



The Practice of Prayer

Experiences of Prayer

Over 70% of all Americans say they pray regularly. People pray for personal needs, family needs, the needs of others and of our world; they pray when they lose a loved one, at the end of a relationship, for healing and recovering, in gratitude for blessings received, and for so many more reasons. We all recognize the need for prayer; sometimes we are actually moved to pray. But how does prayer become part of our daily life, our daily walk with God? How can we grow in our relationship with God through prayer?

Prayer is an essential practice of faith and tradition. Many of us long for a deeper life of prayer. Prayer may be a conversation with God; prayer may also be activity that permeates all of one's life. When we live prayerfully, we may begin to develop a worldview that understands our daily lives as an extension of our communal worship.

The *Practice of Prayer* is a collection of 26 prayer experiences that can be utilized in a variety of settings and combined into a variety of program models including the following:

- Intergenerational programs
- Family-centered programs
- Families at home activities (print or digital)
- Children's programming: classes, vacation Bible school, parent-child, grandparent-child
- Adolescent programming: classes, youth gatherings, and retreats
- Adult programming: independent, small groups, retreats, and large gathering settings
- Social media prayer posts on Facebook and Instagram using the activities
- Online playlists of prayer experiences for different age groups published on a website
- Newsletters
- Advent or Lenten prayer guides (digital and print)
- A "Guide to Prayer" booklet (digital and print)
- And much more

Prayer Activities

There are 26 prayer activities that include a teaching plan and the activity. All of the activities are included on separate MS Word document so that you can create handouts for sessions, a prayer booklet, online playlists and activities, social media posts, etc. Each Prayer Activity can be done in less than 20 minutes.

1. Prayer in My Life Today
2. Prayer is. . . .
3. Prayer is Relationship with God.
4. Prayer is Opening Our Lives to God.
5. Prayer is Being Changed by God.
6. Prayer is Being Attentive to God and Others.
7. Prayer is Living.
8. Prayer Takes Practice
9. Preparing to Pray
10. Contemplative Prayer Experience
11. Centering Prayer Experience
12. Scripture Prayer Experience #1: Reflective Reading
13. Scripture Prayer Experience #2: Imaginative Prayer
14. Scripture Prayer Experience #3: Lectio Divina
15. Scripture Prayer Experience #4: Visio Divina
16. Scripture Prayer Experience #5: The Psalms
17. Intercessory Prayer Experience & Intercessory Prayer at Home
18. Praise Prayer Experience #1: Psalm 103
19. Praise Prayer Experience #2: Psalm 95 & Prayers of Praise at Home
20. Thanksgiving Prayer Experience & Prayers of Thanksgiving at Home
21. Praying with Music Experience
22. Online Resources for Daily Prayer
23. Praying in Color Experience
24. Praying through the Day Experiences
25. Closing the Day: The Prayer of Examen Experience
26. Praying in Families with Children & Prayer Activities for Children

Children Activities

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

1. Prayer in My Life
2. Jesus Prays
3. Learning to Pray
4. Try It-Praying

A Learning Process for Christian Practices

The dynamic of forming people of all ages in a Christian practice incorporates four movements, which become the template for designing Christian practices learning programs.

Movement 1. Reflecting on Our Lives

The first movement, *Reflecting*, taps into a basic area of human need that can find meaning and purpose in a Christian practice. Reflecting gives people an opportunity to become aware of how they experience a basic human need and hunger for the Christian practice in their own life. Reflecting also provides space for people to become aware of how they already engage in this practice, and the things that distort or hinder the practice.

Oftentimes this first movement begins with real-life stories (presentations, print, audio, and/or video) of people who seek meaning and purpose for their lives through a particular practice. This helps spark people's reflection and storytelling.

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

The second movement, *Exploring*, grounds the Christian practice in the Bible by describing how the biblical story deepens our understanding of the Christian practice and connects to people's human needs and hungers. We present the wisdom of the Christian tradition on a particular Christian practice, describing what people today, and throughout history, actually do when they are engaged well in a particular practice—how people or communities live the practice with exceptional grace and skill. By connecting the Christian practice to human needs and hungers, people can identify how and why a practice is important to living a meaningful life.

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

The third movement, *Experiencing*, immerses people in the actual practice—opportunities to experience activities that lead them into the Christian practice. This immersion can take place in programs, within the life of the Christian community (such as worship and ministry activities), and/or out in the community (serving people, providing hospitality, etc.). The key is that people actually experience the practice.

Movement 4. Living the Practice

The fourth movement, *Living*, includes reflecting on the experience of the practice activities (Movement 3); showing people how to make the Christian practice a part of everyday life; and providing people with a variety of tools and activities to integrate the Christian practice into their daily life—at home, at work, at school, and in the world.

The Practice of Prayer Learning Process

To illustrate how these four elements are incorporated into the learning process here is an example for the Practice of Prayer. (The Prayer Learning Program and reproducible Prayer Activities are available for free on the Lifelong Faith website: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/practice-of-prayer.html>.)

1. Prayer in My Life Today
2. Prayer is. . . .
3. Prayer is Relationship with God.
4. Prayer is Opening Our Lives to God.
5. Prayer is Being Changed by God.
6. Prayer is Being Attentive to God and Others.
7. Prayer is Living.
8. Prayer Takes Practice
9. Preparing to Pray
10. Contemplative Prayer
11. Centering Prayer
12. Scripture Prayer #1: Reflective Reading
13. Scripture Prayer #2: Imaginative Prayer
14. Scripture Prayer #3: Lectio Divina
15. Scripture Prayer #4: Visio Divina
16. Scripture Prayer #5: The Psalms
17. Intercessory Prayer
18. Praise Prayer #1: Psalm 103
19. Praise Prayer #2: Psalm 95
20. Thanksgiving Prayer
21. Praying with Music
22. Online Resources for Daily Prayer
23. Praying in Color Experience
24. Praying through the Day
25. Closing the Day: The Prayer of Examen
26. Praying in Families with Children

Movement 1. Reflecting on Life Experience

These two activities help people to identify the role of prayer in their life and how they pray today.

Activities

- Prayer in My Life Today (#1)
- Prayer is.... (#2)

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

These activities explore six descriptions of prayer from the Bible and Christian tradition.

Activities (#3-8)

- Prayer is Relationship with God.
- Prayer is Opening Our Lives to God.
- Prayer is Being Changed by God.
- Prayer is Being Attentive to God and Others.
- Prayer is Living.
- Prayer Takes Practice.

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

There are at least two ways to structure the learning design to give people direct experiences of praying through the activities: a *guided experience* and *experience centers*.

Approach 1. Guided Experience with the Whole Group. Guide the participants in small groups or family groupings through the selected prayer activities with a mix of presentation and direct experience.

Approach 2. Experience Centers. Offer an experience center for each activity you select. Have the participants move from station to station to experience the prayer activities, similar to attending workshops at a conference. Each learning activity should have its own room or section of a large room. If you want everyone to experience all of the learning activities, then organize the participants into the same number of groups as you have learning stations. Make the groups of equal size and have them rotate from learning station to learning station.

Activities (#10-26)

(Select activities to fit your program design. Each takes about 20 minutes to experience.)

- Contemplative Prayer
- Centering Prayer
- Scripture Prayer #1: Reflective Reading
- Scripture Prayer #2: Imaginative Prayer
- Scripture Prayer #3: Lectio Divina
- Scripture Prayer #4: Visio Divina
- Scripture Prayer #5: The Psalms
- Intercessory Prayer
- Praise Prayer #1: Psalm 103
- Praise Prayer #2: Psalm 95
- Thanksgiving Prayer
- Praying with Music
- Online Resources for Daily Prayer
- Praying in Color Experience
- Praying through the Day
- Closing the Day: The Prayer of Examen

- Praying in Families with Children

Movement 4. Living the Practice

These activities help people to reflect on their experience of the prayer activities and explore how to make prayer a part of everyday life. Provide people with a “Prayer Guide” (print and digital) with all of the activities for their personal and family use.

Application Activity

- Preparing to Pray (#9)

Reflection Activity

Reflecting on the prayer experiences. Use questions like the following to help people reflect on their experience of the prayer.

- Which prayer styles did you like best? Why?
- Which ones did you like least? Why?
- How did you feel God’s presence through these prayer experiences?
- Which prayer styles do you (or your household) want to start using in your prayer life?

Integrating prayer into daily life. Use questions like the following to help people imagine how to integrate prayer in their daily lives.

- Which prayer experiences do you (or your household) want to include in your prayer plan?
- When will you (or your household) make time for prayer in your day or week (upon rising, before bedtime, mealtime—breakfast or dinner, etc.)?
- Where will you (or your household) pray (at the table, in the car, outdoors, quiet room in the house, etc.)?

Program Designs

The Christian practices learning process and activities can be used in a variety of program designs:

- Intergenerational programs
- Family-centered programs
- Families at home activities (print or digital)
- Children’s programming: classes, vacation Bible school, parent-child, grandparent-child
- Adolescent programming: classes, youth gatherings, and retreats
- Adult programming: independent, small groups, retreats, and large gathering settings
- Online playlists of prayer experiences for different age groups published on a website

Here are four examples of program designs for the Practice of Prayer.

One-Session Program (Guided Experience)

The four movements and activities can be used to design a one-session program of 60-90 minutes for children, youth, adults, and/or parents. Each prayer activity plan is approximately 15-20 minutes in length.

Movement 1. Reflecting on Life Experience

- Select Prayer Activity #1 or #2.

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

- Use content from Prayer Activities #3 through #8.

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

- Select experiences (based on program schedule) from Prayer Activities #10-#25.

Movement 4. Living the Practice

- Conclude with Activity #9 “Preparing to Pray.”

Intergenerational or Family Learning Program (Experience Centers)

The four movements and prayer activities can be used to design an intergenerational or family program using prayer experience centers in a schedule that allows for three rounds of activities. Offer as many experience centers to accommodate the size of the group, and the physical space and leaders that you have. All of the Prayer Activities can be published on a website and designed onto a playlist for continuing learning.

Large Group Gathering and Opening Prayer Experience (10 minutes)

Movement 1. Reflecting on Life Experience (10-15 minutes)

- Select Prayer Activity #1 or #2.

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice (10 minutes)

- Use content from Prayer Activities #3 through #8.

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice: Select from Prayer Activities #10-#25.

- Round 1: Prayer Centers – a mix of all ages and age-appropriate centers (20 minutes)
Break—move to next Center (5 minutes)
- Round 2: Prayer Centers – a mix of all ages and age-appropriate centers (20 minutes)
Break—move to next Center (5 minutes)
- Round 3: Prayer Centers – a mix of all ages and age-appropriate centers (20 minutes)
Break—move to next Center (5 minutes)

Movement 4. Living the Practice

- Reflect on the Prayer Experiences
- Conclude with Activity #9 “Preparing to Pray.”

Closing Prayer

Small Group Program (Guided Experience)

The four movements and prayer activities can be designed into a multi-session small group program of 90 minutes per sessions. Create a Prayer Guide (print, digital) to accompany the program. All of the Prayer Activities can be published on a website and designed onto a playlist for each session. Here’s an example of a 4-week program.

Week #1. Movements 1 and 2: Fundamentals of Prayer

Movement 1. Reflecting on Life Experience

- Select Prayer Activity #1 or #2.

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

- Use content from Prayer Activities #3 through #8.

Week 2. Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

- Scripture Prayer Experiences: Choose from Prayer Activities #11-14

Week 3. Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

- Contemplative Prayer (#10), Intercessory Prayer (#15), Praise Prayer (#16 or 17), Thanksgiving Prayer (#18)

Week 4.

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practice

- Praying Online (#21), Praying through the Day (#22) Or Closing the Day: The Prayer of Examen (#23)

Movement 4. Living the Practice

- Preparing to Pray (#9)

Retreat or Extended Time Program (Guided and Experience Centers)

The four movements and prayer activities can be designed into a retreat experience with a blend of whole group prayer experiences and small group experience centers.

Opening Prayer

Large Group: Guided Experience – 1 hour

Movement 1. Reflecting on Life Experience

- Select Prayer Activity #1 or #2.

Movement 2. Exploring the Christian Practice

- Use content from Prayer Activities #3 through #8.

Break

Small Groups: Experience Centers – 2 hours

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practices

- Select from Prayer Activities #10-#25.
- Divide the participants into four groups and have them rotate through four, 20-minute prayer experiences in four spaces throughout the facility with 5-minute breaks to change spaces

Break

Large Group: Guided Experience – 1 hour

Movement 3. Experiencing the Christian Practices

- Select from Praying through the Day (#22) or Closing the Day (#9), followed by Prayer Takes Practice (#8)

Movement 4. Living the Practice

- Preparing to Prayer (#9)

Closing Prayer

Designing Online Platforms

The Prayer Activities in this resource can be designed into daily prayer posts on Facebook and Instagram, online playlists of prayer experiences for different age groups published on a website, and digital newsletters. One example of a Prayer Playlist is from the Michigan Conference of the UMC: <https://michiganumc.org/faith-family-playlists/prayer-for-kids-and-families>.

Books on the Practice of Prayer

Here are a few selected books that provide more resources for you to use in forming people in the practice of prayer.

Benson, Robert. *In Constant Prayer*. Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Boyd, Jared Patrick. *Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child's Spiritual Formation*. InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handout: Practices that Transform Us (Revised and Expanded)*. InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Martin, James. *Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone*. HarperOne, 2021.

Morse, MaryKate. *A Guidebook to Prayer: Twenty-Four Ways to Walk with God*. InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Pirtle, Carolyn. *Ten Ways to Pray: A Catholic Guide for Drawing Closer to God*. Ave Maria Press, 2021.

Redmont, Jane. *When in Doubt, Sing: Prayer in Daily Life*. HarperCollins, 1999.

Rupp, Joyce. *Prayer*. Orbis Books, 2007.

Wolpert, Daniel. *Creating a Life with God: The Call of Ancient Prayer Practices*. Upper Room Books, 2003.

Videos on the Practice of Prayer

There are numerous videos available on YouTube and within the resources of each Christian denomination. It is beyond the scope of this resource to recommend videos. Using YouTube to search for available videos will produce a number of excellent resources. You will find “how to pray videos” that describe and demonstrate many of prayer activities included in this Practice of Prayer resource. For example, Fr. James Martin has produced a number of videos to accompany his 2021 book, *Learning to Pray*, available at: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFA_2Z1L-3trG2uB4ghong_QNUTU7jlqB.

Here are several sources of religious video programs to consult:

- Amplify Media: <https://my.amplifymedia.com/amplify/home>
- Ascension Presents (Ascension Press): [YouTube Channel](#)
- BibleProject (<https://bibleproject.com>) and The Bible Project TV (<https://bibleproject.com/stream>)
- BustedHalo: <https://bustedhalo.com/category/video> and [BustedHalo YouTube Channel](#).

- Catholic Central: <https://www.catholiccentral.com>
- Church Knows Church: Things We Can Do: <https://chuckknowschurch.com> and [ChuckKnowsChurch YouTube Channel](#)
- Formed: <https://formed.org> (Catholic video resource)
- Minno Kids: <https://visit.gominno.com> and [YouTube Channel](#)
- ODB Films: <https://odbfilms.com> and [Video Catechism \(VCAT\)](#)
- Paraclete Press: <https://paracletepress.com/products/paraclete-video-streaming-4>
- Right Now Media: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org>
- Saddleback Kids Videos: [YouTube Channel](#)
- The Skit Guys: <https://skitguys.com> and [The Skit Guys on YouTube](#)
- Thirty Seconds or Less: <http://thirtysecondsorless.net> and #30SecondBible
- Work of the People: <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com>
- Worship House Media: <https://www.worshiphousemedia.com>
- Worship House Kids: <https://www.worshiphousekids.com>

Prayer Activities from Vibrant Faith at Home

The prayer activities from Vibrant Faith at Home are short (usually only 5-10 minutes). They are in PDF files with a simple formatting to make it easy to use and download. You can provide these to people in variety of ways through age group programming, family or intergenerational programming, on a website, in an e-newsletter, on social media, etc. Vibrant Faith grants permission to use these activities in print or digital formats. Here is a listing of the prayer activities available at www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/vibrant-faith-home.html.

Children & Families

<https://www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/families-with-children.html>

Spring

- Alleluia Chain
- Devotional Garden
- Hand Prayers
- I Am Sorry Prayers
- Lenten Bedtime
- Pentecost Prayer Labyrinth
- Praying with the Senses
- Serious Illness Prayer

Summer

- Community Prayers
- First World, Last Word
- Planting Prayers
- Prayer Album
- Prayer Pilots

- Summer Prayer Corner

Fall

- Dig Deep Drive
- Falling Leaf Prayers
- Jumping Prayers

Winter

- Prayer for Mother and Baby
- Praying for Light
- Sports Prayers
- Valentine Prayers
- Winter Prayer List
- Winter Prayer Reflections

Teens

<https://www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/teens--families.html>

Spring

- Buried Prayer
- Lord Hear My Cry
- Time to Connect
- Window Prayers
- Winning Prayers

Summer

Blessings Summer

- Constellation Prayers
- God Be with Me
- My Lord's Prayer
- Praying in Nature
- Social Media Prayers

Fall

- A World of Prayer
- Doodle Prayers
- What's Bothering You

Winter

- A Prayer Journal
- Prayers for the Future
- Whiteboard Prayers

Young Adults

<https://www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/young-adults.html>

- 30 Seconds of Prayer
- Life Happens

- Lord's Prayer Stones
- Natural Reminders
- Pray Your Way
- Prayer Block
- Pray Docs
- Prayer Improvement
- Prayer in Sadness
- Prayercation
- Psalms of Prayer

Adults

<https://www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/adults--couples.html>

- All Creation Bless the Lord
- Ask and Ask Again
- Building Order from Chaos
- Contemplative Prayer
- Do You Mind
- Forgiveness
- From Where I Sit for Couple
- Guided Meditation
- Interviewed by Jesus' Friends
- Keeping a Journal
- Lectio Divina
- Little Thanks
- Liturgy of the Hours
- Prayer Labyrinth
- Prayer on the Go
- Psalms of Prayer
- Songs of Our Lives
- Spiritual Movement
- Time Apart

Activity 1. Prayer in My Life Today

Plan

Invite people to share their experience of praying using the Activity. Give participants time to think about their responses. Then invite them to share their responses to the questions with their table group. Remind people that this is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person or family time to share their story without interruptions or discussion.

Activity

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

- ◆ How is your prayer life today?
 - When do you pray?
 - Where do you pray?
 - What do you do during your prayer time, e.g., read the Bible, contemplate, listen to music, be silent, or recite traditional prayers?
 - What do you pray for or pray about?
- ◆ How has your prayer life changed or grown or evolved over the course of your life? What was your prayer life like when you were a child? a teenager? a young adult? a parent? a midlife adult? a grandparent? an older adult? (Answer as many as apply to you.)
- ◆ Have you ever felt “stuck” in your prayer? When? How? What do you do about it?
- ◆ Has there ever been a time when you couldn’t pray, but felt sustained by the prayers offered on your behalf?
- ◆ When were the prayer times when you felt closest to God? Why?

Activity 2. Prayer Is...

Plan

Use Activities #2 through #8 to present an understanding of prayer:

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

Activity

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

◆ What does prayer mean to you?

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

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

Activity 3. Prayer Is Relationship with God

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

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

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

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

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

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

◆ **What does prayer as a 'relationship with God' mean to you today?**

Activity 4. Praying Is Opening Our Lives to God

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

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

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

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

Activity 5. Prayer Is Being Changed by God

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

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

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

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

Activity 6. Prayer Is Being Attentive to God and Others

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

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

Activity 7. Prayer Is Living

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

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

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

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

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

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

◆ **What does prayer as “living daily with God” mean to you today?**

Activity 8. Prayer Takes Practice

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

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

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

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

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

Activity 9. Preparing to Pray

Plan

Guide the participants in determining a Time and Place for prayer in their lives. Explain how Posture and Mood can contribute to the quality of prayer.

Activity

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

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

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

A Prayer Time

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

- ◆ **When will I pray?**
- ◆ **When will our household pray?**

A Prayer Place

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

- ◆ **Where will I pray?**
- ◆ **Where will our household pray?**

A Prayer Posture

If we can pray anywhere, we can also pray in any position. Sometimes we have to experiment to discover the prayer posture that works best for us: lying down, kneeling, sitting, or walking.

- ◆ How will I position myself for prayer?
- ◆ How will we position ourselves as a household for prayer?

A Prayer Mood

The Lord instructs us to “be still and know that I am God.” We cannot pray well unless we slow down and create the proper mental climate. We must first relax. Creating a relaxed mood for prayer is the last preparation for praying—after we have made time, found a place, and assumed a comfortable position for our prayer. Here are three popular methods for relaxing before prayer:

Awareness of our senses. Sit on a straight chair. Assume a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath, hold it momentarily, and then let it go. Relax your body. Begin with your neck muscles, then your shoulders, your chest and back, your arms and legs. Feel the clothes on your shoulders and back, the press of your legs on the chair. Note your posture. Be aware of your legs, your feet, your hands. Feel the heat or coolness of the room. Repeat this pattern of awareness a second and third time. Feel the tension drain out of your body. Dwell on the part of your body that is most tense. Relax the forehead, the jaw, the neck. Let your arms and legs rest. Come to total stillness. Now you are ready to pray.

Breathing. Take a relaxing position, seated or lying down. Let the tension drain from your body. Now focus on your breathing. Observe your breathing. Note how fast or slow it is. Notice the air as it comes in and goes out. Don't try to control your breathing. Just observe it for a few quiet, peaceful moments. Be aware of how it comes in to fill your lungs, and how it goes out of your nostrils. After a short time spent observing your breathing, begin to count your breaths silently. Count “one” as you inhale; “and” as you exhale. Count “two” as you breathe in again; “and” on the exhalation. Continue your count to 15 or 20.

Listening. Take a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Relax the tension in your body. Feel the tightness drain from your face, your neck, your shoulders, your arms and legs. Feel the air on your skin. Be aware of each breath that you take in and let out. Block your ears with your thumbs. Listen to each breath as you take it in and let it out. After ten breaths, let your hands rest on your lap. Now be attentive to all the sounds around you. Hear them all, the ones close to you and the ones in the background, the big sounds and the little noises. After a bit, listen to the sounds blend together. Let them penetrate you. Continue with this until you are at rest and ready to turn to prayer.

- ◆ How will I relax myself for prayer?
- ◆ How will we relax as a household for prayer?

Activity 10. Contemplative Prayer Experience

Plan

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to Contemplative Prayer (instrumental music, dimming the lights).
2. Introduce Contemplative Prayer using the Activity.
3. Share the two Scripture passages: Psalm 63:1-5 and Romans 8:26-27.
4. Explain the process and then guide people through an experience of Contemplative Centering Prayer.
 - Choose a quiet space where you can be comfortable and where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
 - Once you are comfortable, light a candle, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Then set the timer or stopwatch for twenty minutes.
 - Close your eyes and recall your desire to just be in God's presence.
 - Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from Scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Good Shepherd).
 - When thoughts or feelings come into your mind, let them go. Do not give into them or allow them to take you away from God's presence. Distractions will come; this is normal. Think of this kind of prayer as the prayer of "letting go." Don't be surprised if you spend the whole prayer period letting go of thoughts and feelings. Over time you will experience something happening in your life: a new sense of peace, a new awareness of God's great love for you. Be patient! Prayer takes practice.
 - Rest in the center of God's love. Trust that the Holy Spirit, who abides in the depths of your spirit, will connect you with God.
 - When your prayer has ended, slowly come back to the here and now.
5. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate a contemplative prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Activity

*O God, you are my God, and I long for you.
My whole being desires you; like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land, my soul is thirsty for you.
Let me see you in the sanctuary let me see how mighty and glorious you are.
Your constant love is better than life itself, and so I will praise you.
I will give you thanks as long as I live; I will raise my hands to you in prayer.
My soul will feast and be satisfied, and I will sing glad songs of praise to you.*
(Psalm 63:1–5)

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

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

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

Activity 11. Centering Prayer Experience

Plan

1. Develop a simple quiet prayer space—a room with carpeted floor for those who would choose to lie down, with gentle lighting, and free from the noise that might be created by other learning centers.
2. Select quiet background music and have it playing as participants enter the room.
3. Read the introduction to the group.
4. Guide the participants through the process of Centering Prayer, explaining each step using the information in the Activity and giving the participants time to complete the instructions.
5. After a suitable amount of time has passed—pay attention to when the group as a whole seems to be getting restless—about ten or fifteen minutes, gently invite the participants to return to the room by opening their eyes when they are ready.
6. Invite the participants to share with the group what the experience was like for them. Was it hard to be quiet? Did the sacred word/mantra help them to stay centered? Is this a path of prayer that appeals to them or seems easy for them?
7. Close the prayer time by inviting the participants to jot down a phrase or two describing their experience in their prayer journals.

Activity

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

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

Activity 12. Scripture Prayer Experience: Reflective Reading

Plan

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to Scripture Prayer. Light one or more candles.
2. Introduce Scripture Prayer using the Activity.
3. Share the two Scripture passages: Psalm 119:105-106 and Ephesians 5:19-20.
4. Explain the process and then guide people through an experience of Scripture Prayer.
 1. Choose a passage from Scripture, about five to ten verses in length. You might choose one of your favorite passages, a Scripture reading from the previous or coming Sunday, or use an index to help you locate a passage that seems to be appropriate for the time or occasion.
 2. Choose a comfortable place where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
 3. Light a candle. Take a few moments to get your body in harmony with your spirit. Sometimes it helps to take a few deep breaths or stretch your body, then relax.
 4. Acknowledge God's presence with you. Ask God to send the Spirit to be with you and guide you in this time of reflection.
 5. Read the passage you have chosen slowly, out loud, listening carefully to it. You might want to pause after a sentence or phrase.
 6. Say the words or phrases that struck you. Do not discuss them, just say them.
 7. Read the passage a second time, slowly and prayerfully.
 8. Consider the message the passage might have for you: a challenge, an affirmation, or an insight. If you are doing this with others, you could invite them to share what comes to mind.
 9. Read the passage a third time, slowly and prayerfully.
 10. Pause for about ten minutes of silence and allow the Spirit to speak to you. If no words or thoughts come, just sit in the silence. Sometimes God touches us in ways we cannot know.
 11. Following your quiet time, consider how the passage calls you to action. Is there something you need to do to make the Scripture alive for you here and now?
 12. Close with a brief prayer of thanksgiving or praise to God for the gift of the Spirit.
5. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate the Scripture Prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Activity

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

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

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

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

Scripture Passages by Topic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Activity 13. Scripture Prayer Experience: Imaginative Prayer

Plan & Activity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scripture Prayer Example: Luke 17:11-19

1. Settle down.

Take a few minutes to help everyone settle down in the place of prayer. Encourage them to sit with their spine straight, feet on the floor, knees slightly apart, hands on your lap, eyes closed. Ask them to breathe deeply and slowly; to be aware of the sounds around them; to quiet themselves and be still. Play some quiet instrumental music to set a prayerful environment.

2. Pray to the Holy Spirit.

Remind the group that they are in God's presence. Ask them to feel the warmth and the love. As they slowly inhale and exhale, ask the Holy Spirit to help them pray and to hear what the Lord is saying to them.

3. Read the Scripture passage slowly and meditatively.

4. Meditate on the Scripture passage.

Observe

Step into the story and become a part of it. What is happening? What kind of day is it? Hot? What is the road like? Dusty? Who is with Jesus? Imagine yourself as one of the disciples traveling with Jesus. You can't wait to get to town to get a drink of water. See the diseased men, the sores on their arms and faces. They cover their faces. Perhaps they ring a bell to warn travelers away. Then, suddenly, you hear them cry out to Jesus. He looks at them. What is his reaction? Does he approach them? What is your reaction? Do you want your friend and teacher Jesus to shy away from them? Are you afraid he will catch their disease? Are you afraid that you will? Listen to his words. What do they mean? Do you think the men will be cured? What is their reaction? How are the other disciples reacting?

Now imagine that you are one of the sick persons. You walk away to go to the priests when suddenly you are cured. What do you do? Do you come back and thank Jesus? If you don't, what do you do? Why?

Now focus on the Samaritan. He grabs Jesus' feet. He cries with joy. He thanks Jesus and praises him. Listen to Jesus' words. Does he sound disappointed with others who were also cured? What does he mean when he says, "Your faith has saved you"?

Invite them to write their observations in a journal or on paper.

Reflect

What does this story mean? Is it about physical sickness or spiritual sickness? Does it focus on the mercy of Jesus, his compassion for the rejected ones? Is it a call to faith? Is it about gratitude? courage? obedience to the word of the Master? What is Luke stressing in this story? What strikes you as the main point? Invite everyone to write their reflections in a journal or on paper.

Listen

What word is being spoken to you in this Bible passage? Do you have a spiritual sickness eating away at you that Jesus wants to touch and cure? Do you have the courage to approach Jesus to ask for his help and salvation? Are you willing to listen to his answer? What you need for the cure? Are you weak in faith? Do you need Jesus to strengthen your faith? Or perhaps he is telling you to say thank you for all that you have been given. Will you be like the Samaritan who came back to offer thanks? Or are you like the ones who take their healing for granted? Prayerfully ask, “What, Lord, are you saying to me in this reading?” Invite everyone to write their response to the question in a journal or on paper.

5. Make a resolution.

Now invite everyone to resolve to do something about the insights they have gained. Perhaps they will acknowledge that they are a sinner who needs to approach the Lord and ask for his forgiveness. Perhaps they will resolve to thank God for their good health. Perhaps they will think of a person who has done something for them and will now take an opportunity to make some gesture of thanks to this person. Whatever their resolution, invite the young people to thank the Lord for the moments he spent with them and for any insights they received. Invite them to write their resolution in a journal or on paper.

6. Reflect together on the experience.

Invite the participants to share their feelings and reflections on the meditation experience.

Additional Scripture Example: John 8:1-11

Another good passage to use is: John 8:1-11—The Woman Caught in Adultery. Call the participants to imagine details such as the dust in the wind, the feeling of dirt under fingernails (when Jesus bends over to draw in the sand), the look on the faces of the men who drag her forward, and the “thud, thud” of the rocks hitting the ground.

Scripture Passages for Imaginative Prayer

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

- ◆ The Young Jesus (Luke 2:41-50)
- ◆ Temptation in the Desert (Matthew 4:1-11)
- ◆ Calling of the First Disciples (Luke 5:1-11)
- ◆ Calming of the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)
- ◆ The Woman in Simon's House (Luke 7:36-50)
- ◆ Jesus Instructs the Disciples (Mark 6:7-13)
- ◆ The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
- ◆ Miracle of Cana (John 2:1-12)
- ◆ "Who Do People Say I Am?" (Matthew 16:13-17)
- ◆ Curing of the Blind Man of Jericho (Luke 18:35-43)
- ◆ The Miracle of the Loaves (John 6:1-13)
- ◆ Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)
- ◆ Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
- ◆ The Woman at the Well (John 4:5-42)
- ◆ The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)
- ◆ Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44)
- ◆ The Rich Young Man (Matthew 19:16-22)
- ◆ Driving Out the Money Changers (Mark 11:15-17)
- ◆ Washing the Apostles' Feet (John 13:1-20)
- ◆ The Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39-46)
- ◆ The Crucifixion (Luke 23:33-49)
- ◆ The Disciples on the Way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Activity 14. Scripture Prayer Experience: Lectio Divina

Plan

Introduce Lectio Divina (see Activity) and then guide the participants through the more detailed Lectio process below or the simplified process in the Activity. Select a Scripture passage of your choosing, use the Gospel reading from Sunday lectionary, or select a story from the list “Scripture Passages for Imaginative Prayer.” Use Lectio Divina to guide people in a prayer reflection on a Biblical story or text and in imagining how they will live the story or text in their daily life.

Step 1. Lectio (Reading)

Read the Bible passage to the group. Read it a second time. Invite people to let the words really sink in deeply. Ask them to open their minds and hearts to the meaning of the words; and let the passage speak to them.

Step 2. Meditatio (Meditation)

Invite people to reflect on the Bible passage. Ask questions such as the following:

- ◆ What does this passage say to me?
- ◆ Who am I in this Scripture?
- ◆ What do I see and hear?
- ◆ What do I think?
- ◆ Which character do I most relate to?
- ◆ What do I need to learn from this passage?

Step 3. Oratio (Prayer)

Move into the heart of the matter. Consider the following questions to help people respond to God.

- ◆ What do you want to communicate to God?
- ◆ What do you most want in your relationship with God?
- ◆ What emotions do you want to express to God? joy? fear? gratitude? grief?

Step 4. Contemplatio (Contemplation)

Provide quiet time for people to rest in the presence of God. Play quiet instrumental music.

Step 5. Action (Action)

Conclude by inviting people to decide on a course of action and make a commitment to follow through with their plan.

- ◆ How is God challenging me?
- ◆ Is there a good thing that God is calling me to do?
- ◆ Is there a harmful thing that God wants me to stop doing?
- ◆ What is the next step I need to take?

Activity

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

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

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

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

Activity 15. Scripture Prayer Experience: Visio Divina

Plan

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

Guide the participants through the *visio divina* process:

1. **Listen:** As you hear the Scripture proclaimed, listen with the “ear of your heart” for a word or short phrase that God has for you this day.

Scripture Example:

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

2. **Meditate:** What does the word or phrase you have chosen mean to you today?
3. **See:** Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that one part of the image that first catches your eye.
4. **Contemplate:** Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
5. Now, let your eyes gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of it. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
6. **Reflect:** What emotions does this image evoke in you? What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
7. **Pray:** What do you want to pray for today?

Activity

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

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

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

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



Photo by Melissa Askew on Unsplash

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

Activity 16. Scripture Prayer Experience: The Psalms

Plan & Activity

The Psalms are the Bible's book of prayer. The Psalms have been used in worship for thousands of years. We often go to the Psalms today for prayer, personal devotion, and for communal worship. Select one of the Psalm passages below that you feel most comfortable with as the focus of this prayer experience. (You can use your own Bible or access these passages online from Bible Gateway by typing the verse into the search. Go [to https://www.biblegateway.com](https://www.biblegateway.com). Select the NRSV translation.)

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

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

Additional Scripture Prayer Experiences

Activity 1. Select a Scripture passage and then read it slowly and deliberately while the participants identify lines or phrases that stand out for them. Read the passage once, and then ask the participants to simply call out the word or phrase that “jumped out at them.” Read it again and invite them to call out a new word or phrase. Conclude with a third reading. Afterward, invite the participants to spend a minute or two in conversation with God about what God is trying to say to them in the passage.

Activity 2. Take a passage of Scripture and make it a first person reading, as if the lines were being spoken personally to the individuals. For example, take **1 Corinthians 13** (“Love is patient, love is kind) and personalize the reading by inserting people’s names into the reading—(person’s name) is patient, (person’s name) is kind..., etc.

Activity 3. Create a “dialogue” between a passage of Scripture and a story or article from today’s world in a newspaper or magazine. One way to present this is using a relevant newspaper or magazine article. Select an article that deals with the same topic or issue as the Scripture passage or vice versa. Read part of the article; then read part of the passage. Return to the article and then back to the passage. Invite the participants to name their thoughts and feelings of how the Scripture passage relates to current realities.

Activity 4. Read **2 Corinthians 4:6-7**. Give each person a small clay gardening pot as a symbol of themselves and suggest that they write a prayer asking God to come and dwell in them. Provide them with markers (or paint) to draw and write their prayer on the pot. Play quiet instrumental music while the young people decorate their clay pots.

Activity 5. Pray the **Great Commandment** (Mark 12:30-31 or Matthew 22:37-39 or Luke 10:27) by making each part of the commandment a prayer reflection. For example:

- Read, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart” and pause for everyone to think about how they love God and how they experience God’s love. Ask them to write down their reflections.
- Read, “Love the Lord your God with all your soul” and pause for silent reflection.
- Read, “Love the Lord your God with all your mind” and pause for everyone to think of ways God’s word has touched their lives. Ask them to write down their reflections.
- Read, “Love the Lord your God with all your strength” and pause for everyone to think of all the ways they do what God asks of them. Ask them to write down their reflections.

Activity 6. Place a lighted candle in the center of the circle. Dim the lights. Read **John 19:17-18**. Pass a simple wood cross around a circle of people gathered for prayer. Ask each person to hold the cross for a minute, to touch it and look at it. Ask them to share one word that comes to mind when they think of Christ crucified. Play quiet instrumental music while the young people reflect and share.

Activity 17. Intercessory Prayer Experience

Plan

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to prayer. Light one or more candles.
2. Introduce Intercessory Prayer using the Activity.
3. Share the two Scripture passages: Ephesians 6:18 and Philippians 4:4, 6-7.
4. Invite people to take several minutes to recall the needs and concerns they want to pray for. Families can work together to identify their prayer intentions. Provide the group with the following categories to guide their reflection:
 - ◆ the needs and concerns of your family/household and friends
 - ◆ the needs and concerns of people in your local church and community
 - ◆ the needs and concerns of people around the world
5. Begin with an opening prayer and then ask people to offer their prayer intentions. The response to each prayer petition can be “Lord, hear us.”
6. Close by praying the Our Father together as a group.
7. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate an intercessory prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Activity

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

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

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

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

Pray now for...

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

Intercessory Prayer at Home

One of the time-honored kinds of prayer is that of petition or asking God for what we and others need. Prayers of petition challenge us to recall our dependence on God. We cannot get along without God.

We believe that God knows our needs even before we ask. Yet, we offer prayers of petition because it helps us remember that we need God above all. When we offer prayers of petition we do so with a spirit of openness, trusting that God will hear and answer our prayers in the way that is best. Sometimes it seems like the answer never comes or in ways that we do not anticipate. However, we trust in the promise of Jesus, “ask and it will be done for you.”

Activity 1

When you are gathered for a meal or in the car, talk about the times when you pray prayers of petition. What are some of the needs and concerns you have brought to God’s attention? Have your prayers been answered? Were they answered in the way you expected them to be? If they were not answered, did you give up asking? How has your faith been challenged or strengthened by this kind of prayer?

Activity 2

On a large sheet of paper draw four concentric circles. In the innermost circle write some of the needs and concerns of the family/household members that you want to remember in prayer. In the next circle write some of the needs and concerns of your local parish, neighborhood or community that you want to remember in prayer. In the next circle write some of the needs and concerns of our nation, and in the most outer circle write some of the needs and concerns of our world. Post the paper some place where you can be reminded of the things you are asking of God.

Activity 3

When you gather for a meal or other event, pause to pray for one of the needs and concerns you have identified in each of the four categories of Activity 2 above. You might have each member identify one and other members respond, “Lord, hear us” to each petition. Or, set aside a different day to pray for the needs and concerns listed in each of the circles so that one day is dedicated to the concerns of the family/household; another day for parish, neighborhood, community; another for nation; another for world.

Activity 18. Praise Prayer Experience: Psalm 103

Plan

Everyone will need a Bible or a copy of Psalm 103.

1. Introduce this prayer experience by saying: *Many of us pray when we want to ask God for something either for ourselves or someone else. Sometimes it is difficult to just give compliments to God. Prayers of praise give praise to God for being good, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to just praise God for being God.*
2. Explain to the group that they will be using Psalm 103 as a Prayer of Praise. Psalm 103 is one of those priceless treasures that becomes more precious as we spend time with it in reflection and contemplation. The Psalm has four main parts:
 - Personal blessings received from God (1-5)
 - National blessings received from God (6-14)
 - A reminder of our human frailty and utter dependence upon God (15-18)
 - A declaration that all creation praises God (19-22)
3. Pray the Psalm with the group. (You may want to reproduce the Psalm so that everyone can pray it together. You can also organize the participants into two groups. Ask group one to read verses 1- 5 and 15-18; group two reads verses 6-14 and 19-22.)
4. Ask the participants to use Psalm 103 to write their own psalm of praise to God. Invite them to use the four-fold structure of Psalm 103 in their own prayer. Remind them that prayers of praise give praise to God for being good, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to just praise God for being God.
5. Give them several minutes to compose their prayer.
6. After the individuals have composed their prayer of praise to God, ask them to take a few moments to reflect (and perhaps talk) about how it felt to offer God praise.
7. Gather in a circle around a lighted candle. Dim the lights. Invite the participants to share their psalms of praise.

Activity

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

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

The Psalm has four main parts:

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

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

◆ **Inspired by Psalm 103 offer your own prayers of praise.**

Activity 19. Praise Prayer Experience: Psalm 95

Plan & Activity

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to prayer.
2. Share the Scripture passage: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7.

Come, let us praise the Lord!

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

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

Come, let us bow down and worship him; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! He is our God; we are the people he cares for, the flock for which he provides. (Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7)

3. Invite people to take several minutes to compose one or more prayers of praise. Families can work together to compose their prayers. Provide the group with the following examples:
 - “God, you are good and wonderful. We praise you.”
 - “God, we praise you for the mystery that is you.”
 - “God, we believe that you are holy and awesome.”
 - “We praise you for your majesty, O God.”
4. Begin with an opening prayer and then ask people to offer their prayers of praise.
5. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate a praise prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Prayers of Praise at Home

Many of us pray when we want to ask God for something either for ourselves or someone else. Sometimes it is difficult to just give compliments to God. Prayers of praise give praise to God for being good, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to just praise God for being God.

Activity 1

Try for a week to offer only prayers of praise when you gather for meals or other events. Use phrases such as: "God, you are good and wonderful. We praise you." "God, we praise you for the mystery that is you." "God, we believe that you are holy and awesome." "We praise you for your majesty, O God." Be creative and make up some of your own.

Activity 2

As you practice giving praise to God also practice giving praise to each other. Look for opportunities to complement one another for qualities that are unique to each person as well as for what they do. Be sincere. When you receive a compliment, thank the person giving it.

Activity 3

After trying a time for giving praise to God and each other, take time to talk about how it felt. Was it hard to not ask God for something when you prayed? How did it feel to receive compliments from others? Were you embarrassed? Were you able to receive a compliment graciously? Were you able to offer compliments to others with sincere affection? If not, why was it hard?

Activity 4

As a family or household, write a prayer of praise that you could use from time to time when you are gathered for a meal or other event. It could be in the form of a litany with a response such as those suggested in Activity One above. It could be in the form of a poem, a song, or just a brief paragraph. Be creative. If you have lots of ideas, write more than one and alternate the use of them.

Activity 20. Thanksgiving Prayer Experience

Plan

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to prayer.
2. Share the Scripture passage: Psalm 92:1-4.
3. Invite people to take several minutes to compose one or more prayers of thanksgiving. Families can work together to compose their prayers.
4. Begin with an opening prayer and then ask people to offer their prayers of thanksgiving. Respond to each prayer of thanksgiving with: “We thank you, God” or “We are grateful for your goodness.”
5. Close by praying Psalm 92:1-4 or other Psalm of thanksgiving.
6. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate a thanksgiving prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Activity

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

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

Offer your thanks to God.

- ◆ We are grateful for...
- ◆ We give thanks for...

Prayers of Thanksgiving at Home

Thanksgiving is not the only time of the year that we can take time to be grateful to God for the many gifts God shares with us. Prayers of thanksgiving are one of the four types of prayers. Sometimes it is good for us to reflect on the many good things that are ours, that we enjoy and sometimes take for granted and give thanks to God for all that we have and are. It can be a challenge to thank God for what we need even before we have it, trusting that God will provide for our needs in ways that are best.

Activity 1

Gather some pencils, pens, crayons or markers; some pieces of paper about 3 ½ X 5; and a basket or bowl, and invite the family or household to come together. After a brief introduction (you can use the one above) invite them to think about the gifts they have for which they could give thanks to God.

They can then use the paper to write or draw a symbol, one per paper, of the things that come to mind. The papers can be collected in the basket or bowl so that there is a visible sign that our “cup runs over” because of the goodness of God. The basket or bowl could be placed in a prominent place.

Activity 2

When the family or household gathers for a meal, one or more of the papers could be drawn and shared as part of the thanksgiving prayer before or after the meal.

Activity 3

The family or household could gather for a special prayer of thanksgiving. The papers created in Activity One could be the source for a litany of thanksgiving. To each item, the rest of the family could respond with an appropriate phrase such as, “we thank you, God” or “we are grateful for your goodness.”

Activity 4

When the family or household is in the car together, offer thanks to God for the things that you see as you drive. You could express gratitude for nature, things, or other people. For example, when you pass a hospital, you could be grateful for access to such a facility, for the doctors, nurses, and others who care for the sick, etc.

Activity 21. Praying with Music Experience

Plan

Adapt this prayer process for specific age groups.

1. **Select a theme.** Select one or two themes to focus your music and Scripture selections. Identify a theme which connects with your target group. Using the theme as a guide, select one or two songs or hymns *and* an accompanying Scripture reading. Select music that would appeal to the musical tastes of your group and connects with your theme.
2. **Settle down.** Take a few minutes to help everyone settle down in the place of prayer. Encourage them to sit with their spine straight, feet on the floor, knees slightly apart, hands on their laps, eyes closed. Ask them to breathe deeply and slowly; to be aware of the sounds around them; to quiet themselves and be still.
3. **Pray to the Holy Spirit.** Remind the group that they are in God's presence. Ask them to feel the warmth and the love. As they slowly inhale and exhale, ask the Holy Spirit to help them pray and to hear what the Lord is saying to them.
4. **Play one or two songs on your theme.** Ask everyone to listen to the words and to pay attention to the feelings and images the songs stir up in them. After each song, ask the participants to reflect on the song and record their reflections in a journal or on paper. (For children, you may want to talk about each song rather than write or draw.) Ask: What is this song saying to you? How does it speak to your life right now? How can you apply its meaning to your life? What might God be saying to you through this song?
5. **Share the Scripture reading.** Share the Scripture reading which accompanies your music selections. Invite everyone to reflect on the Scripture passage and its connection to the music. Ask: What is this passage saying to you? How does it speak to your life right now? What is God (or Jesus) saying to you through this passage? How can you apply its meaning to your life? How does this passage deepen the message you heard in the songs?
6. **Make a resolution.** Invite each person to resolve to do something about the insights they have gained from praying with music. Whatever the resolution, ask them to thank the Lord for the moments he spent with them and for any insights they received. Invite them to write their resolution in a journal or on paper.
7. **Reflect together on the experience.** Invite everyone to share their feelings and reflections on the praying with music experience.

Music Sources

Here are variety of songs for prayer and worship created by an “ensemble” of musicians. For many of the songs you will find videos of the song being sung by the artists. This is only a small sampling of the music available for praying.

BiFrost Arts

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BifrostArts/>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0tYNIKU_6HQIcjAqgEDbwQ

One Hope Project

Website: <https://www.onehopeproject.co.uk>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7mdvyYHz9q10BIVgi6Wshg>

The Porters Gate

Website: <https://www.theportersgate.com>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSKl7BX0sHpKJFc3lC7Sy9Q>

Salt of the Sound

Website: <https://saltofthesound.com>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEZ8Ftw0kNDhMpIGnJefLuQ>

Taize

Website: <https://www.taize.fr/en>

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=taize

Activity 22. Online Resources for Daily Prayer

Plan

Introduce the variety of online prayer activities and demonstrate a few of them so that group can see how they work and how they might incorporate prayer into their daily life using the app or daily email.

Activity

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

Online: <https://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer> App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

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

Online: <https://abide.co> App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

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

Online: <https://www.rethinkme.com> App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

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

Online: www.pray-as-you-go.org App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

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

Online: www.sacredspace.ie

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

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

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

Online: <https://soulpace.co> App: [iOS](#) [Android](#)

Activity 23. Praying in Color Experience

Plan & Activity

Use *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God* by Sybil MacBeth (Paraclete Press, 2009) to create an experience of praying by creating a picture using crayons and markers. Purchase a copy of the book to understand the approach. All you need is: paper, a black pen, colored markers or colored pencils, and *Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God*.

1. Draw a shape.
2. Put the name of a person for whom you are praying inside the shape.
3. Add lines, squiggles, and dots.
4. Add color.
5. Think of each stroke of the pen and each daub of color as a moment of prayer.

Here's the background on this prayer style:

When multiple friends and family members received ugly and scary diagnoses, Sybil MacBeth found herself exhausted by the words of her prayers and stymied by a lack of focus. One summer day, she retreated to her back porch for a session of mindless doodling with a basket of her favorite colored markers. She drew a shape, put the name of a friend inside, and added lines and color. She drew another shape with another name and added detail and color. When the page was covered with designs and names, Sybil realized she had prayed. The action of drawing was a wordless offering of friends and family into the care of God. The page of drawings became a visual reminder to pray. I like to think of "praying in color" as my II Corinthians 12 prayer form: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." This prayer practice came to me through my weaknesses: I can't draw; I fumble for words; my mind wanders; I can't sit still. When I "pray in color" I turn my faltering words and my worry over to God. The simple action of moving the pen and coloring on the page keeps my restless body happy and allows me to focus on my prayer. Distractions don't disappear completely, but they're less powerful. Since the only drawing I do is shapes, lines, dots, and doodles, no artistic skill is necessary. I am grateful for the awesome generosity of a God who takes my flaws and shortcomings, scrambles them in a cosmic centrifuge, and returns them as a gift of prayer.

Activity 24. Praying through the Day Experiences

Plan

Guide the participants through an experience of morning, midday, or evening prayer.

Activity

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

Morning Prayer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

During the Day Prayer

- ◆ Take a moment during your day to view your visual image of the day.
- ◆ After a moment of quiet reflection, ask yourself: How is this image reflective of my day—what I'm feeling or thinking.
- ◆ Take a moment to read again the Bible version of the day.
- ◆ At midday ask yourself: Where is God in my life today?

Evening Prayer

- ◆ At the end of your day take a few moments to review your day.
- ◆ After a moment of quiet reflection, ask yourself:
 - What was the high point of the day? What was the low point of the day?
 - What am I most grateful for today? least grateful for?
- ◆ Consider your image and Bible verse
 - How did my image reflect the experience of the day?
 - How did my Bible verse reflect the experience of the day?
- ◆ Finally reflect on how God was a part of your life today.
- ◆ Close in prayer:

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

Life Themes & Bible Verses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Family: Colossians 3:18–21; Mark 3:33–35; Acts 2:42–47; Joel 2:15–16; Deuteronomy 31:12–13; 1 Corinthians 12:12–26.

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

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

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

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

Hatred: Psalm 25:18–20; Deuteronomy 31:6; Jeremiah 1:8; Psalm 18:1–4; Psalm 25:1–2; Proverbs 16:7; Proverbs 24:17; Luke 1:69–71

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Activity 25. Closing the Day: The Prayer of Examen Experience

Guide the participants through an experience of The Examen.

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

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

Pause for reflection.

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

Pause for reflection.

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

Pause for reflection.

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

*Gracious God, everything is a gift from you.
I give you thanks and praise for the gifts of today, such as
I ask your forgiveness and mercy for
I ask your healing in*

Pause for reflection.

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

*Lord God, continue to be present with me in my life each day.
Pause for reflection.*

The Prayer of Examen for Children

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

Activity 26. Praying in Families with Children

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

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

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

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

Children's Prayer Activities

Prayer Collage

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

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

Prayer Banner

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

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

Prayer Mobile

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

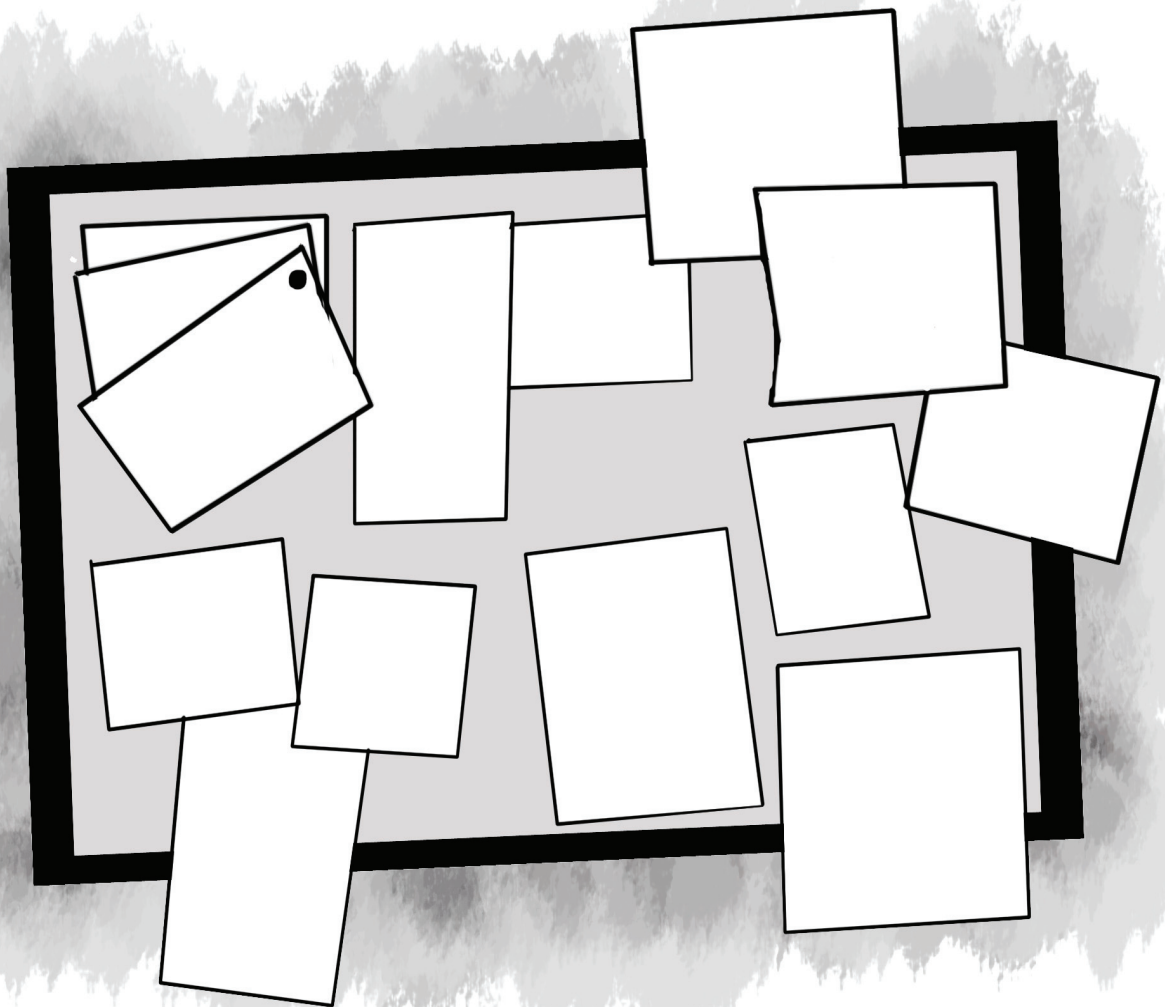
Materials: coat hangers, string or yarn for hanging objects, construction paper, scissors, glue, etc.

Prayer in My Life

What is prayer? Place a check ✓ next to the statements that are true for you.

- Prayer is like a good conversation with a friend.
- Prayer is feeling close to God in all moments of my life.
- Prayer is part of the routine of my day - morning, noon, and night.
- Prayer is thanking God for all that I have been blessed with.
- Prayer is asking God to help take care of people who are sick or in need.
- Prayer is celebrating with my family at Sunday worship.
- Prayer is spending time with God in nature.
- Prayer is reading the Bible.
- Prayer is something we do as a family before meals or going to bed at night.

On the "post it notes" attached to the bulletin board below, write words or draw images that say what prayer is for you.



Jesus Prays

The Gospel of Luke records many of the stories of Jesus praying at important and regular times in his life. Can you match the Bible passages of the times that Jesus prayed to the times in your life that you could pray? Draw lines to connect a Bible passage with the times we pray.

Jesus prayed when. . .

“After all the people had been baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying...”
(Luke 3:21)



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

When the 70 people Jesus sent out to proclaim the Good News returned :
“At that time Jesus was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit...and said ‘I thank you...’ (Luke 10:21)

Jesus prayed before teaching the disciples how to pray:
“He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’ (Luke 11:1)

Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane:
“Then he went off from them about the distance of a stone’s throw, and knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father if you will take this cup of suffering from me...’” (Luke 22:41)

Jesus prayed on the cross:
“Then Jesus said, ‘Forgive them Father! They don’t know what they are doing.’ (Luke 23:34)

Times we pray. . .



When times are tough.

When good things happen.

Before doing important things.

When we need to forgive others or have them forgive us.

When we celebrate sacraments pray for sacramental moments or remember the anniversaries of sacraments like baptism or marriage.

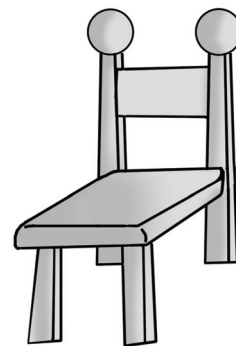
Before we make big decisions.

Learning to Pray

Find a regular **PLACE** to pray.

Some people find that when they enter a church they immediately feel called to pray, others have a favorite chair they sit in to talk with God or a favorite place in the park.

Where is a good place for you to pray?



Use different **POSTURES** to pray.

A posture is simply a physical position. For example, some people like to kneel when they pray, others like to sit upright with their hands in their laps, others like to lie on their bed.

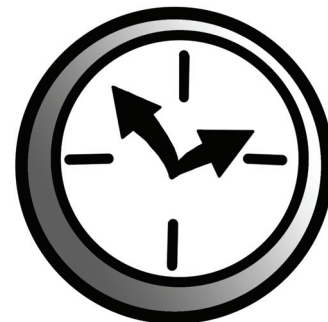
What posture will best help you to talk to God?



Pray at a regular **TIME** each day.

Routine is important. You might already have a routine for how you start your day - shower, eat breakfast, get dressed, pack up homework. Do you have a regular time or pattern for praying each day?

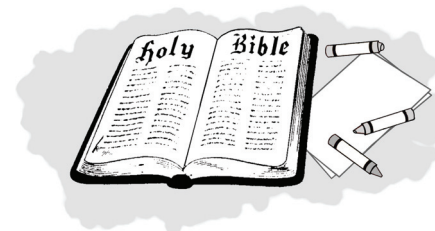
When is best for you to pray? Before you go to sleep at night? When you wake up?



Pray in a regular **WAY** each day.

Some people like to begin their prayer by reading a few lines from the Bible and then thinking about them. Some like to pray by writing a letter to God, or by drawing God a picture about what they are thinking or feeling. Some like to pray by first praying for the prayer needs of others, others like to play a favorite song that reminds them about their relationship with God.

How can you pray in a regular way each day?



Try It! — Praying

Let's try praying! As you experience each "stepping stone" color it in and see how colorful your pathway to God really could be!

Pray with a **saint** or **holy person**. Learn about your person and read one of their prayers.



Pray in **nature**. Go for a walk and see what you can see that can teach you about God.



Pray with your **community**. Go to the worship service at your church this week.



Pray for the **needs** of others. Who most needs you to pray for them at this time?



Pray a prayer of **thanksgiving**. Read Psalm 113.

Pray with the **Bible**. Open your Bible to the Gospel of John and read Chapter 1 verses 1-5.

Pray with **art**. Sit still with a blank piece of paper and some markers, and see what comes into your mind as you draw!

Set up prayer reminders!

A rock under your pillow

Bible passages taped to mirrors

A green dot on your watch so that when you check the time you'll be reminded to pray