

## Prayer Guide

Student Life prepared this resource as a guide to learn about prayer and different ways to approach prayer.

What comes to mind when you think about prayer? Jesus' disciples asked him, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" (Luke 11:1). In response, Jesus taught them the Lord's prayer which you can read in the same chapter in the Bible. Reciting those words is one way to pray, but perhaps you're asking, why pray at all?

Put simply, we pray in response to God who loves us dearly and as a way of drawing closer to him. When we do this regularly, it helps us to live each day grounded in the security of being known by the one who created us in his image. This helps us live our everyday lives, whether it's studying or being a friend to someone in need, within the context of God's profound grace. We can pray right in the middle of the hustle and bustle of our ordinary day.

The heart of prayer is relationship, not a list of do's and don'ts. There are many different ways to pray. The following are a few practices that Christians used throughout the centuries and continue to use today. Not all will resonate with you and some of the language maybe unfamiliar; that is okay. The only way to learn about prayer is to pray, so pick one that interests you and try it out. As you pray, may you experience God's deep and abiding love for you and may this love flow to others.

Below are the different types of prayer covered in this guide:

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## Breath Prayer

Breath prayer is an ancient Christian practice dating back to at least the sixth century. Historically, it is associated with the Eastern Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches. Known as the “Jesus Prayer” or “Prayer of the Heart,” Christians would repeat the phrase, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” to the rhythm of their breath. In time, the prayer was shortened to simply, “Jesus, mercy.”



Breath prayer is a good example of “praying without ceasing,” (1 Thess:16-18). It is intended to be a very short prayer, of six to eight syllables. You express praise by calling on one of God’s names such as God, Jesus, Lord, or Spirit or you may prefer another name of adoration. This is led by your request or heart’s desire. The breath prayer is usually said silently, although some sing or chant it.

Breath prayer comes from an intentional time with God. You may need to compose several prayers before you find one that fits for you. Take your time. Does the prayer reflect the heart of your needs or is it what you think you *ought* to be saying? It may be the same from day to day or it may change.

### How

1. Get comfortable and quiet. “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).
2. With closed eyes, imagine that God is calling you by name. God is asking, “What do you want?”
3. Answer God with what honestly comes from your heart (single word, short phrase).
4. Choose your favorite name for God (Jesus, Christ, Lord, Shepherd, Creator, etc.)
5. Combine your name for God with your answer to God’s question. (e.g. I need peace. The name I call God is Jesus. My prayer: Jesus, I need your peace.)

### Examples

- Jesus, let me feel your love.
- Lord, show me your way.
- Holy One, heal me.

### Tips

- If you have several ideas, write them down and wait until you focus on one.
- The final prayer should have only six to eight syllables.
- You can share your prayer so family and friends can pray your prayer for you.

Taken from <https://gravitycenter.com/practice/breath-prayer/>

## Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is drawn from the ancient prayer practices of the Christian contemplative heritage, notably from hermits and monks who lived in the desert called the Mothers and Fathers of the Desert, and Lectio Divina (praying the scriptures). It is inspired by the writings of Christians such as the anonymous author of a book called “*The Cloud of Unknowing*,” a guide to contemplative prayer written in the 14th century.



Centering prayer is a discipline of wordless prayer where you simply show up and learn how to “*Be still and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10). In this prayer, we acknowledge that God’s Spirit works in our lives constantly. It is an ongoing work in our innermost being where our words or thoughts are not required and are surrendered to God. We learn that God requires nothing from us other than our intent to be in communion with him.

### Practicing centering prayer

- Choose a word as the symbol of your intention to invite God’s presence within you. It should be one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Abba, Father, and be still.
- This becomes your sacred word, but not because of its meaning. It is a way of drawing you to a place of deep communion with God whenever you get distracted!
- Two periods of prayer are recommended each day, e.g. in the morning and evening.
- The benefits of centering prayer are experienced in daily life—not during the prayer. For example, you may become more fully present in your daily interactions and tasks.

### How

1. Set your timer to 20 minutes, (or shorter if you want to build up to that time). Sit comfortably, with eyes closed.
2. Silently introduce the word you have chosen. You may wish to repeat it a few times.
3. Thoughts will arise many, many times during this prayer time. This includes body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections. When you find your mind wandering, use your sacred word to gently draw you back from your distractions. Don’t worry if you have to do this a hundred times!
4. At the end of the prayer period, stay silent with eyes closed for a few minutes.

### Find out more

<https://gravitycenter.com/practice/centering-prayer/>

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/centering-prayer>

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

## Christian Meditation

Various forms of meditation have deep roots in Christian spirituality. This particular form was developed by John Main (1926 - 1982), a Benedictine monk who worked in England and then Canada. He stated it allowed "God's mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only a reality, but the reality which gives meaning, shape, and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are..."

Meditation takes the attention off of us and onto Jesus. Contemplation is seen as a grace and a reciprocal work of love. The fruits of the Spirit are developed in us as we become more loving people.



### How

- Sit still with your back straight and close your eyes.
- Silently begin to recite a single word—a prayer word or mantra. The ancient Christian prayer-word "maranatha" which means "come, Lord" is a good choice.
- Recite your prayer word in equal syllables.
- Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you repeat it, silently, gently, faithfully and—above all—simply.
- Meditate twice a day, morning and evening, for between 20 to 30 minutes.

### Tips

- Stay with the same word during the whole meditation and for each day.
- Don't visualize but listen to the word as you say it.
- Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images, and other words.
- Don't fight your distractions: let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively and returning to it as soon as you realize you have stopped saying it or when your attention wanders.
- Be patient with yourself. When you give up, start again. A weekly meditation group can help you develop this prayer.
- Meditation does not replace other forms of prayer—it enriches them.

Taken from World Community for Christian Meditation:

<http://wccm.org/>

<https://www.johnmain.org/>

## Conversational Prayer

Conversational prayer as practiced by two or more people was first written about by Rosalind Rinker in her book *“Prayer: Conversing with God.”* Dallas Willard, an American philosopher who wrote extensively on Christian spiritual formation, said about the book that “group after group were brought to life as they learned to listen to God.”



There are a few common things that happen when praying in groups. Often a lot of time is taken up by talking about the prayer requests, leaving little time to pray, or the prayer becomes long monologues. Conversational prayer is dialogue, both with God and with others; it recognizes that God is present and he hears our petitions. It focuses on listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit. Using short prayers invites all to participate, including those who are shy or new to prayer. As we pray, we invite and expect the Holy Spirit to be praying with us and through us. (Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:18).

### How

- It is helpful to have a “leader” who can open and close the gathering.
- A topic is presented. For example, prayer for our university or an individual.
- Begin the prayer time with adoration, praising God for who He is by thinking of an attribute and characteristic of God that relates to the topic presented.
- Keep each prayer short, one to three sentences, and focus on one thought.
- Listen carefully and pray silently with the person praying. Do not think about what you’ll pray next.
- Build on the prayers of one another.
- If a scripture comes to mind, pray it. Bring in God’s promises, commands, and desires. This is often how the Holy Spirit directs our prayers.
- Silence is good. Rest in it and don’t rush to fill it.
- When a topic is complete, indicated by a longer period of silence, wait for someone else to present a new topic in prayer. Or the “leader” can present a new topic.
- The “leader” closes the prayer time at the end.

### Tips

- Do not spend time talking about the topic.
- Use everyday language.
- Pray spontaneously, not in a circle. Allow people to pass. No one should feel they have to pray out loud on every topic.
- Pray loud enough so others can hear you.
- Don’t close each short prayer with “amen” to keep the conversation flowing.

### Example

Jane shares she is struggling with anxiety about the future.

- *1st person:* “Lord, you are a sovereign God.”

- *2nd person:* “Yes, you are in complete control and have authority over all things.”
- *3rd person:* “God, you are in control of our lives. You know our past, present, and future. Please help us to rest and trust in you.”
- *4th person:* “Help Jane to rest and trust in you as she struggles with anxiety. Help her to trust you with her future.”

Based on “How to Pray with Others,” Redeemer Presbyterian Church, [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com)



## Ignatian Prayer

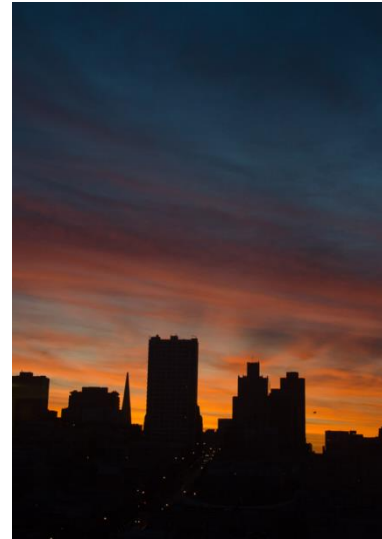
Ignatius of Loyola (1491 -1556) was a Spanish nobleman who experienced a dramatic conversion to Christianity while recovering from severe war injuries. He founded a monastic order called the Jesuits. Ignatian spirituality emphasizes that we can find God in every circumstance of our lives because God's presence is constant.

### The Examen

This way of praying helps us notice God's presence as we review our day. It is best done at the end of a day, but you can choose to review the previous day if practiced in the morning. If it's the afternoon, you could reflect on your morning.

### Practicing the Examen

This way of praying moves from gratitude and recognition of today's gifts to hope for tomorrow.



### How

1. Relish the moments that went well. Think about the ways God blessed you, anything and everything.
2. Request the Spirit to guide you as you think back on your day.
3. Review the day and pay attention to your feelings, recognizing wrong attitudes and behaviours. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?
4. Repent of any mistakes and ask God for forgiveness and healing. Ask for help to move on and for wisdom to discern how you might better handle a similar situation in the future.
5. Resolve to live tomorrow well, asking for God's help. Imagine the things you'll be doing and the people you may see. Ask for help with any moments that might be difficult, especially when you might be tempted to repeat the patterns of today.

### Find out more

<http://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/ignatian-spirituality/examen-and-ignatian-prayer/how-can-i-pray-try-the-daily-examen>  
<https://gravitycenter.com/practice/examen/>

## Imaginative Prayer

In this form of prayer, you use your God-given imagination to place yourself in a biblical scene and you reflect on what God reveals to you. If you find this hard, that's ok. You can still pay attention to your gut feelings and reactions to the passage.



### How

1. Choose a passage of scripture. The gospels work well.
2. Pray that God's Spirit will guide you, drawing you to what God wants you to notice.
3. Read the passage slowly a couple of times.
4. Place yourself in the scene and use your imagination. Who are you in the scene? For example, you read about the shepherds in the fields and you imagine being there, perhaps as a shepherd or an onlooker.
5. What do you see, smell, hear, and touch? What do you feel? Is Jesus there? Talk to him about what he is doing or what is happening. Is there anything you want to ask him?
6. Respond to whatever God shows you with gratitude.

### Finding out more

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/ignatian-contemplation-imaginative-prayer>



## Lectio Divina

*Lectio Divina* is Latin for divine reading. This method goes back to the days of Jesus when listening to scripture was part of the devotional practice of the Jews (there were no printed bibles at this time). Early monastic traditions took up this practice when monks gathered to hear a member of the community read from the Biblical texts. They learned to listen with their hearts, expecting God to reveal his word to them in the belief that Scripture is living and dynamic. This prayer can be done in a group or alone.



### Practicing Lectio Divina

- Choose a passage of scripture.
  - It can be from the Bible or from a book of prayer such as *“Seeking God’s Face: Praying with the Bible Through the Year”* by Philip Reinders, or a daily study. It should be short, around ten to fifteen verses.
- The text is read four times, allowing you to read, reflect, respond, and rest.
- Each time of reading is followed by five to 10 minutes of silence for reflection.

### How

1. Read the passage a couple of times with silence between. Receive the words, listening to the passage as a whole. What word, phrase, or image stands out?
2. Read it again and reflect on the word, phrase, or image. Let questions and wondering arise. Allow God’s Spirit to guide you. How might God be speaking to you?
3. Read again. Now is your time to talk to God, telling him about your thoughts and feelings. How are you being invited to respond? Perhaps there’s a challenge, a word of encouragement, or some action to take.
4. Now is the time to surrender the thinking part of you. God requires nothing from you. He simply wants you to “be” in his presence and know you are loved by him.

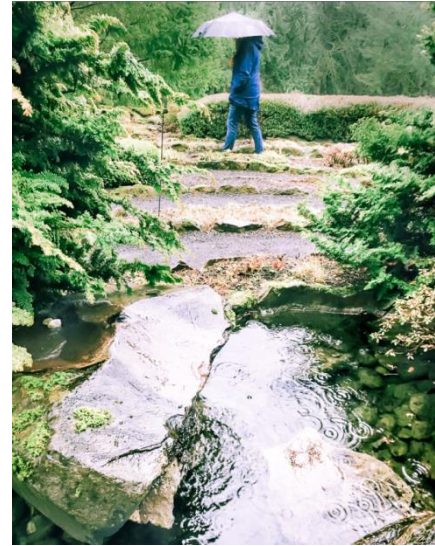
### Find out more

<https://gravitycenter.com/practice/lectio-divina/>

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/lectio-divina>

## Prayer Labyrinth

Dr. Lauren Artress, (b. 1945), an Anglican priest, is the leading figure in using the labyrinth as a spiritual practice. Labyrinths are found in some Medieval Cathedrals, the most famous one being in Chartres Cathedral in Northern France. Originally, they served as a substitute for Christians who could not afford to go to Jerusalem. The labyrinth is a walking meditation and a path of prayer. It is not a maze but leads to a center point along one path and then back out. As you walk slowly, you are deepening your awareness to the presence and activity of God in your life.



### Walking the labyrinth

- The person walking the labyrinth uses the same path to and from the center. The entrance becomes the exit.
- The path is in full view; there are no dead ends or unexpected turns. This allows you to focus internally without worrying about where you are going.
- There is no right way or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. You may even go directly to the center to sit quietly.
- Some approach the labyrinth with questions, others wish to slow down from a busy life. Some come to find strength, or during times of grief and loss. You come as you are. Walking the labyrinth quiets the mind, opens the heart, and grounds the body.

### How

Prepare by sitting or standing quietly before walking the labyrinth. Theologically, this symbolizes the Trinity, and the three stages mean that God is centre, circumference, and the way.

- Releasing on the way in.
- Receiving in the center.
- Returning when you follow the path back out.

Adapted from: <https://www.veriditas.org/>

## Visio Divina

*Visio Divina* is Latin for divine seeing. It is a practice similar to Lectio Divina (divine reading), but it uses images as a way of listening to God.

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, icons are windows into the sacred realm, making the invisible visible and helping believers “see” spiritual realities. Images can move us beyond conventional wisdom and open us to the presence and work of God in our lives, the lives of others, and in our world.



### How

1. Look at a photo, painting, sculpture, or any art form. Note the colors, patterns, and details. Remain with the image for one to two minutes. You can write down what you observe in a few words.
2. Look deeper, allowing yourself to see at a deeper level. Engage your imagination. Where are you in the artwork? What do you see from that perspective? What deeper meaning emerges?
3. Look again and respond to the image with prayer. Perhaps the image reminds you of an experience, a person, or an issue? This may lead you to thanksgiving or intercession.
4. Surrender the thinking and visual seeing part of you. God requires nothing from you; he simply wants you to “be” in his presence and know you are loved by him.

Based on [episcopalprayer.wordpress.com/visio-divina/](http://episcopalprayer.wordpress.com/visio-divina/)

### Find out more

<http://www.seeingtheword.org/About.html>

<http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Praying-with-Art-Visio-Divina>

## Welcome Prayer

The welcome prayer was developed by Mary Mrozowski, a devout Catholic who practiced centering prayer regularly. She based it on an early 18th century spiritual work by a Jesuit priest and spiritual director, Father Jean Pierre de Caussade.

This is one way of bringing the surrendering aspect of prayer into our everyday lives. It helps us let go of thoughts and feelings that distort the true image of God. The welcome prayer includes noticing the feelings, emotions, thoughts, and sensations in our bodies. It gives us the opportunity to respond to those moments in our daily lives in a healthy way, instead of reacting in ways that harm us and others.

We let go and we let God.



### How

When you encounter an emotional experience, (anger, frustration, or mild annoyance), take a moment to be still and follow the steps below.

1. Focus. Let yourself feel the emotions, thoughts, and sensations. Don't fight them.
2. Speak "welcome" to the emotions, thoughts, and sensations. Example, you may say "welcome fear", or "welcome jealousy." This diffuses the emotion. It's like standing up to a bully.
3. Let go. Stay with the first two stages until you sense the emotions dissipating and the knot unfurling. Surrender to God by repeating sentences such as:
  - "God, I let go of the desire for security, affection, and control."
  - "Jesus, I let go of the desire to change this feeling."

Based on: <https://gravitycenter.com/practice/welcoming-prayer/>

## Prayer Resources

### Books

- Guidebook to Prayer: *24 Ways to Walk With God* by MaryKate Morse
- Prayer: *Finding the Heart's True Home* by Richard Foster.
- Prayer: *Conversing with God* by Rosalind Rinker.
- Intimacy with God: *An Introduction to Centering Prayer* by Thomas Keating.
- *To Pray and to Love* by Roberta Bondi.
- *Red Moon Rising* by Pete Greig.
- *Seeking God's face: Praying with the Bible through the Year* by Eugene Peterson.

### Websites

<https://www.24-7prayer.com/>

<https://www.sacredspace.ie/>

<https://renovare.org/>