

TEACH
US TO
PRAY

PRAYER GUIDE



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This booklet is a companion resource for our "Teach Us to Pray" series. The different forms of prayer detailed have been carefully selected from roughly 2000 years of church history and tradition. The purpose of these prayers are to simply provide next steps or some additional help for followers of Jesus looking to deepen their connection with the Father. Included are tips, tools and guides. This document will be regularly updated. The purpose of this resource is only to help us create additional space for a deep, abiding relationship with God.

Remain centered around these purposes:

Love God

Learn the way of Jesus

Live with purpose

INDEX

- 04 – Simple Prayer
- 05 – The Lord's Prayer
- 06 – Breath Prayer
- 07 – Prayer of Examen
- 08 – Imaginative Prayer
- 09 – Intercessory Prayer
- 10 – Stillness Prayer
- 11 – Fixed-Hour Prayer
- 12 – "Come, Holy Spirit"

SIMPLE PRAYER

Simple prayer is the most primary form of prayer available to us, and the most common form of prayer we find in the Bible. In practicing simple prayers, we simply bring ourselves before God, just the way we are.

Simple prayer is found throughout the scriptures, where ordinary people bring ordinary concerns to a loving and compassionate Father. Even Jesus called us to simple prayer when he urged us to ask for daily bread.

There is no real structure to this form of prayer. There are also no pretenses. It's simple and honest. We do not pretend to be someone we are not, and we do not conceal our motives or ourselves from God.

Three reminders to help you pray simple prayers:

(1) Remind yourself that prayer is an ongoing conversation with God. It's a place where we meet our compassionate Father in growing and loving relationship with Him. Come, just the way you are.

(2) Remind yourself not to be discouraged by a lack of prayer in your life. Even when we go extended periods of time without prayer, we still hunger for God. That hunger or desire for prayer is itself a form of prayer.

(3) Remind yourself not to try too hard to pray. If prayer is not a regular part of your life rhythm, don't try and run a marathon of prayer. Start with simple prayers that are honest and short.

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THE LORD'S PRAYER

Throughout the four gospels, the disciples only explicitly ask Jesus to teach them something *once*. In Luke 11v1, they say: "Lord, teach us to pray." For them (Jesus' closest friends and travelling companions), they saw that everything Jesus did was rooted deeply in his relationship with the Father.

Jesus' response to them is the greatest prayer in human history. It's not overly long; but provides us with a template by which we can filter our prayers. Though we often start our prayers with a shopping list of things for God to do, the first words in the Lord's prayer instead recognize that God is our Father with good intentions for us, that He is closer than the very air we breathe, and that there is no parallel to Him in the universe. In prayer, take time regularly to reflect on those truths before anything else.

MATTHEW 6v9-13 (NIV)

"Then, this, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
as it is in heaven.'

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also forgive our debtors.'

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

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BREATH PRAYER

A form of prayer originating from the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the third century, **breath prayer** is the practice of contemplating Jesus' presence in quiet solitude, while meditating on short, one breath prayers.

By gently repeating a breath prayer, we breathe in God's Word slowly and intentionally, letting the meaning descend into our minds and hearts. This form of Christian meditation helps us take scripture from our minds down into the depths of our hearts so that our will is formed by it.

Breath prayer can be useful for those dealing with worry, fear, anger, low self-esteem, or compulsive actions, mindsets and rhythms.

Examples:

From Matthew 11v28-30

Inhale: "Humble and gentle One,"

Exhale: "you are the rest for my soul."

From Matthew 6v10

Inhale: "On earth"

Exhale: "as it is in heaven."

From Psalm 46v10

Inhale: "Be still"

Exhale: "and know you are God"

From Romans 8v38-39

Inhale: "Nothing can separate me"

Exhale: "from the love of God"

From 2 Corinthians 12v9

Inhale: "Your grace"

Exhale: "is enough for me."

From John 15

Inhale: "True Vine and Gardner"

Exhale: "I abide in you."

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

A form of prayer emerging in the sixteenth century from Ignatius of Loyola, the **prayer of examen** is the practice of recognizing instances of God's grace throughout our day. As James K.A. Smith said in his book *You Are What You Love*, the examen is "a practice for paying attention to your life." During this nightly prayer, we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day, as well as examine the areas of our lives where we need healing. We reflect on the day having just ended.

The prayer of examen can be useful to those experiencing hurriedness, compulsive actions and emotions, or a lack of peaceful and daily reflection. The four steps to the prayer of examen are:

I REPLAY

Replay the key events and emotions from your day, asking God to reveal His presence to you in those moments.

III REPENT

Recognize the moments where you veered off track. Were there words, thoughts, desires or actions that don't look like Jesus? Confess, receive His grace and ask for His spirit to empower you.

II RECALL

Thank God for the moments of joy within your day. Thank God for His presence and any blessings that come to mind, no matter how small.

IV RENEW

Considering tomorrow with hope, asking God for the strength and wisdom to walk the path of Jesus in the everyday moments of life.

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IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

A form of prayer emerging in the sixteenth century from Ignatius of Loyola, **imaginative prayer** is the practice of using our imagination in prayer to visualize what is not physically present to us. We rarely think in abstract strings of information, and yet many of us experience prayer this way. God beautifully designed our brains to produce images as a means of interacting with others and the world around us. However, when our imaginations can correspond with the truth we find in God's Word, this has the potential to help form us like powerful moments and memories have shaped who we already are. Here are four steps to praying imaginative prayers:

I SETTING

Find a time and a place where you'll be free from distraction.

What do you see, hear and feel?

Recreate that place in your mind, imagining yourself stepping into it.

II THE SPIRIT

Pray and ask for the Spirit to lead your imagination towards the truth of God. Ask that this opportunity would lead you to experience what you already know intellectually.

IV MEETING JESUS

Now, imagine Jesus also entering that place. Though he is not physically with you, you are still meeting with him in a very real way, where images help represent reality. The accuracy of imagining what Jesus looks like is way less important than the representation of his character. Imagine him sitting with you before you begin simply talking to Jesus.

III LOCATION

Imagine a private space in your mind that is familiar and beautiful to you. This place should be easy to recall and feel safe. Be detailed.

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INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Intercessory prayer involves us shifting our center of gravity from our own needs to the needs and concerns of others. In this selfless form of prayer, we simply pray for the people and world around us.

Pray through the eyes, ears and heart of Jesus. When we align our will with God's will, prayer can be incredibly powerful. In fact, it's the primary way by which God ushers in His kingdom. Who in your life could benefit from prayer? As Walter Wink said in his book *The Powers That Be*: "history belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being."

Here are four helpful tips for intercessory prayer:

I GET INFORMED

Get informed about the person, place or situation you're praying for. Listen carefully so you can understand their circumstances or predicament better. Research facts and understand needs.

II GET INSPIRED

Get inspired by the possibilities. Think to yourself, what would happen to this person, place or situation if God's purpose for them started to come true?

III GET ENGAGED

Get to a place where you can pray authoritatively instead of timidly. Pray with both confidence and reverence, desiring to see God's kingdom come in this person, place or situation.

IV GET IN SYNC

Get involved with others, praying with more than one person in agreement. Jesus teaches us that there is unique power in the united intercession of God's people.

STILLNESS PRAYER

An important practice in both historic Jewish and early Christian traditions, **stillness prayer** is the act of learning to be still and silent in prayer. The goal of stillness prayer is being aware of God's presence and the voice of the Spirit. This practice helps us become more conscious of the Creator, who is closer than the air we breathe.

However, stillness is counter-cultural and takes courage. In a world of hurriedness, being still and silent before God is a way for us to put on the breaks and stop, recapturing what is most important amid our busy schedule. Here are three steps you can take to still your mind before God:

I STILL YOUR BODY

The Hebrew word for 'repent' is *shuvah* which literally means 'to return'. Choosing to be still can be seen as a physical act of repentance. In stillness, we no longer run, but return to the love and care of the Creator.

II STILL YOUR MIND

Quiet your mind and concentrate on your breath. It may be helpful to start with a **breath prayer**. The act of stilling your mind may reveal chaos and distraction to you.

Don't ignore or suppress those thoughts. Instead, acknowledge that they are there and surrender them to God, returning to your breath and awareness of His presence.

III STAY IN THE MOMENT

Stay in this moment of stillness and silence for an extended period. If you don't hear the Spirit speaking to you at first, resist the temptation to feel discouraged. This kind of prayer is a lot like an exercise that needs repetition and consistency.

FIXED-HOUR PRAYER

Fixed-hour prayer is simply the act of scheduling times of intentional conversation with God throughout your day. This ancient practice from the Bible is a way of practicing the presence of God. This helps us live out Paul's instruction for us to "pray without ceasing." In doing so, we align ourselves with God's will for our lives (1 Thessalonians 5v17-18).

By scheduling times of prayer throughout our days, we intentionally slow down and open ourselves up to the flow of the Holy Spirit. This is not a command or a religious obligation. Instead, it's an opportunity for us to live in a deep, abiding relationship with Jesus.

We recommend you start simple and from where you are. The following example is just *one* way you can practice fixed-hour prayer:

I MORNING

Pray soon after you wake up and before any significant work for the day. It might be helpful to spend time in silence, in a place free from distractions. Try and eliminate the external and internal noises that occupy our minds. Pray a Psalm before speaking openly and honestly with Jesus about the day ahead.

II AFTERNOON

Take a pause at noon to recalibrate and invite God into the midst of your day. Pray the Lord's Prayer and contemplate the meaning for you and the day you find yourself in.

III EVENING

Pray before bed the prayer of examen. Discover the ways that God has been present to you throughout the day, and where you need healing. Let the last thing you do before bed be taking time to abide in Jesus.

"COME, HOLY SPIRIT"

An ancient prayer believed to have been written by Rabanus Mauras in the ninth-century, the prayer "Come, Holy Spirit" is a way of asking God to fill us and the space we occupy with His Spirit.

God is never far from us. In fact, the Father is closer to us than the air up against our skin, straight down into the depths and cavities of our lungs. Yet, He still beckons us into His presence. Although God is always present, we are often *not* present because of external and/or internal noises. This simple prayer is a great way for us to index our hearts toward God and invite Him to move in our minds and hearts.

Try praying and reflecting on these ancient words "Come, Holy Spirit" at the beginning of an extended time of conversation with God, before reading and learning from the Bible, upon waking up in the morning, or whenever you seek to practice the presence of God.

Example:

"Come, Holy Spirit, I welcome you. I pray this morning that I come into greater awareness of and connection to You. You so graciously work to intercede for us to the Father, but also to comfort me with Your peace that goes beyond all understanding. I seek and crave to be in Your presence, feeling the inner work of You in my heart and mind. Holy Spirit, come."

