

INVITATION TO PRAYER

True, whole prayer is nothing but love. ~St. Augustine

This is prayer: With simplicity of heart, we allow ourselves to be gathered up into the arms of the Father and let him sing his love song to us.

WARNING! DANGER! Prayer is risky! To pray is to change. Prayer is the path God provides whereby our lives can be taken over by love. Love is freely given with no strings, but in being loved, we are changed.

Example of the risk: Say you find yourself praying for the homeless person you saw on the street this morning; the prayer is probably in your heart and on your lips because God wants to fulfill it through you. We take the same risk every Sunday as we pray the prayers of the people.

Prayer is about an enduring, continuing, growing love relationship with God. To pray is to love.

Note: There are many types, styles, and methods of prayer. Not all of them are for you, but you may find the way you need to express love and receive love from God changes over the years and the moments. To learn a new way to pray, even if it doesn't fit you now, is to have ready a new experience of love when you need it.

Material in this section is largely based on "Prayer" by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992)

ANOTHER INVITATION TO PRAYER

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. ~2 Corinthians 12:9

Prayer is the glue that holds all of the pieces of life together. We are invited to pray without ceasing. But the invitation isn't to bring God to us, but to be with God here and now, for the party has begun.

Momentary check-ins with God throughout the day are probably appreciated, but "Hi God; Bye God" isn't a formula for creating intimacy or a relationship with depth. This relationship requires time after time of time.

NOTICE: No skill is required to pray. None. We all can pray.

If it's worth doing, it's worth doing poorly. ~Merry Doe

Quality is not something we can predict. Quality comes and goes. Relationships require quantity and regularity. Even the "worst" prayers are beautiful to God.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ~Romans 8:26

WARNING! DANGER! Praying is risky! Sometimes people we pray for die. That's a risk we take.

"Please pray for me" is an invitation into the depths of someone's life and humanity. When someone invites into their issues, it creates worry in us for them. Worry is a starting place, not a staying place; worry invites us into prayer.

When invited to pray for someone, our task is to wrap them in God's love.

Prayer is, simple, an encounter with God's love for us and for the world.

Material in this section is largely based on "Praying in Color" by Sybil McBeth (Paraclete Press, 2007)

REVIEW: PRAYER IS...

- Risky
- All about love
- Creating an intimate relationship
- Coming into God's presence

SIMPLE PRAYER

To pray means to be willing to be naïve. ~Emilie Griffin

How to pray: Tell God about your day. Give thanks, yell, question, joke; discover God in every moment.

Many people think that we have to have everything “just right” in order to pray and that we can't pray for ourselves. Simple prayer is praying just as we are, including our utter self-centeredness.

Note: Praying for others is great. Simple prayer *starts* with the one person whose needs, joys, and sorrows we know best: **ourselves**. Others come in and out of the prayer as they come in and out of our lives each day. Yet the prayer will always come back to the one whose prayer needs we know better than anyone else.

NO PRETENDING! Come to God with the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, you exactly as you. No hiding anything or making anything look better or worse than it really is. *It's OK, God knows.*

Simple prayer is like a child coming to their parents, telling them about how their day went, celebrating the happy moments, crying about the sad ones, ask their parents for answers to the things they don't understand. God is your Father, your Holy Parent. Like any parent, God wants to hear how your day was. And, like any child who cannot draw a bad picture, the children of God cannot offer a bad prayer.

Don't try to sort out the good from the bad. If you are frustrated with someone, tell God about your frustration. If you had a great breakfast but an upset stomach later, tell God about how enjoyable your day started and how your stomach ruined it later. If you're happy now, tell God about the source of your joy.

Simple prayer can be filled with many moments of confession. We sin daily, hourly, more than that. Simple prayer is often a practice of coming before God, saying “I've fallen down,” and asking God to pick you up. Sometimes, simple prayer is called “The Prayer of Beginning Again.” It's also the self-care prayer.

☺ The ordinary stuff of daily life is the stuff of simple prayer. ☹ !?!!??uh??!!yes!!?!?!?what?!!!zzzzzzzz...

Material in this section is largely based on “Prayer” by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992)

A CHILD'S BEDTIME PRAYER

Father-Mother God,
Loving me,—
Guard me when I sleep;
Guide my little feet
Up to Thee.

PRAYER POSITION: UPLIFTED HANDS

Let my prayer rise before you as incense; the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice. ~Psa 141:2

When praying, simple open your hands, palms facing up. Rest your arms on your legs or hold them gently in a natural position to the sides of your body. For me, this position is like opening up to God's presence.

When I finish praying this way, I like to raise my hands and bow my head, handing my prayers over to God. My “Amen” with this motion comes to mean: “Lord, these prayers are now in your hands.”

PRAYER OF THE FORSAKEN

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ~Psalm 22:1a, quoted by Jesus on the cross

How to pray: Using the psalms is best. Often just complaining to God and praying for the ability to hold onto trust in the midst of the long silence is all that's needed. Nagging persistence works as well.

Times of desertion, absence, and abandonment appear to be **universal**. Sooner or later, we too will know what it means to feel forsaken by God. Not that God is truly absent, but for now hidden from our sight.

Some call this “the dark night of the soul” or “the cloud of unknowing.” These are the days you cry out “Why...*why*...**why?**” These are the days when God seems silent, when you are assailed with doubts and fears and faith seems fleeting. You may wonder, “Does God really love me...?”

We cannot make the Creator of the universe appear at our beck and call. Like Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, God is *wild* and free and comes at will. This is a relationship with the LIVING GOD.

God's hiddenness often acts to keep us from fashioning God in our image, turning God into an idol, or manipulating the relationship. We cannot manage God.

The silence may last months or **years**. We wait on God, trusting God will come. This parent doesn't abandon his children. Remember, the simplest definition of faith is not lack of doubt, but trust. Trust is confidence in the character of God. Amid all the unknowing and loneliness, rest in your trust in God.

Note: Sometimes we have to travel this road alone, but if you can, find a partner for the journey. A good friend works, but sometimes you need a professional who knows how to survive the desert.

There is a long tradition of complaining as prayer and God responding. Consider the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 2:23,3:7) or during the Exodus (Exodus 16:3-4). Also, Jesus says we are to be like the persistent widow, praying until we are heard (Luke 18:1-8).

Note: Complaining and persistence here are not for asking God to give you a Rolls-Royce (simple prayer has space for such requests). This is asking for justice, help, healing, or simply presence.

The lament psalms will guide you. Individual laments: 3, 5, 6, 7, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 35, 39, 41, 42, 43, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69, 71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 130, 140, 141, 143. Communal laments: 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 124, 126, 137, 144. Lament hymns work well too (ELW 697-704 or “Grief” in the index).

Lament psalms are filled with **complaints** and **petitions**. Often they will oscillate between those and **expressions of trust**, as though reminding themselves of who God is even in the absence. Many lament psalms end in praise, for this prayer is not over until after you discover you have been heard by God.

The deep of my profound misery calls to the deep of Your infinite mercy. ~Bernard of Clairvaux

In God's time and God's way, the desert will give way to a land flowing with milk and honey. Exile ends in return. The cross ends in resurrection. Creation ends in salvation.

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PRAYER POSITION: MUTUAL SUPPORT

When praying in a group, circle up and have everyone hold out their arms with their thumbs facing up. Then have everyone turn their hands so both thumbs are pointing to the left. Now place your right hand on top of your neighbor's left hand. Everyone will be supporting someone and being supported by someone if done correctly. The prayer position is particularly helpful when you are praying for the person beside you, though it can work in any group setting.

COMMON TABLE PRAYER AND ALTERNATE ENDINGS

Come, Lord Jesus, and be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blessed...

- ...We thank you, Lord, for meat and drink. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
- ...May every table everywhere receive from you a goodly share. Amen.
- ...Bless our loved ones everywhere and keep them in your tender care. Amen.
- ...And may our souls by you be fed ever on the Living Bread. Amen.
- ...And with our daily bread impart your love and peace to every heart. Amen.

PRAYING THE PSALMS: BASICS OF HEBREW POETRY

To pray the psalms, it is helpful to know how poetry works in Hebrew. The most basic element of Hebrew poetry is the couplet. With rare exception, Hebrew poetry comes in two lines joined together by a common theme. Notice below how forsaken turns into far away and crying by day turns into sleeplessness by night.

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 22:1-2

People often find this repetition in biblical poetry boring, not knowing why they keep saying the same thing twice. But this isn't simple repetition; this is a style of heightening, intensifying, sharpening, contrasting, etc. It's not just God has forsaken me; it's I'm alone and in pain. It's not just crying by day; it's such intense agony that I cannot sleep. Sometimes the movement is from general to specific, or cause to effect, or literal to metaphorical, or exaggeration to clarity. How to define the movement isn't important, but recognize that the **power** of the poem is in these complimentary lines.

Note: It's poetry from millennia ago. Some of it we still can't understand. Often the poetry is poorly translated, making the couplets hard to see. Ignore verse numbers and have faith.

Occasionally there's a triplet in Hebrew poetry; this is a moment of heightened **intensity**.

Hear my prayer, O Lord;

give ear to my cry;

do not be silent at my tears.

For I am your passing guest,

an alien like all my forebears. ~Psalm 39:12

Material in this section is largely based on "The Art of Biblical Poetry" by Robert Alter (Basic Books, 1987)

A PSALM OF LAMENT

From the raging chaos I call to you, LORD.

In the small storm that feels like a flood I need your aid.

Every something always seems to go wrong,

Often nothing is working right.

I bring sin with me everywhere I go—

Disaster is with me wherever I am.

In the midst of storms, LORD, you make a light.

Though I mess things up, in me your light shines.

Safely I will make it home guided by your Word.

You will bring me into your everlasting presence.

Written by Tyler Rasmussen in 2011.

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Find the door of your heart; you will discover it is the door of the kingdom of God. ~St. John Chrysostom

How to pray: There are two simultaneous foci. First is to discover how God has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to God's loving presence. Second is to uncover those areas that need cleansing, purifying, and healing.

Your prayer must be turned inwards, not toward a God of Heaven nor toward a God far off, but toward God who is closer to you than you are aware. ~Anthony Bloom

The first foci may be called an *examen of consciousness*, the means God uses to make us more aware of our surroundings. Discern the footprints of the Holy all around us, reflecting on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of our days, remembering how God has been at work among us and how we responded.

The Bible urges us to remember the mighty deeds of God. In this prayer, one says, "**Here is where God met me and helped me.**" Take time to remember the mighty deeds of God in your own life.

The second foci may be called an *examen of conscience*, where we invite the Lord to search our hearts to the depths. Without apology and without defense, we ask to see what is truly in us. Confession.

This *examen of conscience* is the prayer that opens Sunday morning worship, confessing our sins. This prayer, coupled with forgiveness, brought Luther from a battle with the Devil into an encounter of God. This is Christ using manure, specifically our $\$ \& \#^*$, to fertile the soil of our hearts.

A confessor or spiritual guide (truly, any listening confidant) may be helpful in both aspects of this prayer.

God goes with us in prayer; as lone examiners, we may justify ourselves or find ourselves unredeemable, but with God we can listen instead of defend and know that we are protected, even from our own evils.

Why examen? The priceless grace of self-knowledge. Even the Greek philosophers said, "Know thyself." Now modern family theory recommends weekly family meetings evaluating the past week.

This path of self-knowledge must never be abandoned. Along this path of prayer, self-knowledge and the thought of one's sins is the bread with which all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be; they cannot be sustained without this bread. ~St. Teresa of Avila

It is not a journey *into* ourselves that we are undertaking but a journey *through* ourselves, emerging from the deepest level of the self into God. Your body is a temple (1 Corinthians 6.19) in which God resides.

We give not just our strengths but also our weaknesses, not just our giftedness but also our brokenness.

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1b-2

Many find journal keeping useful for this prayer. This is not a diary (who and what) but a prayerful examination (why and wherefore), seeking to understand the deeper workings of God in the heart.

Learn how **God speaks** through the course of ordinary events. Do a spiritual inventory of the day.

Luther's Small Catechism may be helpful, using meditation on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer as a means of holding our lives before a moral standard.

Material in this section is largely based on "Prayer" by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992)

Why do I fear your scrutiny? Yours is an examen of love. Still, I am afraid...afraid of what may surface. I invite you to search me to the depths so that I may know myself—and you—in fuller measure. Amen.

PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER

When praying the Lord's Prayer by oneself (this is possible in a group with guidance), don't always just rush through the whole prayer. Rather, let your heart linger on the words, using them as a starting place for your own prayers. Let yourself tangent to any place each phrase takes you, returning to the main prayer when your heart is ready.

For example, when praying for your daily bread, maybe you'll find yourself thanking God for the food you ate and the times you were nourished by God's word and God's presence, or maybe praying for all the people who went hungry this day. Continue praying until you have nothing more to pray related to that phrase, then come back to the Lord's Prayer and continue to the next phrase, "And forgive us..."

If a phrase doesn't inspire you today, that's OK. Continue to praying the Lord's Prayer until your heart prompts you to more things for which to pray.

Luther's Small Catechism was written to help people do exactly this! Following each commandment, each petition of the Lord's Prayer, and each part of the creed, Luther asks, "What does this mean?" He answer to that question is a reflection on all the possible things we might pray for when we encounter each petition. The catechism may be found in the back of the ELW (the red hymnal).

For more guidance, search online for "A Simple Way to Pray" by Martin Luther.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING: ALL ABOUT AMEN

"Amen" means it is true, let it be so, truly, this is the truth, certainly it will be. Basically, to say "amen" is to express agreement at when you just prayed. Amen = I agree.

Historically, it means to be firm, confirmed, reliable, faithful, have faith, believe. In fact, you can say "amen" to anything you believe to be true, anything that you experience as an encounter with God.

NOTABLE BIBLICAL PRAYERS

Beyond the psalms, the Bible is full of prayers. Here are but a few:

- Christ's Intercessory Prayer - John 17 (best prayer ever!)
- The Lord's Prayer - Matthew 6:9-15, Luke 11:2-4 (notice that they're slightly different)
- The Tax Collector's Prayer - Luke 18:13
- Songs in Luke: Magnificat - 1:46-55; Benedictus - 1:67-79; Nunc Dimittis - 2:28-32
- The Prayer of Ezra - Ezra 9:5-15
- Daniel's Prayer for the Captive Jews - Daniel 9:4-19
- Hezekiah's Prayer when Sick - Isaiah 38:2-8
- The Prayer of Jabez - 1 Chronicles 4:10
- King Hezekiah's Prayer - 2 Kings 19:15-19
- Elijah's Prayer at Mount Carmel - I Kings 18:36-39
- Solomon's Prayer of Dedication - 1 Kings 8:22-30
- David's Prayer of Thanks - 2 Samuel 7:18-29
- Hannah's Prayer for a Child - 1 Samuel 1:9-18
- Abraham's Prayer for Sodom - Genesis 18:23-25
- Stephen's Prayer at His Stoning - Acts 7:59-60
- Some of Paul's Prayers - Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-12
- A Prayer of Praise - Jude 1:24-25

Work as though all depended upon human effort and pray as though all depended upon God. ~St. Ignatius (some would inverse this proverb)

MORE ON THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

To look into a face that is for us, in whose beauty and total regard we see our own unsuspected beauty and potential, is expressive of a whole new level of self-understanding. ~Constance FitzGerald

It is only through the opening of oneself to God's grace and the consequential development of self-knowledge, detachment, and humility that one becomes free to love fully.

This is learning to recognize and accept not only one's own **sinfulness but also** the affirmation of the God who created you in **God's own image** and likeness. Look at yourself to see the reflection of God.

In my soul's center Christ, our Lord, was shown to me. It seemed to me I saw him clearly in every part of my soul as through a mirror. ~St. Teresa of Avila

Ask questions that probe one's own relationship with God, self, others, and the world. God works within the "givens" of creation, always calling us to be more fully ourselves.

All things were a means of my knowing and loving God more, for seeing what I owed Him, and for regretting what I had been. ~St. Teresa of Avila

Material in this section is largely based on "Teresa of Jesus: Model and Mentor for Ministry" by Michael Barry Wicks (Paulist Press, 1995)

THE JESUS PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

This prayer is a great meditation. Breathe slowly and pray one phrase with each breathe. Repeat.

This is an English version of "Kyrie, Eleison". Lord, have mercy!

PRAYING WITH AND FOR OTHERS: A BASIC APPROACH

Praying with other people can be terrifying. Many Christians have been trained to pray by themselves, alone, behind a closed door. They do this to fulfill Christ's statement in Matthew 6:6, a warning against praying to be seen. Yet the amazing power of having someone pray for you in your presence cannot be overstated. **Praying for others is powerful!** We are God's light in the world, temples of Christ Jesus, a place where God's love and reconciliation is revealed. To withhold our prayers from others could be tantamount to withholding God's love. To be God's voice to others, we need to learn to pray aloud.

When praying for other person, the easiest place to start is just **by asking them** what they would like you to pray about. Listen to their answer. Ask questions to help you better understand. If they want you to pray for their friend, ask the friend's name. Ask them why this friend is on their mind right now. If they want you to pray for the upcoming test results, ask what the tests are for. Ask them what they hope to find out and what they expect to find out. This line of questioning need not take more than five minutes, tops.

Then pray. Start by addressing the Lord and asking for God's presence and ear. Maybe give thanks for the person you are praying with. Then simply repeat, in your own words, what you heard the other person say. Name their joys and concerns before God; take to God their hopes and fears; petition God with all they requested and desired. Finally, find a way to leave the prayer in God's hands. State your trust in God to hear us, to care for us, and to love us.

Don't forget to say "Amen"!

THE PRAYER OF TEARS

Whoever wishes to advance in building up virtue will do so through weeping and tears. ~Abba Anthony

“Penthos” in Greek. It means a broken and contrite heart; inward godly sorrow; blessed, holy mourning; deep, heartfelt compunction; tears.

This is being **cut to the heart** over our distance and offense to the goodness of God. It is weeping over our sins and the sins of the world. It is entering into the liberating shocks of repentance. It is the intimate and ultimate awareness that sin cuts us off from the fullness of God’s presence.

First millennium writers saw prayer with tears as a gift to be sought. They called this *inner heart turmoil* “**deep joy**”. This is being immersed into the odious nature of sin and finding yourself carried forth in love to God with a lively sense of God’s love for you.

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. ~Psalm 126:5

Tears soften even the hardest of hearts. Unless the emotive center of our lives is touched, it is as if a fuse remains unlit. Tears are a sign (not a sure sign, but a sign) that God has touched this center.

The rock-bottom reality of this prayer is that we are sinners. Not that we sin, but that we commit sinful acts because we are sinners. As Isaiah says (64:6), “Even our best works are filthy rags before God.”

Luther called for **daily** repentance in the life of a Christian. This prayer is an aid in our turning to God.

How to pray: This prayer cannot be forced. If we are not in the place of a grieving, broken, sorrowing, repentant heart, we start this prayer by asking. Repentance is a gift from God. We confess and are forgiven every Sunday without question of repentance; repentance is a gift we ask for. We start by asking for a repentant heart. Then we confess and receive God’s mercy. Finally, we hear God’s call to obedience.

This prayer may seem counter-cultural. Men are told not to weep and women to compose themselves. Weeping in the Bible and the early church were celebrated. Jeremiah is the weeping prophet. Jesus often wept, sometimes as though with blood. The Psalms are covered in tears. A woman bathed Jesus’ feet with her tears, and Jesus responds, “She has shown great love. Woman, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.”

Every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. ~Psalm 6:6

What if we cannot weep? Many have become “not the emotional type”. Let go of the excuse, and remember that you are building new habits of prayer. Have patient, kind, firm persistence with yourself.

If all else fails, have a weeping heart. Keep your soul in tears. The springs of tears will well up one day.

Material in this section is largely based on “Prayer” by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992)

THE PRAYER OF LAUGHTER

The prayer of tears moves one to joy. Laughter may be a sign of that joy. Many who start in prayer in tears find themselves laughing with God before it’s over. This is the deep experience of God’s healing in us.

Yet laughter is also being able to see God’s love in our sinful situation. Tears may be hard to come by in our culture, but laughter is not. Being able to laugh with God in our brokenness can be just as healing as tears, releasing us from our sin by wrapping us up in God’s joyous love.

Laughter can also be seeing God’s “*holy humor*”, for God has humor.

Material in this section is largely based on the musings of Rev. Tyler Rasmussen and a parent in his faith, Rev. Fritz Wehrenberg

THE PRAYER OF RELINQUISHMENT

Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done. Luke 22:42

We now move to a prayer intentionally built to increase our faith. Some may not be ready for this prayer, though it is good for all. This prayer is all about growing into your baptismal promises, where the old, self-curved-in-on-self person has been crucified with Christ and the new creation raised in Christ.

Often we discover that our will is in **struggle** with God's will. This struggle can be an *essential* part of our growing and deepening in faith. In time we can begin to enter into a grace-filled releasing of our will and a flowing into the will of the Father. This prayer moves us from the struggling to the releasing.

In the school of Gethsemane we learn to distrust whatever is of our own mind, thought, and will even though it is not directly sinful. Jesus shows us a more excellent way. This is a **hard** prayer!

For our sins, He suffered beneath the burden of that prayer. ~Andrew Murray

This is prayer and not fatalism. We don't resign ourselves to fate. We align ourselves with God.

We pray, we struggle, we weep. Again, we pray, we struggle, we weep. One day we come to a point where we release our will *with hope*, confidently trusting the character of God. Christ, be our light and guide!

This is a *crucifixion of the will*. There is a death to the self-life, entering the hope that "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

How to pray: This prayer requires the specifics of daily life. From experience, I find this prayer naturally arises in me when my life and self, my hopes and dreams, are challenged. Many use it for the big decisions, but it is useful in all things. The will is surrendered moment by moment as you face the ordinary decisions of home, family, and job. The practice is lived, as all prayer is meant to be, but the following prayers may help.

The prayer of self-emptying: Meditatively pray Philippians 2. Bid God's Spirit to apply your prayer to the specifics of your day. Wait, listen, obey.

The prayers of surrender: Using Matthew, Mark, or Luke, go with Jesus to the Garden. Stay awake and watch. See his sorrow; let your heart be saddened. Struggle with him, hoping to avoid the cup. Now speak his words as your own: Not my will, but yours be done. Invite these words to enter your life, your family, your vocation.

The prayer of abandonment: Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all; I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures – I wish no more than this, Lord. ~Charles de Foucauld

The prayer of release: Lift up onto God's arms your children, your spouse, your friends. Place into God's loving care your future, your hopes, your dreams. Hold up to God your enemies, your angers, your desire for retaliation. Give it all into God's hands then turn around and walk away. Trust God's care.

The prayer of resurrection: Lord, bring back to life what will please you and advance your kingdom. Let it come in whatever form you desire. Let it be in your time and your way. Thank you, Lord, for resurrection.

God is a God of resurrection; trust this. But remember, some things do die and remain dead. New life is not about bring back what was, but taking what was and forming it into something new.

Material in this section is largely based on "Prayer" by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992)

A NOTE ON PRAYER

I hope one has noticed by now that prayer isn't about some moment we talk to God each day. Prayer is about a relationship. Prayer is about a way of life, a way of living. The prayer tools being learned here are ways to go about living into that relationship, into the lifestyle of faith. It's like any worthwhile relationship – we invest in it often, but it continues to grow even when we're not together. Prayer is a word to describe activity of being in relationship with God.

Some of the prayers we've learned are very general; others are very specific. Hopefully, as you learn more ways to pray, you'll start finding not just traditional ways of praying to God, but your own ways as well.

PRAYER ACTIVITY: PRAYING IN COLOR

When I marched in Selma, my feet were praying. ~Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Prayer is by far not restricted to words. Many find doing something active a helpful aid in prayer. One possible way is to use our hands. **Even if you're not an artist**, coloring may work for you.

How to pray: The easiest way to start, with a writing-utensil and something to write on, is to draw a shape (any shape), and write the name of a person for whom you want to pray in or near the shape. Then add detail, using each stroke as a moment in prayer for that person. Continue until the drawing, the prayer, feels complete.

Once you have finished praying for one person, move to another place on the page and draw a new shape for a new person. Continue until you've prayed for everything on your mind. Keep the drawing with you throughout the day as a quick visual reminder of your prayers, or place it somewhere you'll see it.

Note: You may draw something that reminds you of that person, but that's not required. Simply spending time focused on the person is enough. Draw whatever comes to mind.

The next time you pray, you may create a new visual icon, or you may enhance the original in several ways. Add other names. Write specific requests around each prayer-shape. Add new details.

Definition: An icon is an image that helps us to see God. Think of any image, picture, or painting that connects you with the divine – the last supper, Jesus carrying a lamb. This prayer is your own icon.

Can a spiritual practice be both **prayer** and **play**? When we pray, God wants us to be ourselves, not some image of ourselves, but the real thing. Playfulness can take us to a place of honesty. No, this prayer is not restricted to children, just as it is not restricted to artists. Anyone can color.

Play is honest. You can't play unless you are yourself. ~Cynthia Winton-Henry

This prayer activity may be used for many types of prayers: visual journals, healing of memories, grievances, as meditation, with Scripture, discernment and guidance, as a prayer calendar, for enemies.

Material in this section is largely based on "Praying in Color" by Sybil McBeth (Paraclete Press, 2007)

PRAYER POSITION: HUGGING PRAYER

When praying in a group, stand in a circle. **First**, reach your left hand in front of the person to your left and **then** your right hand in front of the person to your right, grabbing the hand of the person two away from you. Decide who will start. **Important:** The person to the right of the starting person must unlock their left hand, moving their left arm from under the right arm of the starting person to over. After each person prays, the people on either side lift their arms up and over that person's head, ending the prayer with everyone being enrapt in a hug. **Note:** Height may be a worthwhile consideration in this prayer.

FORMATION PRAYER

Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. ~Romans 8:29

Prayer changes things. Prayer also changes us. The primary purpose of prayer is to bring us to bring us into such a life of communion with the Father that, by the power of the Spirit, we are increasingly conformed to the image of the Son.

None of us will keep up a life of prayer unless we are prepared to change. *Conversatio morum*. Death to the status quo, death to things as they have always been. Constant change, constant conversion, constant openness to the movings of the Spirit.

Caution: Prayer by itself is severely limited in the good it can accomplish. Prayer is never isolated from the rest of Christian devotion.

There are three major areas God uses in our continuing transformation:

1. Classic disciplines: Solitude, fasting, worship, celebration, etc.
2. Our continual interaction with the movings of the Spirit: resistance, disobedience, repentance, submission, faith, obedience, etc.
3. The patient endurance God develops in us by means of: frustrations, trials, daily temptations

Formation prayer comes with two sides: to pursue God and to be pursued by God. Below are three prayer activities that pursue God, followed by three prayer activities that are about letting yourself be pursued by God.

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

<http://www.jesuit.org/jesuits/wp-content/uploads/The-Spiritual-Exercises-.pdf>

Four sections, or weeks:

1. First focus upon our sins in the light of God's love, seeing the grace of being loved by God and being bathed in his love.
2. Second focus on the life of Christ, requesting the grace of being formed into the image of Christ.
3. Third focus on the passion of Christ, we are continually asking for the grace to die to the attachments of this world.
4. Fourth focus on the resurrection of Christ, seeking the grace and power of the Spirit to always choose God and God's way.

THE TWELVE STEPS INTO HUMILITY OF SAINT BENEDICT

The Rule of St. Benedict: <http://rule.kansasmonks.org/>, Chapter VII

Humility means to live as close to the truth as possible: the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, the truth about the world in which we live.

Humility is filled with the power to bring forth life. Humility comes from *humus*, fertile ground.

Humility is the situation of the earth. ~Anthony Bloom

The earth is always with us, always taken for granted, always walked on by everyone. It is the place where we dump our garbage. It silently accepts everything and makes out of all the refuse new richness, transforming corruption itself into a power of life and a new possibility of creativeness, open to sunshine, open to rain, ready to receive anything we see, and capable of bringing forth a hundredfold.

Humility is the principal aid to prayer. ~Teresa of Avila

THE LITTLE WAY OF THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX (THE LITTLE FLOWER)

In short: To seek out the menial job, to welcome unjust criticisms, to befriend those who annoy us, to help those who are ungrateful.

Almost daily we can give smiling service to nagging co-workers, listen attentively to silly bores, express little kindnesses without making a fuss. And we will never receive a medal or thank you for these invisible victories in ordinary life – which is exactly what we want.

THE COMMUNION OF SOLITUDE

Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. ~Henri Nouwen

By means of solitude God frees us from our bondage to people and our own inner compulsions. Few will understand a call to aloneness. Yet, the less we are mesmerized by human voices, the more we are able to hear the Divine Voice. The less we are manipulated by the expectations of others, the more we are open to the expectations of God.

We are never less alone than when alone. ~Saint Jerome

PEERING INTO THE ABYSS

Contemplation of one's own death is among the most time-honored approaches to personal transformation. What would happen if you were to die today?

THE PRAYER OF DOCILITY

Be completely supple, completely transparent, completely abandoned in the hands of God. ~Underhill

Analogy: A child scribbles on paper. Then the mother places her hands over the child's and guides it, making beautiful letters. Allow God to rest upon you and guide you. Become weak, frail, vulnerable. Now listen to the voice of the true Shepherd and listen to him.

Material in this section is largely based on "Prayer" by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992)

PRAYING THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Like the Muslim tradition, historically worshipping communities like monasteries and abbies have set aside time each day for prayer.

1. **Lauds** (Morning Prayer): As you begin your day
2. Terce: 9am
3. Sext: Noon
4. None: 3pm
5. **Vespers** (Evening Prayer): 6pm or roughly around sundown, when work ends for the day
6. **Compline** (Night Prayer): 9pm or right before bed (tradition to keep silence until the next day after completing this prayer)

There are other prayer hours (Matins during the night, Prime at 6am/dawn), but these major hours point out what other religions traditions have maintain among the common people: There is a deep need in our faith daily and repeatedly throughout the day to orient our lives toward God.

COVENANT PRAYER

My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed. ~Psalm 57:7

Covenant: A promise, a commitment between two parties to engage in or refrain from an activity.

The New Covenant: God will write his law upon the fleshy tablets of our hearts.

Prayer is our response to God. It is part of the covenant we made in baptism. A commitment to be nurtured in faith and prayer. A promise to pray for all baptized people. A covenant to be in God.

Prayer is our special date with God. We can be free and at ease because we are entering into the heart's true home. Our Eternal Lover lures us back regularly into his presence with anticipation and delight. It is not hard to honor this regular time of meeting, for the language of lovers is the language of waste. We are glad to waste time with God, for we are pleased with the company.

Yet many lovers, particular today, set aside particular time and space for each other. In the business of the world, they need moments when they are committed to being together. We need the same with God.

THE COVENANT OF TIME

When do you pray? The covenant to pray in baptism is a covenant to a *regular* experience of prayer, even prayer that interrupts daily life. The prayer hours of monasteries were put in place so people would not forget who is in charge. Prayerful living is not really our work, it's God's work. And sometimes God's work will happen right in the middle of our own apparently urgent and important work. When do you pray? It the time a time of covenant, when you are committed to prayer? Do you have a time in your day or week when there is nothing more important than being in prayer with God?

THE COVENANT OF PLACE

Where do you pray? Find a place – preferably somewhere away from the routine of life, out of the path of distractions. Is this a place where you can pray without finding yourself regularly pulled in other directions? Do you need to shut off your phone in order to pray?

A note to parents, people always “on call,” and anyone alive: Distractions do happen, and sometimes space and time for devotion solely to prayer cannot be found. Can you find a routine or activity in which you can pray even in the busy? Rock your child to sleep while gently singing a prayer to God. Devote five minutes while speed checking the traffic to pray for the cars passing by. Pick a somewhat mundane moment when your mind is free to focus on God, even if your body isn't.

THE COVENANT OF PREPARATION

How do you prepare yourself to pray? Some prayer moments are quick and brief, but we all have things that help us enter the moment more fully. I light candles. Do you make coffee? Water your plants? Lay out a blanket? Start walking? The ideal is to use all the means at our disposal to enter into prayer.

A highly valuable way to prepare for prayer is to read a Psalm or another passage of scripture. For many, prayer centered on scripture opens oneself to God.

Material in this section is largely based on “Prayer” by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992)

REPETITIVE PRAYER

- Have mercy, Lord
- I love you, Jesus
- O Lord, hear my prayer
- Come, Lord Jesus
- Bless the Lord, O my soul

Use these for meditation, particularly on days when too many words seems a burden. Breathe slowly and pray one phrase with each breathe. Repeat the same phrase. Continue as long as you feel called to pray.

LECTIO DIVINA

Four simple steps:

1. Read (usually scripture)
2. Meditate
3. Pray
4. Contemplate

A SIMPLE FORM OF LECTIO DIVINA

To prepare: Have someone pick a scripture passage. Get a Bible. If you are able to acquire three different translations of scripture, that can enhance this time (for each English Bible is only one possible way of hearing the original text).

Note: If in a group of three or more, inform everyone that after we finish reading the text, we will be praying for the person [to our left/right, across from us, two to the left/right, etc.]. Make sure to listen to that person throughout so that you can pray for them.

1. Choose someone to read the first time. Tell everyone: “Listen for a word or phrase that jumps out to you. When the reading ends, share the word or phrase.” Then read the passage. Share.
2. Choose someone to read the second time. Use a different translation if possible. Tell everyone: “This time, listen for how you hear the passage speaking to your life today.” Read the passage and share.
3. Choose someone to read the third time. Use another translation. Tell everyone: “This time, listen for what you hear God calling you to do in the coming week.” Read the passage and share.

We have just done the “read” and “meditate” at the same time. Now pray for each other. If the group is able, close in contemplation. Use centering prayer. A few minutes of silence to listen to God, letting the scripture, the groups’ meditations, the prayers mull in your mind. Use the word or phrase you named as your centering word whenever your mind is distracted by outside thoughts.