

Generations of Faith

Integration of MIND, BODY and SPIRIT as a
PRAYER FORM

January 8th and 11th, 2012



TRUE PRAYER

The test of true prayer is not how good it makes us feel, but whether we're doing God's will better. Prayer makes us more loving, more Christlike. The change in us may be subtle and slow, but it's there. In particular we will show the fruits of the Holy Spirit that St. Paul lists in Galatians 5:22: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

generosity, faithfulness,
gentleness, and self-control.

PRAYER: Connecting to God

We came from God's hands, and our destiny is to live with our Triune God forever. While on earth, we yearn for God, as St. Augustine expressed in his famous prayer: **"Our hearts are restless, O God, until they rest in you."** Philosopher Blaise Pascal described this ache as having a hole in our hearts that can only be filled by God. Incredibly, God also longs to be with us. C.S. Lewis commented, **"People seeking God is like a mouse seeking a cat."** God, the almighty maker of the universe, loves us with a powerful, unconditional love. His love is so tremendous that in order for us to be with him eternally, he stooped to become a human being like us. Then, as the God-man Jesus Christ, God actually underwent death. His resurrection confirmed his promise that we too would rise someday.

In this life we can come in contact with this good God through prayer, traditionally defined as "the lifting of the mind and heart to God." Whenever we think of or speak with God, we are praying. It is said that **most people pray more and better than they think they do.**

St. Teresa of Avila defined prayer as **"a conversation with one whom you know loves you."** It involves both speaking and listening. Just as communication is key in the development of a human love relationship, prayer is essential if we wish to intensify our relationship with God. **Prayer is as necessary for our spiritual life as breathing is for our physical life.** God doesn't need our prayer, but we do! Here are some other good reasons to pray:

- Knowing that God exists makes sense out of the universe. Praying to God gives meaning to our lives.
- Prayer makes us better persons. Through prayer we receive graces to live the Gospel values and grow in virtues like faith, hope, and charity.
- Prayer removes temporal punishment due for sins, that is, the punishment that helps make up for our forgiven sins either on earth or in purgatory.

- Prayer is life's most intoxicating high, the peak experience.
- In prayer we find satisfaction, fulfillment, and peace.
- God desires that we pray.

WEB SITES FOR PRAYER

The rosary ~ www.theholyroary.org

Stations of the Cross ~ www.catholic.org

The Divine Office ~ www.liturgyhours.org

The Spiritual Exercises ~ www.geocities.com/ourladyofthegraces

Sacred Space ~ www.jesuit.ie/prayer

The Psalms ~ www.praythepsalms.com and www.thedailypsalm.com

The labyrinth ~ www.the-peace-project.org/fingerlab.html,
www.yfc.co.uk/labyrinth/online.html, and www.gratefulness.org/labyrinth/index.htm

Prayers by saints ~ www.catholicdoors.com

Sunday readings and short reflections ~ www.catholicnews.com/word2lif.htm

Retreat based on the Sacred Heart ~ www.sacredheartprayers.com

A prayer for each day of the year ~ prayingeachday.org

The day's readings and a reflection ~ www.dailygospel.org or www.livingwithchrist.us

2,774 prayers ~ www.catholicdoors.com/prayer

PUBLISHED MATERIALS RECOMMENDED FOR DEVELOPING MEDITATION SKILLS

De Mello, Anthony. *Sadhana: A Way to God*. Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978.

Kovats, Alexandra. *Prayer: A Discovery of Life*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1983.

Link, Mark. *You: Prayer for Beginners and Those Who Have Forgotten How*. Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1976.

Breakaway: Twenty-eight Steps to a More Prayerful Life. Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1980.

Meegan, Mary. *Climbing the Mountain: A Journey in Prayer*. Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1984.

Vetter, Bernadette. *My Journey, My Prayer*. Rev. ed. Villa Maria, PA: Center for Learning, 1985.

CHALLENGES TO PRAYER

Some days it is easy to pray, and praying leaves us feeling upbeat and renewed. Then there are the other days when we are bored, restless, dry, or plagued by distractions. All we can muster is “Here I am, Lord.” Hubert van Zeller commented that it helps to remember that “we go to pray not because we love prayer but because we love God.” We can take comfort in these words: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). One help to good prayer is realizing that Jesus is not just an idea or a hazy one-dimensional image, but a real, live person. The following are some common challenges that make it difficult to pray.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

Some people are prayer-shy because they have the wrong impression of prayer. Here are some common misconceptions.

- ***Prayer should be long. FALSE!!*** Short prayers can be effective. What do people cry out when their house is on fire? They do not scream, “A conflagration is devastating my abode.” They yell, “Fire!” Your most frequent prayer might be, “Help!” St. Augustine said, “A long speech is one thing, a long love another.”
- ***Prayer should result in a torrent of wonderful thoughts. FALSE!!*** Perhaps the grace that comes from prayer is not an idea at all, but a moment of joy, a tear in the eye, a sense of peace, a desire, or a resolution.
- ***Prayer should be formal. FALSE!!*** St. Teresa of Avila advises, “Try not to let the prayer you make to such a Lord be mere politeness...avoid being bashful with God.” Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* is a good example of informal prayer. To him prayer is not so much duty but a visit with a friend. We don’t have to try to impress God with grand words. He knows us through and through and loves us. By the way, being real and honest with God might mean giving full play to our emotions. This is how the psalmist prayed in the psalms of lament. For example, repeatedly in Psalm 13 he complained, “How long, O Lord? How long?”

- ***Prayer is difficult. FALSE!!*** James Finley recalls, “Merton once told me to quit trying so hard in prayer. He said, ‘How does an apple ripen? It just sits in the sun.’” We needn’t struggle to pray. Meister Eckhard says, “Get out of the way and let God be God in you.” The Jesuit Thomas Greene describes the higher form of prayer as floating as opposed to swimming.
- ***I am not worthy to speak to God. FALSE!!*** Every person, though sinful, is a child of God, loved and redeemed by him. Jesus went out of his way to be with sinners.
- ***Deep prayer is only for great saints. FALSE!!*** All of us are called to be holy, to be saints. We are all redeemed and baptized. We do not have to be super intelligent or super good in order to experience, deep, profound prayer. God showers his gifts, including the gift of prayer, on whomever he wishes.

(From *The Catholic Way to Pray: An Essential Guide for Adults* by Kathleen Glavich, SND, Twenty-third Publications, p. 30-32)

STRATEGIES TO CONTROL DISTRACTIONS

- **Pray at a quiet time and in a peaceful place. There will be fewer external distractions.**
- **At the outset, recall that you are in God’s presence. Make yourself aware of God looking at you with love, and you will be more inclined to focus on him.**
- **Pray before a crucifix, a picture, or a lighted candle. The visual aid will keep your mind on prayer.**
- **Write a prayer. This demands concentration and therefore eliminates distractions.**

- **Pray out loud. This forces you to pay more attention to your words.**
- **If your distraction is important, jot it down so you can deal with it after prayer.**
- **Ignore the distractions as though they were clouds passing by. Focusing on them only makes them more irritating.**
- **Work your distraction into your prayer. For example, if you catch yourself thinking and worrying about your mom's upcoming surgery, begin interceding for her.**

*(From *The Catholic Way to Pray: An Essential Guide for Adults*, Twenty-Third Publications, p. 34)*

CENTERING OR CONTEMPLATION AS A PRAYER FORM

Centering prayer opens us to the gift of contemplation. It is merely giving loving attention to God dwelling within us and letting God do his work in us. Here are the steps:

1. Decide on a word or phrase that you will use to keep focused on God. You might choose Jesus, God, Abba, love, mercy, amen, listen, peace, my Lord and my God, or I love you. You will keep the same word throughout the prayer period.

2. Quiet down. Sit upright so your head is well supported by your spine. Be comfortable, but not so comfortable that you fall asleep. Keep your eyes gently closed so that energy is not wasted seeing. To relax, breathe slowly three times: exhale, take in fresh air, hold it, exhale.
3. Move toward God within you. Think only of God who is living deep within you and ponder God's love for you. Be present to God. Let his overwhelming love and goodness attract you. Rest in God's presence.
4. Respond with your chosen prayer word or phrase. Repeat this prayer word slowly in your mind.
5. Attend to God and enjoy God's presence. When you know you are aware of things other than God, or you find yourself pestered by other thoughts, use your prayer word to gently bring you back. It functions like a tug on a kite string. Don't stop to think about how you're doing. Focus on giving God your loving attention.
6. When you are finished, pray a formula prayer like the Our Father or speak to God to ease the transition back to the world around you.

(From *The Catholic Way to Pray: An Essential Guide for Adults*, Twenty-Third Publications, p. 58-59 and the other side same source, pg. 53-54)

MEDITATION AS A PRAYER FORM

Catholic meditation is the direct opposite of the practices of meditation in vogue today. While modern methods aim to empty the mind, Catholic meditation fills the mind with thoughts of God, Scripture passages, or divine truths. It involves ruminating on these concepts like an animal chewing its cud. Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Life* says that if you know how to worry, you already know how to meditate. When meditating on a Scripture story, consider

who, what, why, when, and how. This focused thinking stirs up our emotions and can lead to resolutions for a holier life. One spiritual writer advises that instead of thinking about God, it is better to think God. In other words, focus on God present to you personally and directly right now. In his *Spiritual Exercises* St. Ignatius of Loyola taught the following form of meditation, which can be carried out using a Gospel event.

1. Ask for a particular grace.
2. Use your imagination and all five senses to fill in the details of the setting, see the characters and hear them speak, and watch the action. How do you feel toward Jesus in the scene? Replay the event in your mind as if you were participating. For instance, as you meditate on the Nativity, Mary might let you hold the newborn baby. When meditating on the washing of the feet at the last supper you might imagine that Jesus is kneeling to wash your feet.
3. Then discuss the event with God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, or Mary. This is called the colloquy.
4. Draw fruit from your reflection by applying the passage to your life and making a resolution.

Another way to meditate on a Gospel story is to imagine that you are one of the people in the story, experiencing what he or she is experiencing. For example, put yourself in the place of the woman who is caught in adultery, the blind beggar Bartimeus who is cured, Peter who is invited to walk on the Sea of Galilee, or a child on Jesus' lap.

There are different methods for using the imagination to facilitate prayer. In his journal Wordsworth recorded that when he was in a beautiful place, he often imagined Jesus next to him, for instance when he wrote his poem "Daffodils." Father George Maloney, SJ, takes people in an imaginary elevator down into the depths of their hearts. He slowly calls out the floors as they descend, then leaves them in silence to commune with God. Imagine Jesus with you in any of the following ways and then speak to him, even aloud, and imagine his reply: sitting next to you, sitting on an empty chair in your room, meeting in a room mentally furnished to suit your taste, meeting at the seashore, in a garden, or on a mountaintop, sitting next to you in a boat, or sitting with you in your favorite place.

ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN MEDITATION

- **AN APPROPRIATE PLACE:** When you and your friend really need to talk, you do not go to a rock concert or a movie theater. You need privacy, an environment that helps you relax and focus on each other. The same need exists in meditation. Certainly, many options are available with regard to the place for prayer. In fact, the possibilities are unlimited in the sense that one can pray in virtually any place, from a mountaintop to a dungeon. However, it stands to reason that some places are more conducive to prayer than others. Among the more popular are:
 - a bedroom located in a part of the house in which you can find some privacy or another room of the house that is available for decorating in a way conducive to prayer, for example, with low lighting and candles.
 - a natural setting, which can help you experience the isolation and peace of the forest, the exhilaration of hills from which one can see great distances, or the relaxing sounds of water brushing the shores of a creek and slapping against the rocks.
 - A chapel or a church – options that are perhaps not as obvious as one might imagine. We tend to think of churches as reserved for public, communal worship rather than for private prayer. Yet few places inspire private prayer more than a beautiful church in the evening – lights out and quiet, a candle or two flickering, and the distant, muffled sounds of the street.

- **AN APPROPRIATE TIME OF DAY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL:** Everyone has his or her own biological clock, a kind of built-in system that makes some people morning people and others, night owls. If you don't really wake up until noon, it would not make sense to try to meditate the first thing in the morning. Although the Scriptures tell us to pray always, some times of the day may seem more conducive to prayer than others. It is a little hard to pray during lunch in a cafeteria, and it is rather dangerous to attempt meditation while driving! Two times traditionally preferred for prayer are early morning or late at night, just before bedtime. Yet there are some individuals for whom one or both of these times would prove unworkable: the kind of person who takes hours to wake up, for instance, or the one who passes out as soon as he or she gets near a bed. For such people, maybe a time at midday is required, perhaps stopping briefly at church on their way home from school or work. Or they might find that the time immediately after supper is appropriate for prayer – just before studying or finishing some household chores – when they can be alone without feeling uncomfortable about it. When do you think your best time of day for prayer might be?

- **THE PROPER POSTURE:** Through the centuries, masters of meditation have discovered a variety of physical postures that are conducive to meditation.
 - Kneeling with the back straight and the hands folded in front of the body, the hands resting on something – perhaps a chair or couch – to give support and aid balance. Or, kneeling again, but this time allowing the body to relax with the buttocks resting on the heels of the feet. The back remains straight, and the hands are allowed to rest on the thighs, often with the palms turned upward in a gesture of openness to God.
 - Sitting in a firm, straight-backed chair, the upper body erect, the feet together and firmly on the floor, the hands gently resting on the lap, with the palms facing upward. Kitchen or dining room chairs provide appropriate chairs for this posture. Some people prefer to sit on the edge of the chair rather than with their back against the back of the chair.
 - Reclining on the floor, either on the back or the belly, but in such a way that one feels relaxed yet attentive. The body should be straight, the legs not crossed, and the hands in a relaxed but prayerful position. (For obvious reasons, this posture is the most predisposed to inducing sleep.)
 - Sit on the floor in the famous lotus position: the legs folded close to the body, the back straight – perhaps held so against a wall – the hands resting on the knees with upraised palms. Most people can only do a modified version of this posture, as they do not normally have the flexibility to assume the traditional version.
- **THE ABILITY TO CENTER THROUGH RELAXATION AND DEEP BREATHING:** Relaxation and deep breathing are two basic meditation techniques that will help you get in touch with your center in preparation for communication with God.
- **AN AWARENESS OF AND OPENNESS TO GOD:** In many ways, awareness of the Presence of God is both a goal and a by-product of all the other elements of meditation. This awareness also includes the ability to listen to God, to comprehend what God is revealing to you in prayer.

(This handout comes from *Learning to Meditate: A Thirty-Day Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* by Thomas Zanzig, Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brothers Publications, Winona, Minnesota)

FAMILY, FRIEND, OR GROUP ACTIVITIES FOR THE WEEKS OF:

Sunday, January 8 – 14:

- This week keep 10 things in your pocket such as beads on a string or paper clips or safety pins, all linked together. At odd moments you can use these to pray ten quick prayers. Discuss your results with family and/or friends over dinner.
- Make prayer mats with your young children to sit upon during prayer. These can be small purchased carpets. Mats can be made by cutting two 8" by 12" pieces of wallpaper samples, punching holes around them, stuffing them with newspaper or packing material, and then sewing them together with yarn. Older children could draw a beautiful scene and look at it whenever they pray.

Sunday, January 15 - 21:

- Have each family/group member find one or two of their favorite scripture verses and share with the entire group as an inspirational prayer. Each shares their verse and why it is one of their favorites.
- As a group read and reflect several times this week on the Scripture readings of the upcoming weekend's Mass as a beautiful way to prepare.

Sunday, January 22-28:

- Pull names of your family/friends/group out of a hat and seek that person throughout the week to encourage them with their prayer life. Pray every day in particular for yourself and that person for the grace to pray well.
- As a family/group, put an object in the middle of the table and have each member write a prayer that comes from meditating on that object.

Sunday, January 29 – February 4:

- Have someone from the family/group read the following story out loud: One day St. Rita was speaking with Jesus during an apparition and asked, "Lord, on which occasion in my life did I please you most? Was it when I was loving you in ecstasy?" Jesus answered, "No, my dear. You pleased me most on one occasion when you were struggling to complete your daily prayer out of love for me, despite your great desolations." Discuss the story as a family/group.
- Practice being quiet together as a family/group by turning the lights off, lighting a candle, playing soft music and asking everyone to quietly sit with Jesus. After a designated period of time, discuss the experience.
- Become better spontaneous people of prayer. It helps to prepare spontaneous prayer by writing down your ideas first. Another idea for young and old alike to prompt spontaneous prayer is to pass around a box with pictures in it. Have everyone choose a picture and praise and thank God for what it shows.

PRAYER AIDS

Any of the following objects will help keep us focused on prayer:

- A Bible, perhaps one with a beautiful cover, is God present in his Word.
- A crucifix reminds us of God's great love for us.
- A picture or statue of Jesus, Mary, or another saint is also helpful.
- A burning candle stands for the mystery of God or Christ as the light of the world.
- Incense (grains or a stick) symbolizes our prayers going to God as its smoke rises.
- Potpourri appeals to our sense of smell.
- A picture of a glorious nature scene or an item from nature such as flowers, a plant, seashells, rocks, or driftwood can make us think of God's presence. Sometimes it helps to actually hold an item in your hands (like a crucifix or a seashell) as you pray.
- A beautiful selection of music that speaks to your soul.
- A rosary
- A prayer book, devotional or spiritual book.
- A warm blanket that reminds you that you are wrapped in the arms of Jesus at all times.
- A nail or medal held in your hand.

10 TIPS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER LIFE

(By Gregory Koukl)

If praying does not come effortlessly for you, try these tips for making your prayer life more focused and effective.

For a few hardy prayer warriors, talking with God is as easy as breathing; it happens almost effortlessly. When you ask them how they do it, they simply shrug and reply, “I just pray.” Unfortunately, that’s about as helpful as John McEnroe saying, “I just hit the ball,” when asked for some tips on more effective tennis. It may be easy for him to “just hit the ball”, but most of us hackers need a little more fundamental instruction to get the job done. With that in mind, we’ve included here some practical guidelines that might make your time with the Lord more fruitful. Not all of the suggestions will apply to your particular situation, but if you begin by incorporating a few of them, I’m confident your prayer life will improve.

- 1. CHOOSE A SPECIFIC PLACE TO PRAY** away from distractions so you can concentrate. Ringing phones and crying children will sabotage your “quiet time” before it gets started.
- 2. PRAY AT THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY**, if at all possible. Make it part of your regular routine and it will become habit. Write it into your schedule and then treat it just like a daily appointment.
- 3. PRAY OUT LOUD.** Many people can pray under their breath or in their minds for long periods and still maintain intensity, but for most of us it’s a quick ticket to dreamland. When we pray out loud we have to form intelligent sentences. We have to concentrate more on what we’re praying about.
- 4. KEEP A NOTE PAD HANDY** so you can jot down different things that come to mind while you’re before the Lord. Sometimes you’ll get great ideas totally unrelated to what you’ve been praying about. If you jot them down you can quickly get back to the topic at hand without being too distracted.
- 5. MAKE A LIST** to keep track of your prayer needs. This can be done several ways. Prayer needs can be listed by category like “Church,” “Family,” or “Unsaved friends.”

Or they may be listed by the days of the week. Each day you pray for a different set of needs. You may want to include prayer everyday for a different area of society that has a tremendous influence on the direction of our nation. These seven categories include 1) the church and religion, 2) the family and the home, 3) the media, 4) government, 5) education, 6) business and commerce, and 7) the arts and entertainment.

6. **REDEEM TIME FOR PRAYING** out of unused corners of your schedule. Those who have to drive to work can use the time talking with the Lord instead of screaming at traffic (just don't close your eyes!). Busy homemakers can combine prayer and housework, especially if the task doesn't require a lot of concentration. Joggers, swimmers and cyclists can use their workout time for prayer. Sometimes my best times with the Lord have been chats during long, early morning walks or jogs along the beach.
7. **CHANGE THE PACE DURING YOUR PRAYER TIME.** Include praise, thanksgiving and singing as well as petition. Spend some of your time reflecting on the Scripture, meditating on it and digesting its meaning.
8. **KEEP A PRAYER JOURNAL.** Here are two variations of this idea. The first is to keep track of what you prayed for and when you prayed for it. Leave a space to jot down the answer when it comes. This will help you to keep alert to God's answer so you can thank Him promptly. Sometimes prayer answers come in the back door and you don't want them to slip by you. The second variation is to write the entire prayer in your journal. Make it a personal letter to the Lord on a daily basis. Just write "Dear Lord" instead of "Dear Diary."
9. **PRAY WITH SOMEONE ELSE.** Though some prayers can only be said in solitude, there will be times when you'll want to join hearts with another person in prayer. If you commit to meet on a regular basis, the accountability can really help build consistency. Such prayer trysts can become powerful, life-changing events.
10. **PRAY ONE SENTENCE PRAYERS.** If the thought of laboring over a topic wears you out, pray short, sincere prayers instead. A sentence or two may be all that's needed to exhaust the topic for you for the time being. If so, just move on to the next item without feeling guilty for your brevity.