



PRAYER:  
PRACTICE  
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PRACTICE



ISCOVERY  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

## **Imaginative Contemplation: Prayer with the Imagination**

"Imaginative contemplation is a way to get to know and meet Christ in the gospels. The ultimate goal is personal encounter with Him.

The Holy Spirit makes present the mystery of Christ found in the particular passage, and helps you to explore things in a way you might not find possible through regular reading of the scriptures or study of the scriptures.

Let the events of Jesus' life in these scenes be present to you.

Visualize the event as if you were making a movie.

Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event.

At some point, place yourself in the scene and meet Jesus there.

We might initially worry about going beyond the text of the Gospel. If you have offered your time of prayer to God, then begin by trusting that God is communicating with you. If you wonder if your imagination is going "too far," then do some discernment with how you are praying.

Where did your imagining lead you: closer to God or farther away?

Is your imagining bringing consolation or desolation?

*"Some people find imaginative prayer difficult. They may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet they have some intuition or gut reaction to the story. Or they may hear or feel the story more than visualize. Pray as you are able, don't try to force it. Rest assured that God will speak to you, whether through your memory, understanding, intellect, emotions or imagination."*

- Kevin O'Brien SJ

### **Suggested passages to begin with**

Luke 18:35-43

Luke 19:1-10

Luke 8:43-48

John 20:1-18

Luke 24:13-32

Matthew 14:22-33

Luke 10:38-42

John 13:1-11

John 5:1-8

**Pray-As-You-Go prayer tools [www.prayasyougo.org](http://www.prayasyougo.org)**

## Writing a Personal Prayer of Lament

[Note: This process may take some time. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your expression of lament. We have time! Try sitting with the things you are bringing (disappointment, sadness, loss, anger, frustration, doubt etc) for a while and not rushing through to where you “think you should be” in trust and praise. Let God sit with you as you look at your feelings, and emotions together.]

“Prayer is a long loving look at what is real.” Imagine yourself AND your real feelings and emotions as being in the long loving gaze of God. Remember that what you're bringing is not a surprise to Him. You can not shock Him with your candor. He knows better than you do the depths of your emotions, and the sources of your lament. His longing is for you to know yourself- what is most true about you- as Beloved of God. Trust that your Belovedness is so complete that it includes these points and sources of lament.

### Application steps (adapted from Ann Arbor Vineyard Church):

Take some time and reflect on how the last week (or a time frame of your choice) has been for you. Make note of the predominant emotions you have been feeling during this time, in particular the more negative ones. Reflect on a particular situation or recurring theme that you know has been causing you distress, pain or anxiety and that you feel is beyond your control. Imagine that God is with you and that He has given you complete freedom to lay it all out, to complain fearlessly without judgment, in order to get it all off your chest.

With a piece of paper and pen, invite God's presence and follow the steps outlined below.

1. **Address and introductory cry:** Identify the Lord as the person to whom you are addressing your complaint. Request for His presence as you express what is on your heart.
2. **Complaint or Lament:** Articulate the problem you are wrestling with. Detail how it is affecting you, the pain it is causing, and ask the Lord for His help.
3. **Confession of Trust:** Verbalize your trust in the Lord. Share your hopes that He will come to your aid, that He will be present with you in your situation.
4. **Prayer for Deliverance:** Request deliverance, or God's intervention in the problem.
5. **Praise:** Offer praise and thanksgiving to God for God's many blessings and faithfulness.

Another way to do this is through pictures, or color. As you move through each step listed above, draw a picture of what you are feeling/bringing and what is being stirred up in you. Or simply use swaths of color on the page. Cutting out pictures that you are drawn to from a magazine is another way to access your lament.

Pray through each step and allow your right brain to take over. Typically, this is the place where the cries of the soul find their voice. The left brain tries to rationalize our feelings and emotions away and has great success! But when we pick up color/art and ask the Lord to speak to us through it, we give Him the reins to unlock the depths of our emotion and feeling. The artists in our community know and live this regularly. For those of us who don't think of ourselves as artists, this is an especially powerful exercise that invites us to take the hand of God being offered and trust Him to lead us into things only He knows about us!

### Recommended Books:

Finding God: Praying the Psalms in Times of Depression - Thomas Lewis  
A Grace Disguised - Gerald Sittser  
A Grief Observed - C.S. Lewis  
Invitations From God - Adele Calhoun

## Breath Prayer

Breath prayer, or prayer of the heart has been practiced by Christians for centuries. From Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, by Adele Calhoun: *“Breathing is an unconscious thing. And breath prayer reminds us that just as we can’t live on one breath of air, we can’t live on one breath of God. God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breathe him in all day long.”*

Acts 17:28 “For in him we live and move and have our being.”

This form of praying connects our mind with the reality that God is as close as the breath we breathe, and reminds us that our words need only be small.

Examples of breath prayer

**Breathe in: “Abba” Breathe out: I belong to You**

**Breathe in: “Healer” Breathe out: “Speak the word and I shall be healed”**

**Breathe in “Shepherd” Breathe out: “I have all I need”**

There is also an adventure in discovering your own breath prayer! Ask the Lord to identify what is most true about you right now or what is most true about your desire to be with Him in this moment. Ask Him for a word or short phrase that will express that as you breathe it in and out. Let this prayer be your breath prayer until the Lord shifts or changes your own longings and desires.

### **Recommended Books:**

Sacred Rhythms - Ruth Haley Barton

The Breath of the Soul: Reflections on Prayer - Joan Chittister

The Way of the Pilgrim - translated by Helen Bacovcin

## Centering Prayer

A story is told about a 19th century French priest who once noticed a peasant come into the church every day at noon and stay for hours in front of the communion elements.

One day the priest asked this man, "What do you say during all that time you stand before Jesus in the Eucharist?"

The Peasant replied, "Nothing. I look at Him and He looks at me."

Spending time practicing simply sitting in the Long Loving Gaze of God, is a form of prayer that shapes and transforms us. In fact, this kind of wordless prayer is so formational BECAUSE we simply sit. We don't DO anything. We sit and submit to the presence of the Trinity and let Them DO what They DO.

Sometimes we feel something powerful during or after this form of prayer. Other times, we feel nothing. That is part of the power of it. It doesn't rely on us to make something happen, and reminds us Who prayer is really about. It's not primarily about us. Prayer is primarily about God and what He wants to do in us... because He loves us.

This kind of prayer shapes humility in us, even as it deepens our awareness of our Belovedness. Again, another mystery :)

## Suggested ways to enter into this practice

1. **Sacred Word:** Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your desire to let Jesus' action and presence form you. The word can be a deep desire of your heart (love, grace, peace) or a name or title of God that is dear to you (Jesus, Good Shepherd, Healer of my soul, Counselor, Devender). Become still and offer yourself and your love to God. Let this word or phrase draw you into the presence of Christ. When you are distracted, return gently to this word and to the Lord. At the end of the prayer remain still for several minutes. Throughout your day, return to your word and remind the Lord of your love for him.
2. Sit comfortably in a position that allows you to stay alert and attentive. **Read a short passage of scripture slowly out loud.** Choose **a word** from the text as your centering word. Then follow the directions given in #1. Let the word lead you into the presence of Jesus. When thoughts distract you, return to Christ by repeating your word. Simply be with Jesus. Offer yourself to him. Wait in his presence.
3. **Centering prayer App:** Contemplative Outreach <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org> has a wonderful free app to help us along the way in our centering prayer practice. Enjoy!

## Recommended Books:

Centering Prayer - M.Basil Pennington

Open Mind, Open Heart - Thomas Keating

Contemplative Outreach <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org>

## Lectio Divina: (Sacred Reading)

"Lectio Divina is an approach to the scriptures that sets us up to listen for the word of God spoken to us in the present moment. It is a practice of divine reading that dates back to the early mothers and fathers of the Christian faith.

"The practice itself is rooted in the belief that through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are indeed alive and active as we engage them for spiritual transformation. "For the Word of God is alive and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12

"One of the reasons this approach is so powerful is that lectio divina involves a delicate balance of silence and word. It is a very concrete way of entering into the rhythm of speaking and listening involved in intimate communication."

Sacred Rhythms- Ruth Haley Barton

## Lectio Divina Exercise

1. **Ready:** Choose a passage of scripture. Best to start with a short one. Take a moment to become still before the Lord and before His Word. Let your body relax and take some deep breaths to orient yourself to the presence of God.
2. **Read:** Read through the passage slowly listening for a word or phrase that jumps off of the page. Read through the passage again slowly, this time out loud and linger on that word or phrase.
3. **Reflect:** Write it down, and trust that this is God's word for you today. Read the word or phrase out loud and sit with it for a bit, and allow God to speak to you.
4. **Respond:** Ask the following questions and write down what you sense the Lord's response is.
  - a. Lord, what do you want me to know about this word or phrase?
  - b. Lord, is there a picture or an image you want me to see or that you want to expand around this word or phrase?
  - c. Lord, what are you calling me to either be or do today around this word or phrase?
5. **Return:** End with a prayer of thanks for the word you've been given, ask for the Spirit to continue to clarify His word to you as you return to it throughout the day. Ask for the strength and courage to act on that word.

## Scripture suggestions for Lectio Divina

Mark 10:46-52 What do you want?

Isaiah 55:1-13 Everyone who thirsts

Matthew 11:25-30 Jesus' words of invitation

Jeremiah 29:11-14 Jeremiah's word of hope

Isaiah 43:1-7 Fear not

Psalms 131 Hope in the Lord

Psalms 139: 1-18 God at the origin of my being

Jeremiah 18:1-6 Potter and clay

John 2:1-11 The first of the signs

John 4:1-42 The Samaritan woman

Mark 5:24-34 Courage to tell Jesus everything

Mark 1:21-39 A Day with Jesus

Luke 7:36-50 Lavish Devotion

Matthew 8:23-27 Why are you afraid?

Jeremiah 1:4-19 Called from before my birth

Luke 19:1-10 Zaccheus

## Recommended Books:

Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer - David Benner

Praying Scripture For a Change - Tim Gray

Praise Habit - David Crowder

## Examen

"The practice of the examen- a prayer of discernment at the end of each day, helps us to see the ways we have sensed God's presence or felt distant from him in our daily life. This prayer of attending to God's presence, when practiced regularly, opens our eyes to new ways of recognizing God's interruptions, God's attempts to catch our attention through our day. It is a prayer that sharpens our awareness and clears our vision so that we learn to discern where God is in our lives every day." - Julie Benner, *Contemplative Vision*

"The Examen makes us aware of moments that at first we might easily pass by as insignificant, moments that ultimately can give direction for our lives." Dennis Linn

When we practice the prayer of Examen we are primarily asking ourselves two questions as we allow the Spirit to take us back through our day. Choose the set below that feels most like it was written by you and apply it to the suggested exercises

- For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful?
- When did I give and receive the most love today? When did I give and receive the least love today?
- What was the most life-giving part of my day? What was the most life-thwarting part of my day?
- When today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others and myself? When today did I have the least sense of connection?
- Where was I aware of living out of the fruit of the Spirit? Where was there an absence of the fruit of the Spirit?
- Where did I experience desolation? Where did I find consolation?

## Suggested Exercises for the Examen

1. Find a quiet place to reflect. Ask the Lord to take you back through your day as if you are watching a movie scene by scene. Start from when you woke up. Ask Him to shine a gentle light and show you evidence of His presence with you. Notice where you felt the most alive today. Notice where you felt the most drained today.
2. Make a list of feelings words. For example: accepted, anxious, apathetic, confused, defeated, disgusted, ecstatic, enraged, paranoid, weak, undecided. Then begin to ask yourself the examen questions. Let these words help you articulate what drains or saps you and what gives you life. Let this knowing inform your choices.
3. Find a quiet moment to reflect on your day or week. Open your palms and ask the holy Spirit to show you the moment for which you are least grateful. What made that moment difficult? Be with your feelings; don't try to change them or make them acceptable. Offer them up to God. Talk to him about them. Where was God in that moment? You may want to thank God that he is always ready to be with you and talk to you.
4. Look back over the past year. List the things that brought you life and the times you were able to truly give and receive love. Make another list of the life-thwarting moments. What do you discover about yourself? How can this self-awareness help you choose a healthier, God-directed life?

## Recommended Books:

The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius in Daily Life - Kevin O'Brien

Journey with Jesus: Discovering the Exercises of Saint Ignatius - Larry Warner

Sleeping with Bread - Dennis Linn, Sheila Linn

Pray-As-You-Go prayer tools [www.prayasyougo.org](http://www.prayasyougo.org)

## **Fixed Hour Prayer**

From Spiritual Disciplines Handbook- Adele Calhoun: "Fixed hour prayer, or praying the hours is a practice of prayer that mimics the regular daily rhythms of Jesus' own life. Jesus learned prayer from his own parents who would have taught him to pray in the traditional Hebrew way. There was morning, midday and evening prayer.

"Devout Jews would go to the temple at noon and three o'clock every day. After Jesus' death, his disciples continued to pray at fixed hours of the day. (Acts 3:1; 10:3,9,30) This custom of praying at set daily intervals quickly became part of the early church's rhythm of prayer."

We begin this practice where we are. We may already have one fixed time of prayer in the morning. So we simply add one more time-perhaps in the middle of work- as a reminder that time is a gift made for work and relationship, relationship with God and others.

As we regularly honor this one intentional moment with God, we begin to realize how the world and its demands control us, leaving us frantic and overwhelmed. And stopping to pray, even if we have to set the timer, cultivates an awareness of the unseen reality of God's presence in all time and things.

Prayers offered at fixed hours can be spontaneous or liturgical. We can pray Scripture, the divine office, daily hours, memorized prayers or simply pour our hearts out to God.

## **Suggested ways to begin**

1. In addition to your normal time of prayer, establish one new time of prayer during the day. Set a timer to remind you to stop for 1-15 minutes to pray. After one week, consider what this has been like for you.
2. When you wake in the middle of the night, don't fight with yourself about why you're awake. Enter into Vigils. Lean deeply into God and simply pray for the things that come to mind. Don't hurry. Attend to God as David did "in the watches of the night".
3. If you would like to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, try using *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle. These three volumes are guides to prayer for the entire year

## **Recommended Books:**

*The Divine Hours* - Phyllis Tickle

*The Music of Silence* - David Steindl-Rast and Sharon Lebell

*Praying the Hours*- Susanne Guthrie

*Receiving the Day*- Dorothy C. Bass

*Seven* - Jen Hatmaker



## Praying Scripture

“Praying scripture is a way of entering deeply into the text with a heart alert to a unique and personal word from God. Words and verses that catch our attention become invitations to be with God in prayer. When our prayers seem to be more about maintaining control and offering God our agenda for his stamp of approval, praying scripture can return us to a simpler state of openness and attentiveness to God. We lay aside our own agendas and open ourselves to the prayers given to us in the Bible.” - Spiritual Disciplines Handbook

## Suggested ways to begin

1. Become quiet and breathe in God's love. Breathe out your self-doubts and self-recriminations. Turn to Psalm 139. Slowly read the psalm aloud, pausing after each verse. Substitute your own name for the pronouns me and I. For instance, insert your name in the blanks: For you created \_\_\_\_\_'s inmost being; you knit \_\_\_\_\_ together in \_\_\_\_\_'s mother's womb. \_\_\_\_\_praises you because \_\_\_\_\_ is fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, \_\_\_\_\_knows that full well (Psalm 139:13-14) Do not hurry. There's no need to get through the entire psalm at once. Respond to God's nurturing knowing.
2. Meditate on a passage of scripture and interact with God around the revelation this story brings. Whatever jumps out at you, whatever stirs you, wherever you notice a response to what you've read, let that be the thing that prompts your conversation with God.
3. Listen to the questions Jesus puts to the disciples as if they were questions He is putting to you. Let your response to those questions be the springboard for conversation with God.
4. Sing God's word. When a song comes to your mind, receive it as a word from God to you. Listen to the song. What is God saying to you? What do you want to say to Him?
5. Is there a story in Scripture that reminds you of your life or a situation in your life? Go to that story and begin to meditate on it. What is God saying to you? How might the life of a biblical character help shape your prayers?

## Recommended Books:

Praying God's Word: Breaking Free from Spiritual Strongholds - Beth Moore

Praying the Parables - Joyce Huggett