

***Session V: The Prayer Question:
Practices of “Showing Up” and “Paying Attention”***

•The PRAYER Question: How do you pray? Where in your daily life and work have you been most often or most clearly aware of the presence of God? How do you respond to this awareness?

In this session, participants will be invited to share their own experiences and approaches to prayer. It will also introduce two broadly defined approaches to prayer that I classify as “showing up” prayers and “paying attention” prayers. Two guided meditations help participants to experience these approaches to prayer. The first offers a way of praying that takes very little time but can be used during a definite prayer-time set aside during each day. The second offers a way to “pray a day of life,” attending to the ways we experience God’s presence in the ordinary experiences of life.

For the Facilitator

The first question, of course, is “what do we mean by prayer” – and for that we need to begin where the participants are: it’s important to return to the question “how do you pray?” See how people respond to that question and whether there are issues for them with the question itself.

In this session the point is to connect prayer with the idea of “spiritual practice” So what is a spiritual practice? It is something we decide to do in order to make ourselves more available to the divine presence in our lives. Brian McLaren and others talk about the analogy between spiritual practice and “practicing” a musical instrument: It is what we do in order to be able to make music, and to learn more. A spiritual practice is part of our routine “spiritual workout.” It “gets us into shape” for the journey of discipleship. The practices we choose deepen our availability to the underlying practice of discernment – of listening habitually for God’s will in all that we do. This session will focus especially on the practice of prayer, broadly defined by the group discussing it. It will invite participants to reflect on what prayer means to them. It will also introduce two prayer-practices that can be helpful in creating a more balanced spiritual life.

Resources

(the list on prayer is endless: here are some of my personal favorites, many of them “classics.”

Dorothy Bass, ed *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*. Paulist Press 1970.

- John Coburn, *Prayer and Personal Religion*. Morehouse, rev edition 2009. (also on google books)
- Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* Harper SF 1989
- Esther de Waal, *Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the Spiritual art of Attentiveness*. Liturgical Press, 2003
- Richard Foster. *Prayer: The Heart's True Home*. Harper One 1992.
- Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Online & in public domain
<http://www.practicegodspresence.com/brotherlawrence/index.html>
- Brian McLaren. *Finding our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- Bonnie Thurston, *For God Alone: A Primer on Prayer*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.
- Phyllis Tickle *The Divine Hours* Doubleday 2000 (provides 5-minute "fixed hour prayers for all four seasons of the year.)
- Evelyn Underhill, *Life as Prayer*

(Web Resources)

- Phyllis Tickle's website on fixed-hour prayer:
http://www.phyllistickle.com/book_dh_fall.html
- Beliefnet resources on Christian prayer
<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/index.aspx>
- Daily office online <http://www.missionstclare.com/english/>

Materials

Journals/notebooks or paper and pens
Crayons/markers/paper/collage materials, art supplies
Modeling clay/play-dough.

Chart pad and markers.

**[Video of KSH leading guided meditations?]

Gathering: (10 minutes): What is prayer (let me google that?)

If most people in the group have smartphones start by asking them to google "prayer" and see what definitions come up that they can/can't relate to (5 minutes)

Pair off and discuss with your partner the question "how do you pray?"
Gather answers – See what kinds of definitions of "prayer" emerge.

Facilitator can elicit and also suggest some common misconceptions/understandings of prayer – ask for a show of hands and reflection on these questions. Ask for show of hands if you’ve ever thought of prayer as:

- A performance: something you have to “get right”
- A task: something you have to do to be a good person
- Self-analysis, exploration of your inner self
- An achievement: something people become “adept” at
- Magic: a way to get God to do what we want God to do
- An SOS -- for emergency use mainly
- Something I feel I’m “not very good at.”

Other definitions:

Offer Book of Common Prayer definition of prayer (BCP p. 856) Prayer is “responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.” With that definition, what practices in your life would you describe as “prayer?”

Other prayer definitions might include: “asking God to help us or to help others,” “a conversation with God,” “feeling God’s presence” – the discussion should demonstrate that there are many ways to think about prayers.

This session is going to suggest that we think of prayer as a spiritual practice that helps us to “respond” to God’s presence in our lives. Basically, we can think about this practice in two broad, basic ways: We pray by “showing up” for some kind of dedicated time with God, however short, at some time during the day, and we pray by “paying attention” – learning to attend to “God moments”—moments of depth, insight, deep joy, love, even sorrow, that emerge throughout our daily lives. We will practice 2 exercises that can help us toward these two ways of prayer: “showing up” and “paying attention.”

Exploring: The Practice of “Showing Up” (20 minutes)

How do we make ourselves available to people we care about, so they can find us when they need us? (take answers – which may include facebook friending, answering a “chat” summons, taking a phone call. When is it important to actually “show up” in person? What happens then?

Consider this story (see “Resources” section for a fuller version): A friend wants to deliver a birthday gift she has bought for you that kows you are really going to like (an actual, solid thing – not a virtual gift). She knows this because she knows you, and knows you’re going to love what she’s found for you. You are both in the same workplace, but you are

very busy that day, with a lot of different people trying to get your attention. She keeps trying to get your attention, texting, stalking you a little. Finally she shows up and stands in your doorway and says, “When can I have 10 minutes of your time, so I can *give you this present?*” She wants to be in the room with you, watch you open it, enjoy it with you.

Imagine a God who is like that; who wants to give us gifts, and watch us receive them.

How do we “show up” so that God can give us the gift of God’s presence? Most of us feel we don’t have time for a dedicated “time set aside,” but down through the ages, spiritual advisors and guides have advocated setting aside some time each day – at the beginning or end of the day, or in the middle – whatever works – to intentionally make ourselves available to God, through reading, or remembering people in prayer, or simply being quiet for a few minutes.

Walk the group through the “5-minute prayer” practice, following the instructions given on the handout in “Resources”. (Or use video of KHS doing this). Don’t give out the handout until after people have experienced the exercise.

“Showing Up” Prayer:

First take 5 deep breaths – to settle and focus.

1. Hold out one finger, to begin the count, and say, **Oh God, you.** . . . (form a sense or an image of the God who loves you, and quietly place yourself in that presence.
2. On the next finger, say “Thank you for. . .” and bring to mind anything you remember for which you are grateful today. Rest with this for 5 breaths.
- 3 On your third finger, say, **I’m sorry for.....**and bring to mind whatever you are regretting, feeling sorry for today. As you breathe in, breathe in God’s merciful love, and as you breathe out, breathe out what you are sorry for. Breathe this way four or five times.
- 4 On your fourth finger, say **Please help** and bring to mind anyone you are praying for, anyone who has asked for prayers or seems to be in need. Hold their names in your mind as you breathe in God’s love, breathe out all hurt and pain and need. 4 or 5 deep, long breaths.
5. With all five fingers spread out now, say **Please help me,** and ask God for whatever you need today. Rest with this request for 4 or 5 deep breaths.

With both hands spread out, and turned up to God (if this gesture is comfortable), end your prayer time by offering, very slowly, the Lord's prayer.

Share impressions in the large group or (if the group is very large – in small groups of 3 or four –

Note that this prayer practice can happen at any time during the day – but it's good to choose a regular time and place: a prayers space in your home, OR perhaps the moment when you turn on your computer in the morning, or some other routine moment that could “open up” into 5 minutes of intentional prayer.

Share handout (see “Resources”), talk about ways that this practice can be expanded – invite people to share their current practice and variations on this.

Going Deeper (40 minutes): The practice of “Paying attention”

This exercise invites participants to form the habit of looking for God’s presence in the ordinary events of their daily lives, beginning with a day “Praying a Day of Life” that has passed.

Using video resources, or the script provided in “Resources,” invite participants to a guided meditation that invites them to attend to God’s presence in a day that has already passed. The exercise can be offered one of three ways:

1. Leader reads the “script” provided below
2. Group watches the video provided, and then participants are invited to use the handout in small groups, as a way of grounding what they have experienced.
3. Participants take time alone and use the long handout-version of the exercise to guide individual journaling. Drawing or painting materials may also be used if this approach is chosen.

Praying a Day of Life: Script:

Invite participants to have pen and paper (or other writing implements) handy.

Think about a day this past week -- if you have a "typical day" pick the most typical one, or just the first one that occurs to you. (You might invite participants, for this part, to take out smartphones / calendars and look back at their weeks, to choose a day. Then turn off the phones and put them aside, thus creating “sacred space”).

Make a list of, say 5-10 items that day, first thing, last thing, then filling in between

Begin this exercise by choosing a day from the past week -- if possible, choose the most routine, mundane, un-memorable day, or a day most typical of your daily routine, if there is such a day. Or just do yesterday. Take only a few minutes choosing the day. Settle down into quiet, offer God thanks for the gift of that day, and then, without pausing over details, make a retrospective "what I did" list -(Got up, had breakfast. . . .etc.)- no more than 8 or 10 items -- so that all the pieces of the day are listed. (If you need to get out a calendar or palm to do this, go ahead. But then put it away!)

What you come out with is a kind of personalized list of the "hours of your day -- the Benedictine rule establishes hours of the day for work and prayer, for pause from work to turn to worship, and the Anglican spirituality of the Book of Common prayer is also Benedictine in its appointment of offices or prayer times at morning, midday, evening, and the close of day. The spirituality that seeks to be alert to the "sacrament of the present moment" can be thought of as each person's unique variation on these disciplines of daily rhythm. Looking back at your list, the rhythm of the day, you will begin to discover how God has been present with you in the unexpected outward forms of your daily life.

Now put your list aside, and reflect on your day, using the following framework:

I

Spend a few minutes sitting quietly, and recall before God the first part of the day you are remembering, from your first rising until about midday.

Ask the spirit to guide you, and imagine yourself back into one part of that morning -- your rising, breakfast, the commute, your work or someone you met. Stay with the first thing that you remember, and return to that time, in the presence of God. Sit with that memory in quiet, for a few minutes. Where is there abundance? Where is there brokenness?
(2-4 minutes of silence)

II

Midday

Moving now to the middle of your day -- let the Holy Spirit guide your memory to one piece of that day- a meeting -- a task, some work that you were given to do.

Remember this part of the day in the presence of God.
Where do you see abundance, where brokenness? Bring what you see into prayer.
(2-4 minutes of silence)

III

Evening

Now remember your home-coming: the commute, the transition from day to evening -- whatever it was for you.

Remember, in God's presence, how you spent your evening. Write down a few sentences recalling something you particularly remember about that evening -- a person, an event, a detail of the evening's routine. Where is the abundance, or the brokenness?

(2-4 minutes of silence)

IV Night

Now remember yourself going through your late evening routine, settling down to your night's rest.

Reflecting on the day you have been recalling, remember that the Presence you have been discerning in the day that has passed is also with you, just as steadily and firmly, in this present moment. Wherever you are in your day now, stay for a few minutes in that presence, giving thanks in whatever way you can for what you have just noticed about the day that has past, and resting in God's love for you in the present moment.

(2-4 minutes of silence)

Leader: at the end of this series of prompts, and some silence, invite participants to take out notebooks, or to use provided art materials, and take 10-15 minutes to record some insight that has come to them from this time of prayer. Share in pairs or small groups.

Concluding – Open Questions (10-20 minutes, depending on time)

Return to the 'grid' exercise from Session IV, which includes "showing up" and "paying attention" as categories for a balanced life. What have we learned today that we might add to that spiritual practice "grid"? How do these and other practices of "showing up" and "paying attention" contribute to a sense of balance and meaning in our lives? What would you add, challenge, express in a different way?

Since this is the next-to-last session of the series, also ask what people want to explore further so that this can be incorporated into the final session.

Closing Prayer:

A traditional spiritual practice, taught by St. Ignatius of Loyola, is the "examen," which can be followed in a simple form at the end of every day. As we settle to sleep, we have a conversation with God, simply asking "when did I meet you today?" "when did I miss you? And then, after reflection, giving back the day in thanksgiving.

Gather the group in a prayer-space – perhaps with lighted candle or icon or other religious symbol, and invite people to reflect, in silence on these two questions:

Speak to God, however God seems to be for you, and ask “Where did I meet you today?” Give thanks for those moments.

Now ask, “Where did I miss you?” Be with that memory, whatever comes.

Close with the Lord’s Prayer, or with this prayer, (adapted from BCP, p. 100)

Heavenly Father and Mother,
Friend and Lover of our souls,
Spirit that empowers us:
In you we live, and move and have our being
We humbly ask you, so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit
That in all the cares and occupations we encounter in this life
We may not forget you
But remember that we are ever walking in your sight
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, *Amen*

Prayer

Over many years of walking with people on their spiritual journeys, I have come to recognize two basic elements that seem to ground a balanced and healthy spiritual life. They help in different ways to deepen our ability to discern God's presence and activity in our lives and, in so doing, to make us available to follow our particular call to discipleship, wherever we find ourselves. As we begin to discover a desire to grow in the way of discipleship, we need to **show up** for conversation and listening, making ourselves available to God, and we need to **pay attention**: find ways to shed distraction and attend to the blessings and challenges that come to us in an ordinary day of life. Show up. Pay attention. Within these categories, we may adopt different kinds of spiritual practice, but together they help to keep us spiritually fit, balanced and available to discern God's ongoing call to discipleship – the call to follow the living Christ, and to become bearers of God's love in the world, each in our own way. This session introduces participants to ways of "showing up" and "paying attention." In this "Resource" section I share some of my personal experience with these prayer practice in the hope that this will encourage leaders to reflect on their own experience with prayer, in preparation for sharing with and listening to the group. This is an area of spiritual practice where we truly learn from one another.

"Showing Up" – A Definite Time and Place for Prayer

I find that I've learned my most important spiritual lessons from friends over the years. And sometimes they speak to us in the voice of God. This happened for me one busy day at Virginia Theological seminary, where I teach, during the years when my best friend was also a student there. She and I go way back -- we met at women's Bible study at church when our children were small, told our life stories pushing our kids on the swings, and drinking coffee in each other's kitchens, grew up together spiritually as adults, each pursuing our own way of discernment. The day I'm remembering was a weekday morning at the seminary where I teach, and where she was a student at the time. After morning chapel in those days there would be a mass of people flowing from chapel over to our mailboxes, and we would all follow the crowd. Kit greeted me this particular September morning with a gift bag in her hand. It was my birthday, and she had remembered! She started to ask if we could get together sometime that day so I could open it, but I was repeatedly being interrupted -- a student had a question about class, a faculty colleague greeted me -- I kept getting pulled away. Finally, Kit planted her in my path, looked me in the eye, and said, "Please tell me when we can find ten minutes so that I can *give you this present*."

Sometimes our friends speak to us in the voice of God: "Where can you find ten minutes so I can give you this present?" God is always trying to give us good gifts --and sometimes God's generosity is hard to receive. We have trouble making time, or we are overwhelmed. Or we may just feel guilty about the fact that we don't seem to have make time in our lives to be simply present and available to God's love. Kit's words have stayed as a mantra to me, supporting what I believe is an important invitation in the spiritual life – the invitation to spend some time during our day focusing on God alone – "a definite time set apart," to use Evelyn Underhill's words – even if it is only a few

minutes in the morning or evening. A loving God invites us, saying to us, “When in your day can you find 10 minutes (or 5, or 30, or an hour) so I can *give you this present?*”

People in their 20’s and 30’s often seem to feel they don’t have time for anything. Part of this is the overall culture of constant availability that we’ve created through our reliance on electronic communications. We make choices about what messages we pick up, what links we follow, but we are also constantly bombarded with opportunities to turn our attention from one thing to the next. The call to “show up” to receive the quiet messages of the Spirit is a hard one to hear, and it takes practice – the kind of practice required by workouts or learning a musical instrument – to create the time to attend to God’s presence in our lives. A challenge is to integrate time-honored traditions of prayer and attention into our highly distracted contemporary culture, and part of the spiritual formation of young adults will be to listen to their experience and help them navigate this.

My own practice of setting aside time for prayer emerged during a similarly crazy time of life, when the distractions were the needs of young children, work and family, and I did not think I had time for prayer. One day I was reflecting on the story of the feeding of the five thousand, as told in Mark 8:4-5. Looking at the crowd, the disciples ask how they can possibly feed all these people, and Jesus responds with a question: “How many loaves *do* you have?” We can ask the same thing about time for prayer. I imagined Jesus asking me: “How much time *do* you have? Do you have five minutes? We can start there.

Do you have 5 minutes? We can start there.”

This is where I began, literally, at that crazy time of life: with five minutes set aside for prayer in the morning. Here’s the prayer I used then, adapted from a classic primer on prayer that I was reading at the time. (John Coburn, *Prayer and Personal Religion*, and reflection the traditional categories of prayer in the Christian tradition: Adoration, repentance, thanksgiving, intercession, supplication and trust (also known as the “ARTIST” prayer). Try this, alone or in a group, taking just a minute (or about 5-6 deep breaths) over each part of the prayer. I used to count them out on my fingers – a 5 part prayers, with these words. Try this:

First take 5 deep breaths – to settle and focus.

1. Hold out one finger, to begin the count, and say, **Oh God, you . . .** (Form a sense or an image of the God who loves you, and quietly place yourself in that presence.

Or begin your prayer time with the opening verse of Psalm 63: “O God, you are my God. Eagerly I seek you. “ Just sit with this desire for 4 or 5 deep breaths.

2. On the next finger, say “Thank you for . . .” and bring to mind anything you remember for which you are grateful today. Rest with this for 5 breaths.

3 On your third finger, say, **I'm sorry for...** and bring to mind whatever you are regretting, feeling sorry for today. As you breathe in, breathe in God's merciful love, and as you breathe out, breathe out what you are sorry for. Breathe this way four or five times.

4 On your fourth finger, say, "Please **help**" And bring to mind anyone you are praying for, anyone who has asked for prayers or seems to be in need. Hold their names in your mind as you breathe in God's love, breathe out all hurt and pain and need. 4 or 5 deep, long breaths.

5. With all five fingers spread out now, say **Please help me**, and ask God for whatever you need today. Rest with this request for 4 or 5 deep breaths.

With both hands spread out, and turned up to God (if this gesture is comfortable), end your prayer time by offering, very slowly, the Lord's Prayer.

This practice takes just about 5 minutes – though I don't time it with a clock. The four or five breaths on each step measure out for me, just about a minute – you can see how the breathing-time works for you. I found as I practiced this that the five minutes felt longer than 5 minutes – or that they moved beyond the measured time we call "chronos-time" into God's time, a kind of eternal moment – what Scripture calls *kairos*-time, or the time of God.

Expanding:

Longer prayer times:

As I managed more regularly this time of "showing up," I found that I looked forward to it. Indeed, I craved more time for prayer, and it seemed, perhaps because my desire for it deepened, that it grew easier to find that time. I added other practices – sometimes reading a passage from Scripture, sometimes simply a short version of the fixed-hour morning prayers provided in the Book of Common Prayer. I varied the practices with liturgical seasons, and with shifts in my own life and needs. But the point is, the first step was simply to show up – to honor to that limited extent, for that five minutes, my deep desire for more time with God. I learned the value of finding a few minutes each day, to show up, so God could give me this gift of prayer. The handout on prayer provided with these resources is my effort to share with other young adults.

Worship as "showing up"

On a corporate level, committing the time to show up for an hour a week for some kind of worship can have a similar effect. Even if we feel we don't have time, or aren't sure what we're "getting out of it" the intention to "show up" and listen to the words of worship and Scripture can open a way to deeper discernment of God's presence in our lives and in the lives of others around us.

Affirmations and Encouragements

It is amazing how difficult it is for most of us to take this first step of setting aside time and space, and we can easily be thwarted by guilt about how badly we're doing at it, or by self-critique and comparing ourselves to others we think are holier or more proficient than we are. But do remember this: You wouldn't even be reflecting or asking about prayer if the Holy Spirit had not already awakened your desire for God. You provide the space. God's Spirit will do the rest, teaching you to pray, and using the time that you have to offer. No matter how much time you think you have or don't have, try to accept this gift of regular prayer. Do what you can to make a time and a space each day to spend just being present with God. Show up. Accept the invitation. Let it become a part of your routine and don't worry about "getting it right." If the time doesn't work out one day, try again the next. Commit to trying one approach to personal prayer for a stretch of time – a month or a liturgical season. That way you won't give up too soon.

You will know you are growing in your life of prayer when you find yourself desiring, looking forward to your time with God – and missing it when something interferes. This holds true whether you spend five minutes or an hour. Most of us on the journey of discipleship discover that "at prayer" is really where we want to be, deep down. Don't be afraid to follow your heart. It has helped me on this journey to remember my friend's invitation and to hear it as from God: "When can you give me a few minutes of your time, and your undivided attention, *so I can give you this gift.*" Perhaps you can hear this as an invitation, too.

2. “Paying attention”

“Come and see.” Jesus says in John 1:39, used as our guided meditation in a previous session. How often do we really “see” what is around us? Our lives are so crammed with distractions, it is difficult to pause and practice what Esther de Waal has called “the spiritual art of attentiveness.” (See resource list: *Lost in Wonder*) The eastern religions have practices of “mindfulness,” designed to slow people down and make them aware of the particulars of smell, sight, sound, and to find there a way into prayer. The Christian tradition also has its mindfulness traditions, though they have been much neglected until recently. In particular, a number of seventeenth-century European writers on spirituality encourage “the practice of the presence of God,” a phrase coined by a Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. Brother Lawrence’s letters speak of looking at the flowering of a tree in spring and suddenly recognizing in it the Providence of a loving God who cares for creation. He learned to talk to God among the pots and pans in the monastery kitchen, and to embrace every task of his ordinary life as an opportunity to recognize God’s constant presence. A French contemporary, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, invites people to experience “the sacrament of the present moment,” and the English poet-priest George Herbert writes as a kind of mantra:

“Teach me, my God and king, in all things thee to see
And what I do in anything, to do it as for thee.”

Herbert presents this prayer as an “elixir” – a magical substance that turns everything to gold, suggesting that when we offer this prayer our experience of God’s presence in our lives is deepened and transformed.

In my experience, poets have been good companions in helping me to pay attention to the world around me, both through their words and through the spiritual practices that feed the creative life. Contemporary poet Mary Oliver’s spiritual practice is to get up early every morning and go out walking in nature, in the world around her home in Provincetown, and to write about what she has seen. She is quintessentially the poet of being in the moment, with full attention. And for her this practice of paying attention is intimately tied to prayer. In her poem called “A Summer’s Day,” she gives a rich and highly particular account of the grasshopper – “this grasshopper” who is sitting in her hand in the meadow, on a summer day – and she reflects.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day. (*A Summer’s Day)

Weaving into our days some practice of paying attention: of recognizing beauty and detail in the world around us, can be an important part of responding to Christ’s invitation to “come and see.”

A classic prayer practice that can help us to pay attention is what I call the practice of “praying a day.” The script for this is provided in the following pages: It can be done at the end of a day, or as a way of reflecting back on a day that has gone before. Here’s how it works:

HANDOUT 1 – for “journaling” option

Praying a Day of Life
An Exercise in Contemplative Writing
Prepared by Kathleen Henderson Staudt

I

Morning

On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

Spend a few minutes sitting quietly, and recall before God the first part of the day you are remembering, from your first rising until about midday.

Ask the spirit to guide you, and imagine yourself back into one part of that morning -- your rising, breakfast, the commute, your work or someone you met. Stay with the first thing that you remember, and return to that time, in the presence of God. Sit with that memory in quiet, for a few minutes.

Write down a response to God’s presence -- or perhaps your desire for God’s presence, in the moment you have been recalling.

II

Midday

*Lord, you have searched me out and known me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.*

*You trace my journeys and my resting-places, and are acquainted with all my ways.
(Psalm 139: 1-2)*

Moving now to the middle of your day -- let the Holy Spirit guide your memory to one piece of that day- a meeting -- a task, some work that you were given to do.

Remember this part of the day in the presence of God. You might try writing your recollection as a note to God, saying “you” to your Companion on the day’s journey.

If you had a long afternoon, repeat this exercise with another part of the work

III

Evening

*Turn again to your rest, O my soul,
for the Lord has treated you well.
For you have rescued my life from death,
my eyes from tears, and my feet from stumbling.
I will walk in the presence of the Lord
in the land of the living.*

(Psalm 116: 6-8)

Now remember your home-coming: the commute, the transition from day to evening -- whatever it was for you.

Remember, in God's presence, how you spent your evening. Write down a few sentences recalling something you particularly remember about that evening -- a person, an event, a detail of the evening's routine.

IV Night

*Behold now, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
you that stand by night in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands in the holy place and bless the Lord;
the Lord who made heaven and earth bless you out of Zion.*

(Psalm 134)

Now remember yourself going through your late evening routine, settling down to your night's rest.

If you can, write down a prayer offering the day to God, giving thanks for any insights about the day that the Spirit has led you to in this time of reflection.

V

Returning to the Present Moment

Look over your notes now and then put your journal aside and sit still, in the presence of God, remembering that the presence you have been discerning in the day that has passed is also with you, just as steadily and firmly, in this present moment. Wherever you are in your day now, stay for a few minutes in that presence, giving thanks in whatever way you can for God's love for you in the present moment.

Now spend about 5 minutes simply writing about something you have observed in this exercise. Or if you prefer, use clay or paints/markers to produce a visual representation of something you have observed during this time of prayer, and that you are able to share with others.

HANDOUT ON “SHOWING UP” PRAYER

How much time do you have for prayer? Go and see:

Do you have 5-10 minutes a day? The 5-point approach

(adapted from John Coburn, Prayer and Personal Religion (1957; large print edition 1985, Walker Press)
5 deep breaths – to settle and focus.

Oh God, you. . . . (form a sense of the God who loves you, and enter a conversation)

Or begin your prayer time with the opening verses of Psalm 42, 63 or 103.

Thank you for

I'm sorry for

Please help

Please help me.

The Lord's Prayer (remembering you are not alone). And 5 more deep breaths. AMEN

OR if you prefer more structure, and a sense of praying with others, replace the Lord's Prayer with the “Daily devotions” service for the appropriate time of day, found on pp. 137-140 in the prayer book. It takes about 4 minutes to read one of these services through slowly. Gradually, you may find you want to add a period of silent reflection after you finish the formal part of your prayer. If you find you want to do this, there will be time for it!

Do you have 15-25 minutes? Take it slower

- Use the 5-point structure, and slow down, lingering over each prayer (Use your fingers to keep track of where you are) Read all of Psalm 42, 63 or 103 to begin
- Add Scripture: use one passage from the daily lectionary, or a psalm, or readings in Forward, Day by Day. Pause after reading, to reflect on what you have read.
- End with the Lord's Prayer or Daily Devotion service.
-

OR read the morning or evening office, or compline (choose from among services in BCP pp. 75-135) -- whichever one suits your schedule best, using the appointed readings. It takes about 15-20 minutes to read the office through slowly. You can expand or contract it by choosing 1-2 readings and adding or skipping canticles. Try to establish a routine for yourself if you use the office, so you are not distracted by your choices during the actual prayer time.

30-60 minutes

Expand the time you spend on each “finger” of your prayer. Breathe deeply and rest in the quiet as you pray, taking a full 5 minutes or more over each.

Use Scripture for lectio divina: Ask the Spirit to open your heart as you read. Then read the passage through slowly, preferably aloud, and stop when you get to a part of it that seems to “shimmer” or speak to you. Stop reading, and sit with it in silence, attending to what God is saying to you in this passage, and responding as you are led. When the meditation seems to be over, close with the Lord's Prayer, or with a quiet thanksgiving.

What prayer is not – common misconceptions and hang-ups (where do you see yourself here?)

- A performance: something you have to “get right”
- A task: something you have to do to be a good person
- Self-analysis, exploration of your inner self (this can emerge from prayer, but it isn't prayer)
- An achievement: something people become “adept” at (mainly, something that other people are better at than you are)
- Magic: a way to get God to do what we want God to do
- An SOS -- for emergency use mainly

What prayer is:

- Time with God – in relationship. Being “real” with God.
- “responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words”(BCP, p. 856)
- Response to an invitation. It is God's party, and you are invited. A place God desires for you to be.

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- A discipline – as in “disciple” – teaches us to follow faithfully, and increases our desire to do so.

Steps toward a prayerful life – for normal, busy people:

- Regular prayer time – (the “loaves and fishes” question – see separate handout)
- “recollection” times: checking in with God as you begin a daily task, walking & talking prayer, driving, being aware of God’s presence with you at moments in the day.
- Regular worship: look at your week before Eucharist and “bring an offering”
- Journaling, Spiritual reading, Bible study.
- Morning and evening “check-ins” In the morning – lying in bed before you get up, or over coffee, looking through your day-timer, give thanks for the new day, and “pray through” the day ahead, asking God’s blessing on the tasks ahead of you. At bedtime: Remember the day and give it back gently to God, asking God’s blessing on your rest.
- “the Sacrament of the present moment” – openness to “the gift of joy and wonder in all [God’s] works” (BCP p. 308)
- Openness for works of of mercy and compassion – a discerning heart. This comes.

THE INVITATION: REMEMBER--

You wouldn’t be reading or asking about prayer if the Spirit had not already awakened your desire for God. You provide the space. God’s Spirit will do the rest, teaching you to pray, and using the time that you have to offer. No matter how much time you think you have or don’t have, try to accept this gift of regular prayer. Make a time and a space each day to spend just being present with God. Show up. Accept the invitation. Let it become a part of your routine and don’t worry about “getting it right.” If the time doesn’t work out one day, try again the next. Commit to trying one approach to personal prayer for a stretch of time – a month or a liturgical season. That way you won’t give up too soon.

You will know you are growing in your life of prayer when you find yourself desiring, looking forward to your time with God – and missing it when something interferes. This holds true whether you spend 5 minutes or an hour. Most of us discover that “at prayer” is really where we want to be, deep down. Don’t be afraid to follow your heart.