, and darksome."

-Miguel de Molinos (1628-1696)

There are times when all our prayers seem to fall to the ground of their own weight. There are times when prayer seems like just one long slog. There are those difficult times when God seems far away and everything is tinged with darkness. One of the most familiar passages of scripture is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm<sup>5</sup>—yet immediately before this psalm of comfort is Psalm 22, which begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest" (Psalm 22:1). We hear Jesus repeat these words on the cross. They are words of deep pain and longing. They are also words that reflect a sense of abandonment and honesty. These prayers of abandonment and complaint are so common they have

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<sup>5</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

their own category. They are referred to as “Prayers of Lament.” You will find them in the psalms<sup>6</sup> as well as in the book of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations.

It’s common to think that we should not complain to God. We should just accept what comes our way. Yet, the inclusion of these powerful objections to the wrongness of life offers us an example of prayer that demands honesty. To pray these prayers is to provoke us to come clean in our life of prayer, to reveal the pain of our broken hearts to God, and even to demand God’s intervention.

These prayers also reflect the unnerving times of God’s silence, times when God seems to have withdrawn into darkness and we are left in the void. Praying in the void is difficult. There is an air of futility about it. For centuries scholars and saints have written about this time of hollowness. They have brought all of their experience and knowledge to the subject. In the end, the answers have more to do with habit of prayer than any system or practice. Their advice could be mostly summed up as, “Just keep praying.” When God seems far away, just keep praying. When everything is dark and filled with pain and fear, just keep praying. When your whole spiritual life feels like nothing but dust and ashes, just keep praying. If you are praying in the void, just keep praying.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is on one to help. But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword. Save me from the power of the lion. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

Psalm 22:11, 19-21, 28

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<sup>6</sup> See Psalms 42, 60, 74, 79, 80, and 85.

## Week 4- Wednesday

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. Matt. 5:43-45 NRSV

I don't suppose that many of us have people we would refer to as “enemies.” All of us have people who have hurt us. Often those injuries are deep and have left scars. Sometimes the damage has been caused by an institution or a group, but the wounds are just as deep and painful. Healing from this kind of damage is a long road and involves many layers of care. To pray for those people and situations can be a tremendously difficult task. It can also be an incredibly freeing one. In her reflections on forgiveness, Barbara Cawthorne Crafton suggests that you should imagine the person who has hurt you as a small image in the palm of your hand. They are too small to hurt you in any way. Now you can hold that image up to God. One need not do this for more than a second, but by doing it repeatedly throughout the day, over time the hurt will lessen, and so will the hold that person has over you. Like the desensitization that happens from an allergy shot, this repeated exposure of the person who has hurt you to the light of God's presence can begin the healing process. Make no mistake, it is a process, and this is just one step along the way. It is also a part of the process of forgiveness. Lifting up those who have hurt us to God allows God to loosen the cables that fasten us to the pain. Once we are not so bound up to that damaged part of us, there is a greater possibility for healing and the kind of forgiveness that will enable us to move forward into life a greater freedom.

Curiously, sometimes the person we most need to lift up to God is ourselves. I'm sure you have heard the saying, “He is his own worst enemy.” There are times when our awareness of our own failings creates a continual abrasion on our souls. We pick at the scab of our deficiencies until we are a bloody mess. Lifting ourselves up to God without petition or condemnation opens that way for God to heal those wounds and find that place of peace and hope in Christ.

Praying for those who have wounded us is difficult. You may find it helpful to discuss this process with someone who is wise in the ways of prayer. Finding such a person is not always easy. Start with those you know that you trust. It can be a clergy person or someone you know (or know about) who is wise in the ways of prayer. You may also want to check out Spiritual Directors International ([www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)). This is an organization for those who are specifically trained in Spiritual Direction.

Finding the right person to walk this path of prayer with you can be very helpful. God's desire is that we be healed and whole. Taking those parts of us that have been damaged and lifting them up to the one who is able to heal all wounds is an important but difficult part of our life in prayer.

Almighty God, have mercy on me, and on all who seek to harm me. I know that you do not wish any to perish. But I am too broken to know how or what to pray for them or for me, so I lift them up to you as I lift my broken heart to you. Let your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, through Jesus Christ, your Son, and the Holy Spirit, through whom all healing comes. Amen.

## Week 4- Thursday

For the last four weeks we have been pondering many aspects of prayer. Today you have a bit of work to do, some questions to ask yourself. Hopefully they will help you get a sense of where you are after this journey in prayer. As we have seen, there is no “right” way to pray. These questions are to help you identify your current practice of prayer.

1. Where do you pray? In the car? On a walk? On a bench outside? In the lunchroom at work or at your desk? In bed? In your favorite chair? On the back porch? Or some other place?
2. When did you pray? In the morning? On your way to work? At Lunch or in the evening? Before bed? When you woke up in the middle of the night? Or some other time?
3. How do you address God in your prayers? Is your usual image of God helpful? Are you being invited to change that image or not? Are you being invited to explore this image further?
4. What do you pray for? Do you bring to God everything that is in your heart and mind or do you “edit” it and only bring what you think is acceptable? Do you pray for yourself as well as for others? Are there people or situations that you find it hard to pray for?
5. Why do you pray the way you do now?
6. Is this type of prayer feeding your soul?

Consider what Jesus told us about prayer:

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! Luke 11:9-13, NRSV

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (BCP, p. 832)

## Week 4- Friday

So, what is prayer? We have spent four weeks wandering around it this topic. After four weeks of thinking about prayer, after these days of trying different types of prayer, after these days of praying, how would you answer that question? What do you think is the essence of prayer? Jesus and his disciples were all first-century Jews. We know they prayed in the Temple in Jerusalem and in the synagogues. We know from the Gospels that Jesus took time apart from the crowds to pray (Mark 6:45-46). We see examples of Jesus' prayer: his prayer for those who followed him (John 17), and his prayer before his crucifixion (Luke 22:39-46). We know that, when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he responded by giving them a prayer we pray at every Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13). So I ask you, what is prayer?

Where do you go from here?

You have the opportunity to try out a number of types of prayer over the last four weeks. In addition we have mentioned a number of other types of prayer. Consider which of these has most engaged you. Are their ones that you would like to explore in the weeks to come? Creating a structure and at least an expectation for yourself of what kind of prayer you would like to experience will help you to continue on this path of prayer.

Who will you share this experience with?

In this study we have noted that the how, and the when and the where and the manner of our prayer changes throughout our lives. Change can be difficult, but change can also be freeing. I hope that this opportunity to consider both different ways to pray and the challenges of prayer have deepened your life in God.

I encourage you to continue to pray and to continue a conversation about your prayer with others who pray. Living in a community of prayer strengthens and supports your life in God. Creating a circle of people with whom you can both pray and share your experiences in prayer will give you the wisdom we all need to walk this path of faith.

How will you share what you have learned?

I recently read a study on learning. It stated that even for those who had just learned a concept, the best way to ensure that they would retain it was to teach it to someone else. No one is an "expert" on the life of prayer. God is teaching each of us the lessons that we are ready to hear. I encourage you to share what you have learned and experienced with someone else. God has given you a gift. Share that gift with someone else. Pray that God would show you when and how and with whom to share what you have learned and experienced.

God's blessing be upon you.

The blessings of heaven

The blessings of earth

The blessing of sea and sky.

On those we love this day and on every human family

The gifts of heaven

The gifts of earth

The gifts of sea and sky.  
The blessing of the Holy Trinity remain with you. Amen.  
-J. Philip Newell, Celtic Treasure

## Week 4- Saturday

Below is a way to use your imagination in prayer.

Find a quiet and comfortable place.

Make sure you don't feel rushed.

Read the meditation below, slowly. Give yourself plenty of time to imagine the whole scene.

Accept whatever happens or where you may be led.

Dark—pitch dark except for the stars; even the Milky Way is visible and a crescent moon

A field and over a ways away there is a campfire

Walking through the dry grass toward the fire

Feel the breeze, soft, just a whisper,

It's warm and dry, the remnants of a hot day

As you get closer

Smell the smoke from the fire and the leftover scent of the meal that had been cooked there

You begin to hear the mummer of two voices speaking low

The light is too dim to make out anything but the outline of the speakers.

You are just close enough to hear the conversation

“Rabbi, we all know you are a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it.”

“Yes, you're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to—to God's kingdom.”

“How can anyone be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?”

“You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.” (John 3:1-6 The Message)

The questioner gets up and leaves

Jesus turns to you.

What do you ask?

How does Jesus answer you?

Conclude you conversation.

Walk back across the field.

What will you take away from this conversation?

## Week 4- Sunday

Lord God lead us into your presence that as we hunger and thirst for you we may be fed by your very self. Amen. -Teresa of Avila