

Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life
© 2009 LifelongFaith Associates

Permission is granted by LifelongFaith Associates to reprint this chapter from *Living Well* for program use within a church or other non-profit organization.

This chapter may not be reprinted for any other purpose or published in another publication without the written permission of the publisher.

LifelongFaith Associates
40 Brighton Road
Naugatuck, CT 06770
203-729-2953
www.lifelongfaith.com
(Contact: jroberto@lifelongfaith.com)

Living Well

Christian Practices for Everyday Life

10 Praying



10 Praying

Yearning



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?

Starting the Day

Margaret worries a lot about the safety and well being of her daughters. The violence of the inner city and the racism in her larger community frighten her. She tries to spend as much time as she can with them, nurturing and protecting them. She also prays a lot for them and for herself. She not only prays *for* them, but she also prays *with* them every morning before she sends them off to school:

We usually pray about ten minutes before the bus comes. I pray and ask God to bless their school and to bless their teachers. I call their teachers' names out, and I call the bus driver's name out. I ask God to bless my girls, to help them have a good day, to help them follow their teacher's instructions, to help them be good and do well in school. If it's Monday, I always thank God for a good weekend, and then we end, "In Jesus' name we pray, we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us, Amen."

Every parent knows the frantic, pressured morning time of getting children out the door to the school bus. Nevertheless, Margaret has found a way to carve out time for a prayer that blesses her daughters and sends them into God's care for the day. It is simple yet powerful.

(Diana Garland, *Sacred Stories of Ordinary Families*)

Listening for God's Voice

Sometimes I feel like I have no real sense of direction. At 45, this is a little scary. I think my distraction is due to the variety of roles I play and my tendency to try to please others. Much of my day is spent responding to requests: "Mommy, will you..." "Susan, can you..." My world is full of spoken and unspoken expectations that I try to live up to as a parent, as a person, and as a friend.

I believe I have to remove myself from the voices that barrage me in order to find my true compass. This includes a daily walk just to listen. The guiding light of my life is the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. In our hectic, noisy world, I have to slow down or withdraw in order to hear it. Prayer, I have discovered, is less about what I say and more about what I hear.

Time set apart with God is like a hike to a peak from the middle of a dense forest; it gives me perspective and some ability to see where I've been and where I am going.

Discerning God's voice is not so hard when I make time to listen closely. Sometimes I hear it as a sudden insight when I step back from a situation. Other times, it's a deep sense of my priorities or a conviction about something I should do or say. I often take a walk with a pencil and notepad in my pocket, and return with notes for a speech or piece of writing. Later, when someone tells me she was moved by the words I'd scribbled on that paper, I know my prompting came from God.

My pursuit of spiritual truth is not about religion as much as it is about relationship. It is not about intellectualizing God's commands, but about internalizing his truth within my heart as well as my head—an understanding so deep and intimate that it affects not only my thinking, but my behavior as well. On my daily walks, I've recognized how to parent my children through difficult situations, been prompted to call a friend I hadn't heard from in a while, and felt compelled to reach out to strangers who soon became my friends.

I believe in a daily walk to listen because that is when I am close to God; that is when I find my way. I am most at peace when I tune out the voices of the world long enough to hear the still, small voice of God directing me. "Be still," Psalm 46 reminds me, "and know that I am God."

(Susan Cosio, *This I Believe*, www.thisibelieve.org, October 2, 2006)

Prayer Can Wear Many Faces

- The nurse at work, deeply involved with patients and paperwork, sometimes pauses to consider that she works not only for a paycheck that supports her children. She recalls also that her work taps into God's unique gifts to her; her compassion contributes to healing the suffering Christ in human beings. That pause to reflect may last only the length of a coffee break, but it transforms her work. She is centered and re-energized by knowing that God goes with her, into the oncology ward as well as into the coffee shop. She has not fallen on her knees, but she has an ongoing relationship with God, an attitude of prayer.
- The husband watches beside the hospital bed of his wife. He says nothing; he holds her hand as he has for two weeks.
- The young woman spends the first or last moments of the day bent over a journal. Her roommates think she's doodling; in fact, she is making sense of her life, struggling to understand the day's twists and turns, gifts and challenges.



- The mother rises to nurse the baby for the third time that night. With half-opened eyes, she bumbles toward the crib, scoops up the infant, and feeds him sleepily.
- The student completes a week of final exams, three term papers, a group project, and the organization of a canned-food drive. He dives into bed, but pauses for a moment before falling asleep. Words addressed to the mysterious Holy One come muffled by exhaustion: "Thanks. I got it all done."
- The dancer takes a deep breath, then leaps onto the stage. As the music swells, she knows that this is the moment into which long hours of practice have poured. The dancer pirouettes and pivots with utter joy in the strength and grace of a body trained for dance.
- The business executive knows that a long day looms ahead. She faces the window and lifts both hands in an eloquent gesture. "Thank you for a new day," her hands seem to say. "I am yours, O God. Help me to be kind as well as efficient."
- The two friends meet over coffee to talk through a dilemma that concerns them both. They listen carefully, lean across the table toward each other, joke, respect each other's truth. They leave, knowing clearly what action they must take; the caffeine was in the conversation.

(Kathy Coffey, *God in the Moment: Making Every Day a Prayer*)

10 Praying

Reflecting

What is the role of prayer in your spiritual life? Make time to reflect on your prayer life and the prayer life of your household. 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. You can make it part of your prayer time during the week or month. You can discuss these questions together as a household. 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? Consider the following questions:
 - 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.)
- Which prayer traditions have been helpful to you? How? When? Why, or why not?
- What new ways of praying have you tried? Have they been helpful? How? Why? Or why not?
- Has there ever been a time when you made no effort to pray and “gave things a rest,” either inadvertently or on purpose, in your prayer life? Why? What was this like? Looking back, can you see any benefits from this experience?
- 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?
- Have you experienced any change in God’s faithfulness to you?
- Have you experienced any change in your faithfulness to God?
- When were the prayer times when you felt closest to God? Why?
- Would you say that prayer is an integral part of your everyday life today? Why or why not? If not, how could it be?
- If you are a parent or grandparent, how and when do you pray with your (grand) children?



Exploring

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 these 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.

Take some time to reflect on your own understanding of prayer as you read and reflect on the wisdom of these contemporary guides to the practice of prayer. Remember that prayer is all of this and much more.

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 every 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*)



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*)

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*)

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*)

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 dis-eased.

(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 wisdom about prayer did you gain from these spiritual guides?
- What does prayer mean to you now?



10 Praying

Living

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)

How do we move from recognizing the importance of prayer in our life and in the life of our family or household, to the actual practice of prayer in our daily lives? How do we become more skilled at seeing God in all we do?

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. There are many ways to pray. Henri Nouwen reminds us “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*)

Use the following guide to prepare for prayer and to experience a variety of prayer activities—alone or with your family or household. Try all of these activities so that gradually you will find the rhythm and pattern that works for you. Remember, this is only a start. There are dozens of additional ways to pray that you can learn as you grow in the practice of prayer. (For additional prayer activities, see the other chapters in *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*.)

Preparing to Pray

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

1. 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; twenty minutes is better. Set aside a regular time: morning, noontime, before dinner, or before going to sleep at night.

■ When I will pray:

■ When our household will pray:



2. 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 the house or church.

Take advantage of outdoor settings, such as a labyrinth or prayer path at a local church. Walk in a park or on a hiking trail; even a corner of your own yard can be a regular place for prayer. Go for a walk at your lunch break. If you drive to work, leave early and spend time with God, quietly sitting in the parking lot before going in. If you spend a lot of time in your car, make every drive a unique time to meet with God by playing instrumental music as you pray. Personalize your prayer space—keep a Bible, a cross, an icon, a special picture, or a candle nearby.

■ Where I will pray:

■ When our household will pray:

Create a home altar for prayer and ritual. Find a place in your home (e.g., in the kitchen or family room) that you can set aside and decorate as your home altar or prayer space. Include items such as a Bible, candles, art, photographs, prayer books, and prayer petitions on your altar.

3. 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 I will position myself for prayer:

■ How we will position ourselves as a household for prayer:

10 Praying

4. 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 I will relax myself for prayer:

■ How will we relax as a household for prayer:

A One-Minute Experiment in Prayer

There is a beautiful simplicity in learning to seize moments here and there to connect with God's presence. Even pausing to say the word “Jesus” on occasion, mulling over what he means to you for a few seconds, can have a great impact. This may not come completely naturally for you, though, so here are a few suggestions that can help you pursue the practice until it is woven into the fabric of your daily life.

- *Be intentional.* Start by considering times when you might pause to pray during your day; for example, at meals or at certain times, like 9 AM, noon, and 6 PM. You can also decide simply to think about God in small ways throughout the day whenever an opportunity presents itself.
- *Be God-centered.* One of the most important things we can do to is get to know God. It might be helpful to choose one of God's attributes—such as kindness, mercy, forgiveness, or love—on which to focus for a day or even a week. You could write out Scripture passages that speak of this attribute on cards and carry them with you.



- **Establish “triggers.”** Think of ways your everyday life can be a reminder to meet God in the moment. For example, you might tape a card with a Scripture verse on the steering wheel of your car and glance at it when you stop for a red light, or tape it to your bathroom mirror and pause to reflect on it each time you brush your teeth or comb your hair or wash your hands. You can also practice thinking of God while noticing the beauty of creation—a sunset, a fragrant flower, or a smiling child—when helping a person in need, or when faced with a difficult task or situation.
- **Welcome God’s presence.** God speaks to us often during the day. Take a few moments whenever you can to listen, be attentive to the divine presence, and open your heart to God. Present any issue or situation in which you seek God’s wisdom. Ask if God has something to reveal to you. Be grateful for God’s presence. You can do all of this in a minute’s time, and before long it will become a habit you won’t want to do without.

(Adapted from Tricia McGary Rhodes, *Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have*)

Five-Minute Experiments in Prayer

One habit that takes minimal effort but can produce great results is to develop a discipline of taking time when we awaken and when we lay down to sleep, to connect and commune with God. While you may plan other five-minute spaces throughout the day, beginning and ending it in God’s presence lays a foundation and establishes a perspective that affects your entire day.

Upon Waking

- Plan to spend your first conscious moments in the presence of God. If you wake up before your alarm or if you don’t normally set one, quietly affirm that God is present with you as soon as you begin to stir, being grateful that God has been with you through night. (If you wake up to an alarm, quiet your mind first by taking a few deep breaths.)
- Spend a few moments acknowledging the beauty of Jesus, perhaps by focusing on one of his many names in Scripture. You may want to plan for this in advance by choosing one name to focus on for a week or more.
- Offer your day to God as you go about your waking-up routine. Listen for God’s voice, and be open to what God might be saying to you.
- Thank God for all that will happen during this day. Ask God to make his presence known in and through you as you interact with others.

Before Going to Sleep

- Praise God for the ways he has blessed you today. These can be anything from a good meal, a phone call from a friend, the solution to a difficult problem, or an answer to a specific prayer. Try to name at least five things.
- Reflect on your day. Ask God to show you how he has worked in and through you, and thank him for these gifts. Look inside yourself to see if there was an occasion of sin during this day. If so, ask God for forgiveness and healing.
- Speak to God about the people on your mind—your children, spouse, friends, parents, and others—and pray for them accordingly.
- Offer your sleep to God. Ask God to speak to you even as you rest, and enable you to awaken mindful of his presence.

(Adapted from Tricia McGary Rhodes, *Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have*)

Ways to Pray

Contemplative Centering Prayer

*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*

Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where we seek to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of Christ'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 centering prayer we take time to just be with God, realizing that God is beyond all human thoughts, feelings and concepts. 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 can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
- Once you are comfortable, light a candle, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Then set the timer or stop watch 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.

Scriptural Prayer

*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 manifested to us is through Scripture. 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.

Praying with Scripture can be done alone or with others. When done with others, it can be a means of sharing more deeply the faith you attempt to live out day by day. The following steps will help you to use Scripture in prayer.

- 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.
- Choose a comfortable place where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
- 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.
- 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. Do not discuss them, just say them.
- 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.



Intercessory Prayer

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 God into doing our will. Rather, it is a way we become aware of God's prayer for a person and join in that intercession.

Pray 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.

Respond "Lord, hear us" to each petition

Consider keeping a household prayer list on a 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.

10 Praying

Praise Prayer

*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*

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.

Offer prayers of praise:

“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.”

Thanksgiving Prayer

*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 thanks to God:

“We thank you, God.”

“We are grateful for your goodness.”

■ Prayer styles I will use:

■ Prayer styles our household will use:

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.



Online Resources for Daily Prayer

Upper Room

Daily Reflections:
www.upperroom.org/DAILY

Daily Devotional:
www.upperroom.org/devotional

Prayer Resources:
www.upperroom.org/methodx/thelife

Taize

Daily Bible readings and meditation:
www.taize.fr/en_article1000.html

Prayer for Each Day:
www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html

Sacred Space

Daily Prayer Online: [/www.sacredspace.ie/](http://www.sacredspace.ie/)

Daily Lectionary Readings

Online: www.usccb.org/nab/today.shtml

Podcast: www.usccb.org/nab/nabpodcast.shtml

iTunes: "Daily readings from
 the New American Bible"

Pray-As-You-Go: Daily Prayer for Your MP3 Player

www.pray-as-you-go.org

Creighton University

Daily Bible Reading and Reflections:
www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily

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.

Resources for Living the Christian Practice of Praying

Go to our project web site
www.lifelongfaith.com
 for exciting ideas, practical resources,
 and recommended books
 and web sites to help you live the
 Christian practice of Praying.

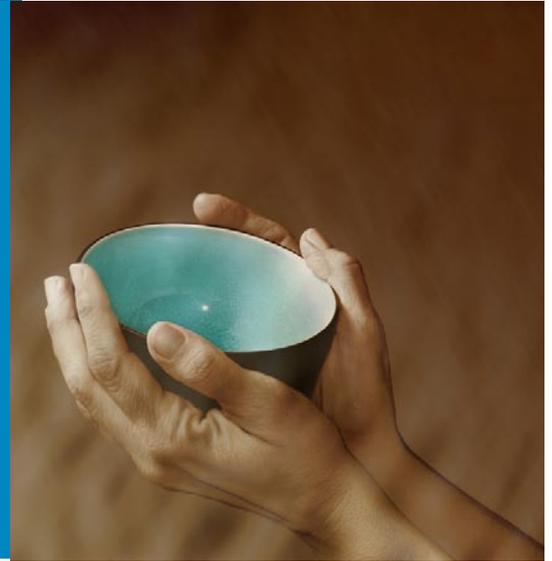
10 Praying

Praying

Prayer for the Journey

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.
Thank you.
Amen.

(Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*)



A Contemporary Lord's Prayer

Abba in heaven,
your name is holy!
Your justice come,
your will be done,
on earth as in the heavens.
Fill us this day
with all that we need.
Teach us to heal
as you have healed us.
Bring us not to the test,
but deliver us always
from the power of evil.
You alone are God,
and all belongs to you!

(Edward F. Gabriele, *Gathered at the Table in Prayer and Song*)