



an interactive experience of listening, praying the Scriptures & being still with God

PRESENTED BY:

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WHAT IS PRAYER?

“To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed by Christ” (33).

“If we turn on our television set and it does not work, we do not declare that there are no such things as electronic frequencies in the air or on the cable. We assume something is wrong, something we can find and correct... [in prayer, we must] look for the ‘block’; perhaps we are praying wrongly, perhaps there are new principles of prayer to be learned, perhaps patience and persistence are needed. We listen, make the necessary adjustments, and try again” (38).

“God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us into deeper things. Occasional joggers do not suddenly enter an Olympic marathon. They prepare and train themselves over a period of time, and so should we... It was liberating to me to understand that prayer involved a learning process. I was set free to question, to experiment, even to fail, for I knew I was learning” (35-36).

“We need not worry that this work will take up too much of our time, for ‘It takes no time, but it occupies all our time.’ It is not prayer in addition to work but prayer simultaneous with work... There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we may be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings” (45).

“Learn to live so that ‘to see anybody will be to pray! To hear anybody, may be to pray!’”

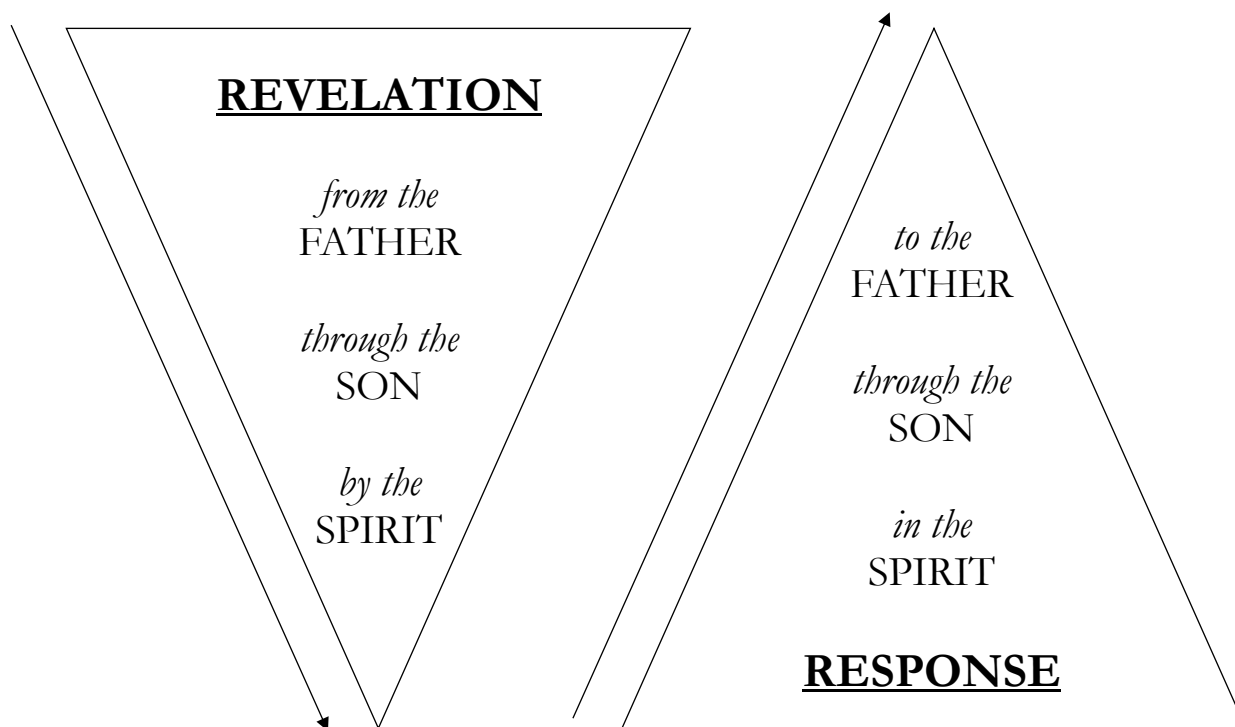
ST. PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE PRAYER

I arise today
 Through a mighty strength,
 the invocation of the Trinity,
 Through belief in the Threeness,
 Through confession of the Oneness
 of the Creator of creation...

THE MOVEMENT OF PRAYER

(based on the work of Dr. Steve Seamands, Asbury Seminary)

Prayer always begins with God.
 We do not make the first move toward God.
 We respond to God's movement toward us.



“Sometimes we don’t even need to voice our deepest prayers, but simply sit in God’s presence and let him still the raging sea that is in turmoil within us.”

Dr. Timothy Tennent (Asbury Seminary)

THE WISDOM OF THE SPIRIT

As we prepare to pray and intercede for others, we first seek the Spirit's wisdom. We do not pray for our will or even for the desires of the one making the request, but for God's will in their life. To know and discern how to pray God's will, we begin by listening.

God is Spirit and God's Spirit gives us access to the Father through Christ. Through the Holy Spirit we receive the wisdom of God, the very mind of Christ.

Scripture: John 4:24; Ephesians 2:18; James 1:5; Romans 8:14-17, 26-27;
1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Romans 8:26-27

²⁶ Likewise 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. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Practice: Holy Listening

Hold in your heart and mind a particular person or situation.

Spend 5 minutes in silence listening for a simple word or phrase the Spirit may be laying on your heart for that particular person or situation. You may see an image or hear a word that you don't understand at first. Stay with it. It may be exactly what that person needs to hear from God or something you may come to understand later. Embrace whatever comes and sit with it for awhile.

If you are praying for a person, you may choose to share with them what you have heard.

Remember, these are not our prayers, but the prayers we have heard from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. We do not have to know the situation.

God does.

Holy Listening for Small Groups

In small groups, you may want to practice another form of Holy Listening which helps us increase our awareness of the Spirit's work in ourselves and in one another.

In this process you will go around the circle allowing each person three brief opportunities to share. Time is flexible depending on the number of people in the group, but shorter times are encouraged to keep the focus on the work of the Spirit without getting lost in our own stories. A quiet timer is strongly recommended.

Devotional

- Pre-arrange for someone in the group to bring a devotional reflection or short scripture reading to center your thoughts as you begin your time together. This reading may provide a focal point for the sharing which will follow.

Silence

- Spend some time in silence (at least 10 minutes), to simply be still with God and quiet your thoughts. This may grow into a 20 minute Centering Prayer Sit (see "Centering Prayer Guidelines" at the end of this packet).

First Round of Sharing: 3-5 minutes

- Each person may share whatever God is laying on their hearts. It may be something from your own life in the recent weeks, or it may relate to the devotional or scripture reading shared at the beginning of your gathering.

Second Round of Sharing: 2-3 minutes

- You may choose to continue reflecting on what you raised in the first round or respond to another group member. Responses should not offer "answers" or "stories." We simply mirror back to them something the Spirit spoke to us as they shared or ask them an open-ended rhetorical question to help them further explore the Spirit's work in their life.

Third Round of Sharing: 1-2 minutes

- Offer a word of thanks to God and share something the Spirit has laid on your heart that you will take with you from this time.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

“Lord, teach us to pray...” the disciples ask (Luke 11:1). Who better to teach us the art of prayer than Jesus. It is through Christ that we have access to the Father and through Christ that the Father speaks to us. I used to struggle with the silence of God until I realized that the Word of the Father is embodied in and spoken by the Son.

Jesus teaches them what we call “The Lord’s Prayer,” followed by several stories about perseverance in prayer and the goodness of the Father who hears and answers us through the Holy Spirit. Matthew also records the Lord’s prayer, but this time it comes with an emphasis on the way we approach God in prayer.

Scripture: John 14:6-7; Hebrews 7:25; Luke 11:1-13; Matthew 6:5-7

Matthew 6:5-8

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Practice: Lectio Divina

There are many ways to read and study the scriptures. Today we will practice entering into the text slowly and prayerfully, not so much to interpret, but to receive the gift of the Living Word for our lives in this moment. As you hear Jesus’ teaching on prayer from the Sermon on the Mount, see if there is a particular word or phrase which resonates in your mind and heart. Hold onto that word or phrase as we read the text a few more times.

Reflections on Matthew 6:5-8

- 1st Reading: Listen for a word or phrase that resonates deeply with you.

- 2nd Reading: What feelings arise in you? Where does this word intersect with your life right now?

- 3rd Reading: How is God inviting you to respond to this word?

- Prayer (write a brief prayer in response to what you have heard / sensed from God)

Lectio Divina

Lectio (Read)

Slowly read (listen with your heart) to a short passage, noticing a word or phrase that surfaces, catching your attention.

(listen to the text aloud if you are able)

Meditatio (Reflect)

Reflect on the word or phrase and the meaning they carry. Learn it by heart. Let your thoughts move back and forth between your life and this word or phrase. Be attentive to the feelings, memories, questions, and connections that arise.

Oratio (Respond)

Respond by talking to God simply and honestly, about what is surfacing.

Contemplatio (Rest)

Linger quietly in God's embrace, maybe there's more He wants to say, or perhaps he just wants you to "be still and know that He is God."

(Psalm 46:10)

Incarnatio (Incarnate)

What is God's invitation to me in this passage? What is it that God is calling me to be or to do, in response to the word?

Also try *Visio Divina* - follow the same steps above using an image, photograph, a piece of artwork or an icon.

Further Resources on Lectio Divina:

- Contemplative Outreach - <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/lectio-divina>
- Upper Room - <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/lectio-divina-praying-the-scriptures>
- Visio Divina - <https://www.prayerandpossibilities.com/pray-with-eyes-of-the-heart-visio-divina/>

Other ways of praying over Scripture

- Identify with the feelings expressed in the passage
- Imagine yourself in the scene
- Paraphrase the scripture into a prayer

Helpful Tips

- Read through the entire text first
- Choose short passages (roughly 10 verses or less on average)
- Writing may help you focus
- When distractions come, treat them gently – let them go, return to the text
- When you are too distracted, turn your worries into prayer
- When you think of something you need to do, write it down, and return to the text
- When you don't "get anything" from your meditation, see it as an offering of love to God, as a time you simply rested in His presence.

THE HEART OF THE FATHER

“Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

This scripture often calms us in the midst of anxiety. It reminds us to trust in the Lord and to allow God to take control of circumstances far beyond our ability to handle. But beyond a brief reminder to take a breath and trust God in the midst of our busy lives, do we ever really practice “being still” in God?

Being still is about moving beyond listening for a word of wisdom from the Spirit or even discerning the mind of Christ through the Word. Being still is about resting in the heart of the Father. God continually invites us to surrender, to rest, to let go and to simply BE, like an infant wrapped up in the arms of a loving mom or dad.

Scripture: Psalm 46:10; Psalm 27:7-9; Psalm 4:1; Hebrews 4:9-10; Ezekiel 11:19; Ezekiel 36:26-27 (The Heart of God); Matthew 10:39 (Surrender); 1 Kings 19:1-13 (Why are you here?)

1 Kings 19:11-13

¹¹ He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Practice: Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is rooted in the monastic traditions of the Desert Fathers and has seen a great renewal in recent times thanks to faith leaders like Thomas Merton and Fr. Thomas Keating. A typical Centering Prayer “sit” lasts for 20 minutes but we will begin with 10 to ease into this practice.

After our 10 minutes of silence we will have time to share what the experience was like and address any questions or concerns which may arise.

Centering Prayer

The method of Centering Prayer is based on four simple guidelines:

1. Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and then silently introduce the sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When you engage with thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed.

Helpful Tips

(from Ann Starrette, Lydia Group / Wesleyan Contemplative Order)

Remember, a Centering Prayer "sit" is neither good nor bad... We are simply creating space to be with God ...consenting to God's presence and action within.

Also, thoughts are normal. We're not trying to make our thoughts stop we're practicing letting go of our thoughts and returning to God (our sacred word or breath). For whatever period of time we "sit" we are attempting to stop talking to ourselves (imagine that!). In daily life, this practice in silence helps us focus on the person in front of us or the work at hand.

Further Resources on Centering Prayer:

- Contemplative Outreach - <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer-1>
- Contemplative Outreach of Piedmont, NC - <https://www.copnc.org>
 - One Day Centering Prayer Workshops available
- Wesleyan Contemplative Order (WCO) - <http://wesleyancontemplativeorder.com/>
- Lydia Group / Ann Starrette - <https://www.thelydiagroup.com/>



Fire

Judy Brown,

*The Sea Accepts All Rivers
& Other Poems*

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can squelch a fire
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water can.

So building fires
requires tending in a special way,
attention to the wood
as well as to the spaces in between,
so fire can catch, can grow, can breathe,
can build its energy and warmth
which we so need in order
to survive the cold.

We need to practice
building open spaces
just as clearly as we learn
to pile on the logs

It's fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that makes fire possible,
lets it develop in the way that's
possible when we lay logs in just the
way the fire wants to go

Then we can watch it as it leaps and plays,
burns down and then flames up
in unexpected ways.

Then we need only lay a log on it
from time to time.
Then it has life all of its own,
a beauty that emerges
not where logs are
but where spaces can invite the flames
to burn, to form exquisite
patterns of their own,
their beauty possible
simply because the space is there,
an opening in which the flame
that knows just how it wants
to burn can find its way.

Prayer of Examen

A great way to pray is to look for God's presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius of Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Daily Examen. It is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us.

Try this version of St. Ignatius's prayer at the end of your day.

Become aware of the presence of God.

Review the day with gratitude.

Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights.

Pay attention to your emotions.

Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Ask what God is saying through these feelings.

Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.

Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that *God* thinks is particularly important. It may be a vivid moment or something that seems insignificant.

Look toward tomorrow.

Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude.

~ <http://www.loyolapress.com/how-can-i-pray-try-the-daily-examen.htm>

Prayer of Examen - Continued

Tips on Praying the Ignation Way

Find a quiet place where you can be alone for 10 – 15 minutes.

Take 2 or 3 minutes to practice rhythmic breathing to clear your mind and focus on God.

Select a brief passage from Scripture and prayerfully read it. Use your five senses to imagine yourself in the story or passage you are reading.

In addition to Scripture, you may also use devotional readings or an image that draws you closer to God.

Close with one or two minutes of contemplation, sitting quietly in God's presence.

~ <http://www.loyolapress.com/praying-the-ignatian-way-reflective-prayer.htm>

Pray All Ways

Although you may occasionally engage in almost all of these practices, place a check beside those items which represent your regular pattern. Also highlight or circle those which you may like to try and begin experimenting with them in your regular prayer life.

- read prayers from a book, or from the Psalms, or recite prayers you have memorized
- write your prayers
- follow an outline or pattern in your prayer time
- talk to God, spontaneously, in your own words
- express your feelings to God
- intercede by entering empathetically into the feelings of others and bearing these feelings to God in prayer
- intercede by talking to God about other's needs
- intercede silently by visualizing the other person in Christ's presence
- intercede for others while looking at their photographs
- intercede for others with the use of a "prayer list"
- spend time just "feeling" the presence of God
- spend time quietly thinking about God
- listen in silence for what God wants to say
- pray a phrase or verse from scripture in order to focus your attention and rest in God's presence
- imagine Christ present with you, or visualize yourself as present with Him in some gospel scene, and let that lead into conversational prayer with Christ
- read a passage of scripture and try to allow God to show you how it relates to or applies to your life
- read from a devotional source which raises your thoughts to God and helps you think about His attributes and qualities and stimulate your worship
- pray over your day's schedule, offering persons & situations to God in anticipatory prayer, and to seek God's help in ordering your priorities
- read a selection from a devotional source which relates stories about how real people have experienced God in their circumstances, using it as a "faith lift"
- "daydream" or follow a stream of consciousness in God's presence allowing it to take you "wherever" as you open yourself to God--all the way from confession of sins, asking for help, or receiving creative ideas

Pray All Ways - Continued

- think about something in a focused way, in God's presence, perhaps with pen in hand
- use symbols in your place of prayer (for example, a lit candle, open Bible, picture, cross, or worship center of some sort)
- sing, play a musical instrument or listen to music during your time of prayer
- keep a spiritual journal or prayer diary
- set aside time during prayer in order to reflect deliberately over your day, in order to see how God has been (or may have wanted to be) at work
- set aside time for self-examination into your attitudes, actions or thoughts which are hindering your relationship with God
- "practice the presence of God" during the day by frequent interior conversations with God
- find that there are frequent moments through the day when your thoughts turn to God and you are conscious of God's presence in you
- organize your schedule so that there are fixed times throughout the day when you remind yourself to lift your heart to God in prayer
- "pray with your body" by using posture (kneeling, lying prostrate, etc.)
- use actions (dancing or movement), or gestures (palms opened, arms lifted, etc.), as a means of prayerful expression to God
- sometimes use voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function (eating, watching TV, sweets, etc.) for the sake of spiritual focus and prayer
- walk/jog/play in order to place yourself in the "path" of God who lifts your spirit through the beauty of creation
- listen to audio readings of scripture selections, as you drive, work, or rest
- read/sing from the hymnal or other worship songs in order to drink in the message which comes through the poetic imagery as a means of being with God

Hearing & Discerning God's Voice

"Whenever he has gathered all of his sheep, he goes before them and they follow him, because they know his voice" (John 10:4)

Prayer is often more about listening than speaking, but God's voice is not always easy to hear amidst the noise of the world. Consider these general characteristics of the message you are hearing or sensing to help discern if it is the voice of Christ, or the clamor of the world, sin, and self.¹

The Nature of the Approach: How are you hearing or perceiving the voice?

God:

Leads and invites
Quiet
Internal
Invited and wanted

The World / Sin / Self:

Drives and pushes
Loud
External
Unwelcome distraction

The Content: What Message are you hearing?

God:

In line with Scripture
Has an inner (heart) solution
Merciful
Corrects Actual Behavior
Convicts of Sin (specific)
Peace Making / Builds Relationships
Rooted in Fact (Truth)

The World / Sin / Self:

Verses out of context
Has an outer (circumstantial) solution
No Mercy / Judgmental
Condemns Personal worth / value
Condemnation / Critical Spirit (general)
Divides Relationships
Based on experience (subjective / relative)

Relevance of the Content: What impact or application does it have on your life?

God:

Now
Practical
Usual / Ordinary (even mundane)
Simple
Definite / Clear

The World / Sin / Self:

Future
Impractical
Sensational or Extraordinary
Complicated
Confused

Effects of the Content: How does it make you feel or respond?

God:

Hope
Peace
Faith
Encouragement
Understanding Others (Empathy)

The World / Sin / Self:

Hopeless
Worry / Anxiety
Unbelief or Doubt
Discouragement
Despising Others (Judgmental)

¹ Adapted from Rev. Peter Lord, Titusville, FL, 1986.

sermons and blog available at:

craigsefa.org

“echoing the whispers of heaven”

