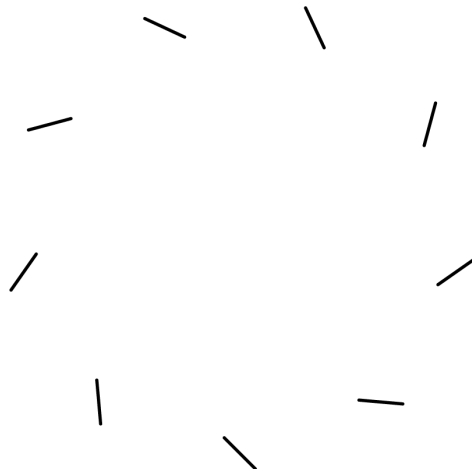


The Prayer Practice



Companion Guide

Practicing the Way

Introduction to the Prayer Practice

We hope you find this companion guide a helpful resource to accompany the Sunday sermon series and whether you use the video teaching from *Practicing the Way* or not.

We believe that prayer is something that nobody ever 'masters'. Whether you are just starting to pray or have been praying for decades, Jesus has more for you over this next season and beyond!

As we begin, we remember: the goal isn't to "get good" at prayer, but to create new daily rhythms and ways of being that open us to God's goodness in more profound ways. We hope these next four sessions will help you do just that.

Recommended Reading:

Reading a book alongside the Practice can greatly enhance your understanding and enjoyment of prayer. You may love to read, or you may not. For that reason, it's recommended, but certainly not required.

Our companion book for the Prayer Practice is *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton, who is the lead pastor of Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, and the national director of 24-7 Prayer USA.

Week One | TALKING TO GOD

1. Questions (if not watching the video or only watching the teaching)

1. What emotions does the word “prayer” elicit from your heart?
2. What challenges do you face in prayer?
3. What invitation do you sense from God to go deeper in prayer?

2. Bible: Ask someone to read Luke 11v1-4; Matthew 5v5-15.

Leaders can find other passages that speak of Talking to God for people to read out, if they wish.

3. Watch video or read this Overview

Today we look at the first movement of prayer: Talking to God. Whether you are new to prayer or have been praying for years it can be difficult to pray. You may be in a very busy season of life, you may be undergoing a difficult season of life, you may just find it boring, or find that your prayer-life has dried up or maybe you’ve even questioned whether prayer *really* makes any difference. If you do struggle to pray, you are not alone. No one ever masters prayer, so please don’t think you’re the only one who finds it difficult.

The great thing for us is that Jesus had a lot to say about how to pray. We read in Luke 11 that after witnessing Jesus’ prayer life over many occasions and seeing the fruit and power of his life, his disciples ask him, ‘Teach us to pray’. Jesus responds by giving his disciples a prayer which could be used as both a framework for our prayers, but also a ready-made prayer to use anytime, anywhere.

In modern times, we call this the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ or the ‘Our Father.’ It is one of the most well-known part of the Bible and has been used as a powerful model and pre-made prayer over the past 2000 years by Christians all over the world.

Another word for a pre-made prayer is ‘liturgy’ and comes in all sorts of forms: including praying the Lord’s Prayer, singing through the Psalms or using a prayer app on your phone. This way of praying can be incredibly

helpful in various seasons of our lives: when we're learning to pray, when we're exhausted or sick, when we're traveling and find it hard to focus, or when we're living with grief and doubt, searching for the right words to talk to God. "The prayers of the saints," as some call them, can carry us through.

So, we start our four-week journey simply, by praying pre-made prayers to God.

Respond by discussing the following questions:

- a) Are pre-made prayers a part of your life with God, or not?**
- b) What support do you need from this community or our church as we go on this journey with God?**

Practice 01 – Starting or Developing our Daily Prayer Rhythms

This week's Practice will focus on starting and developing our daily prayer rhythms which will sustain us through the ups and downs of life. You may have something worked out really well already, but we invite you to continue to be open for God to speak to you about going deeper.

The Catholic priest, Ronald Rolheiser writes:

"What clear, simple, and brief rituals provide is precisely prayer that depends upon something beyond our own energy. The rituals carry us, our tiredness, our lack of energy, our inattentiveness, our indifference, and even our occasional distaste. They keep us praying even when we are too tired to muster up our own energy."

If you run out of time, encourage people to continue reflecting on these questions for the next time you meet and to share insights with the group at the start of the next session

Here are a few questions to hold in your mind and even to write down, as we enter this week's Practice. (Note for leaders: Depending on the where you members are you may want to 'mix and match' these questions with the alternative questions below)

When will I pray? - First thing in the morning? After my workout? At night? On my lunch break? When the kids are napping? Many people find first thing in the morning to be best, but not always. As a general rule, give God your best time of day, when you are most awake and aware.

Where will I pray? - Most of us find it incredibly helpful to choose a dedicated space for prayer — a room in our home, a corner in our bedroom, a park bench near our house, or a literal prayer closet. This place can become a kind of modern day altar, where you go to open to God. Not because God hears us better at an altar, but because we hear God better!

How should I pray? What posture is best for me? Sitting on a chair, a couch, or the floor? Kneeling? Standing? Walking? Lying down? Out loud or quiet? Does it help to begin with deep breathing first? How do I get my body to work with my heart's desire for God, not against it?

How long should I pray? There's no "right" answer (to this or any of the other questions), but as a general rule: long enough to become present to God. And that may take a bit longer than you expect. If you have a newborn child or some other extenuating circumstances that make 30 minutes too hard, that's fine. Start where you are and take the next step forward in your journey.

In general, if we can't pray for 30 minutes a day, we're simply too busy. And we need to take a serious life audit of what we believe is most important to us. After all, we're not trying to layer on more Christian busyness to our already over-maxed lives; we're trying to slow down and simplify our lives around what we most deeply desire — God.

Alternatively, you could ask:

- 1. When do you pray?***
- 2. Where do you pray?***
- 3. How do you pray?***
- 4. How long do you pray?***

Encourage discussion as people choose one of these practices for this week. Leaders will need to read these out/ make them available to people.

01 Create a daily prayer rhythm

Decide on a time and a place to pray, if possible, every day this week. Decide on and commit to a time duration. Don't overreach. Start where you are. If you don't pray daily, aim for 10-15 minutes. If you pray for 10-15 minutes, consider upping it to half an hour. Just take the next step. Create routines or rituals you actually enjoy to make your daily prayer habit something you look forward to all day long — light a candle, make yourself coffee or tea, sit by a window you love, go outside, savour the quiet, or put on worship music.

Those of you who are more kinesthetic may find it helpful to pray while walking, inside or in nature, or with something to keep your hands busy, like knitting or drawing.

Ultimately, work with your personality, not against it.

02 Pick out a pre-made prayer and talk to God

Try using one of the sources we mentioned earlier.

-The Lord's Prayer

-The Psalms — See below for recommendations

-Scripture — Find a passage that resonates with your heart and pray it back to God

-Singing — Sing acapella, put on a worship album, or play an instrument

-Liturgy — *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle, or *Every Moment Holy* by Douglas Kaine McKelvey

- Apps — Lectio 365 from 24-7 Prayer, Pray as You Go from the Jesuits, or Hallow.

You can start in Psalm 1 and pray through the book. Or you can pray a psalm based on your emotional or spiritual state that day.

Here are some recommendations.

- **To begin your day with God:** Psalm 5, 19, 20, 23, 25
- **When you are sad:** Psalm 13, 22, 42, 77
- **When you are in distress:** Psalm 57, 60, 86

- **When you are scared:** Psalm 27
 - **When you are hurt:** Psalm 10
 - **When you ache for more of God:** Psalm 63, 84
 - **When you want to repent:** Psalm 51
 - **When you are grateful:** Psalm 9, 103
 - **When you want to worship:** Psalm 8, 148-150
- Whatever you decide, pray at least once a day.

GOING DEEPER THIS WEEK

Reading Read chapters 1-3 of *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton (pp. 1-68).

Podcast Listen to episode 1 of the Prayer series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: Praying the Lord's Prayer

This week's Reach Exercise is to utilize the Lord's Prayer as a template for a longer time of prayer by praying through each line. This should take around 15 minutes to pray, but feel free to take it at your own pace, listening to the Spirit's prompting.

Note: You can do this exercise alone or as a group.

You can follow this QR code to a video tutorial from Straham Coleman that will guide you step by step, using prayer prompts.



Or you can follow the written tutorial on the following pages.

Tutorial

Take a few deep, slow breaths. Become aware of your surroundings, the sounds, how your body is today. Open up to God in this present moment. Then, praying from what you imagine or feel is a deep place within you and then spend time on each line of the Lord's prayer:

- **Our Father in heaven**

- **Hallowed by your name**
- **Your kingdom come, you will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**
- **Give us each day our daily bread.**
- **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.**
- **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

Before Next Week

If you want to get the most out of this Practice, you need to do it and then *reflect* on it. Before your next time together with the group for Week 02, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Week Two | TALKING WITH GOD

1. Questions (if not watching the video or only watching the teaching)

1. Last week where did you feel resistance in prayer? Internally or externally?
2. Where did you feel delight?
3. Where did you most experience God's nearness??

2. Bible: Ask someone to read Luke 11v5-13; Psalm 22v1-2; Ephesians 6:18-20

Leaders can find other passages that speak of Talking with God for people to read out, if they wish.

3. Watch video or read this Overview

Praying pre-made prayers or liturgy is a beautiful way to pray. Pre-written or spoken words can both be a wonderful model for us and can carry us through, especially when we struggle with words or don't know what to pray.

However, there is something also powerful about using our own words to pray, as we share with God what is on our mind, our hopes, our dreams, our pain, fears and confusion. A healthy relationship is one where we can share where we truly are with the one we love. This includes our life with God. Below are three helpful categories for how we can talk with God:

1. 01 **Gratitude** — talking with God about what is good in your life and world. Gratitude involves reminding ourselves and others of how good God is and all the gifts that he has given to us. It doesn't brush away our troubles but it can sustain us through them as we are lifted up beyond the horizon of hardship of life. Appreciating God draws us closer to him and opens us up to his love, whatever our circumstances.
2. 02 **Lament** — talking with God about what is evil in your life and world. Over half the book of psalms is devoted to lament. Lament is not a sign of a weak faith, but a real and living trust that God wants

us to be real with him and is interested in every part of our lives. Lament can open us up to the healing of God in our grief and to the care of God in our sadness.

3. **03 Petition and Intercession** — asking God to fulfill his promises to overcome evil with good. We ask for ourselves (petition) and on behalf of others (intercession) because we believe God that God is a good Father and king who wants to provide for us and his world. It reminds us that although we can't accomplish everything on our own, we can trust in and contend for God's provision to be poured out on those places and people in need and to see his beautiful and wise kingdom rule come to earth.

TIME TO PRAY

This session, instead of follow up questions, we invite you to either pray together in one group or to break into smaller groups to pray three aspects of prayer out loud. This is an invitation, so don't feel pressured if this is a step too far from you, but where possible, even a short sentence prayer or a few lines will be a great step forward for you. We invite you to pray a few minutes on each of these aspects before moving on to the next one.

- 1. Gratitude**
- 2. Lament**
- 3. Petition and Intercession.**

PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK(S) AHEAD:

Choose one or a couple of these practices for the week.

01 Fine tune your daily prayer rhythm.

How are you getting on with your daily prayer rhythm? This week is there anything that you would like to try differently? A different time or a different body posture such as sitting, standing, kneeling, or having your arms outstretched or going for a walk? Some times making one simple change like this can breathe new life into our prayer time.

02 Begin and/or end your day with gratitude

While there's no "right" way to practice gratitude, we encourage you to use your imagination and creativity to "give thanks in all circumstances," as written in 1 Thessalonians 5v18.

Here are a few ideas.

- Begin your daily prayer time by giving thanks for three gifts of the day.
- Give thanks during everyday moments like while you commute to work, take a shower, or walk your dog.
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Write out three gratitudes on a small piece of paper each morning, and then carry them in your pocket all day long.
- Go around the table at dinner with your family, spouse, roommates, or community and say what you are thankful for.

However you do it, at *least* once a day, pause, and give thanks for at least three good things in your life.

03 Ask

Step into petition and intercession, and ask on behalf of yourself and others. We have two recommended exercises to do this.

• Prayer Cards

○ Make a deck of index cards with names or situations at the top of each card (or you can do one card with the most important people and situations in your life). We challenge you to consider including your enemies or those you are struggling to forgive, as praying for them can set your heart free to love them.

○ Flip through your cards and linger over each one for a few seconds to a few minutes, offering up specific prayers to our Father. Remember, generic prayers make it harder to see God's hand in our life.

• "Pray the Room"

- This is a form of imaginative prayer that combines intercession with waiting on and listening for God. The goal is to pray what the Spirit of Jesus is already wanting you to pray from deep within.
- Get to a quiet, distraction-free place if at all possible. Take 5-10 deep, slow breaths.
- Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a room with the Father or Jesus. Take a moment to visualize the room. If no specific room takes shape in your mind, use your memory of a room you love and experience God in.
- Ask the Spirit to bring into the room anyone or anything that he wants you to pray for. Wait and see what comes into your field of vision.
- How do they look? Are they happy? Sad? Bruised? Tired? Scared? Lost? What else do you notice about their appearance or demeanor?
- Then, pray for that person. Make your intercession as specific as possible. You can pray whatever is on your heart for them, or ask the Spirit for further insight into what to pray for them. If you don't know what to pray, just hold them before God with love.
- Consider reaching out to that person to check in or offer a word of encouragement or sense of God's heart for them.

GOING DEEPER THIS WEEK

Reading Read chapters 4-5 of *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton (pp. 69-114).

Podcast Listen to episode 2 of the Prayer series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: Praying your own lament

Praying lament is a deeply personal experience. This exercise has been designed to help you connect with your own feelings and experiences so you can freely express them to God. Don't feel like you need to go deep if you're not ready. Remember, honesty is where the real power is with

lament, so try not to filter your emotions and words. You can follow this QR code to a video tutorial from Straham Coleman that will guide you step by step, using prayer prompts



Or you can follow the written tutorial on the following pages.

01 Become aware — To start, make yourself comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Become aware of your surroundings, the sounds, the temperature, how your body is today. Open up to God.

02 Focus on a feeling — Let yourself feel your present emotional state, your difficult situations and griefs and losses. You may have a few in your life. See if you can bring your focus to one of those emotions or situations that you're currently feeling hurt or angry about.

03 Sit with it — Sit with that feeling, without judging it or telling yourself it's good or bad. Just notice how it feels. Can you locate it in your body? Your gut? Chest? Back? Shoulders? What is it like to hold that within you?

04 Bring it to God — Now, imagine holding it out in your hands as you stand before him, so you can both see it. Tell God exactly how you feel, without a filter, and allow God to feel what you feel in this moment, to acknowledge the pain and grief that exists. Be raw, honest, and vulnerable. Let God hear all that's in your heart. Remember, you're taking your pain to him, on a quest for deeper intimacy, not rebellion. And know that God can bear it, and that he knows what it's like to hurt. Hebrews 4v15 tells us that God sympathizes with us. Give God consent to sympathize with your lament.

05 Express your desires and needs — Plead with God to act, to change what is, to redeem or vindicate or heal or save or fight on your behalf. Wrestle with God if you feel the permission to do so.

06 Give God your trust — Then, let go. You might want to say, "Even though I feel [insert your emotion or lament], you are good and I trust you

with it.” Or “I trust you, help my lack of trust!” Or use the ending to Jesus’s own prayer of lament, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

07 Be still — For a few minutes, be still before God and allow him to respond. You may feel a lightness or a peace, you may see a picture or hear a word in your mind or imagination, or you might not. Notice how you feel after letting God hear your lament. Whatever happens, allow God the opportunity to meet you in this moment.

08 Give thanks — Finally, take a moment to thank God for being with you in this space. For listening, and for caring.

Reminder: Start with where you are. As an alternative to the tutorial above, you can simply pray one of the Psalms of Lament. Scholars argue approximately two-thirds of the 150 psalms are prayers of lament.

Here are a few we recommend to pray: Psalm 10, 13, 22, 42, 74, 77

Before Next Week

If you want to get the most out of this Practice, you need to do it and then *reflect* on it. Before your next time together with the group for Week 02, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Week Three | LISTENING TO GOD

1. Introductory Questions (if not watching the video or only watching the teaching)

1. What aspects of last week's exercises were most difficult for you - gratitude, lament, or asking?
2. Do you have any stories of answered prayer? Or unanswered prayer?
3. What did you sense God doing in you as you prayed?

2. **Bible:** Ask someone to read John 10v2-6 and/or Hebrews 1v1-3; or another passage that speaks of Listening to God.

3. **Watch the video or read this Overview**

There comes a point in our relationship to God where we desire not just to speak to him, but to listen. To hear his voice. As Jesus said in John 10v27, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." This is a Spirit-generated desire in the heart of a disciple of Jesus. In Luke 10v39, it was said of Jesus' disciple Mary that she "sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he said." This is the primary posture of a disciple of Jesus: sitting at his feet and listening.

But how do we hear God's voice? He doesn't speak in the ways we're used to. Yet he speaks in a variety of ways. Ultimately through Jesus, then Scripture, circumstances, desire, prophesy, dreams, visions, the "still small voice," and more.

Leaders who are not using the video in their Community may still find it helpful to show the section of the video from 09:19 to 20:07 for these important points.

1. Jesus: hearing God's voice begins and ends with Jesus, the Word.

2. Scripture: "the eternally ongoing speech of God to us." [Bavinck]

3. Circumstances: some of the circumstances of our lives are the shepherd's voice coming to us to lead and guide us.

4. Desires: we discern God’s voice by listening – both carefully and critically – to the desires of our heart.

5. Prophecy, dreams and visions: hearing God’s voice for other people; waiting to see if a Bible phrase or a picture comes to mind, and then offering that to the other person as a possible word from God, to be tested against Scripture and in community.

6. Listening prayer: waiting quietly for God to speak into your mind or heart.

Learning to sift through all the “voices” in our head and to discern how God is speaking to us is a key task of discipleship. We need to discern what is my own imagination, or worse, my flesh or sin, what is the evil one, and what is God’s voice coming to me.

Learning to hear is just the beginning; learning to obey is the even greater task. Our intention must be to really listen to God, with a heart of loving surrender and trust.

Respond by discussing the following questions:

- a) Which of these ways of hearing God are most familiar to you?
- b) Which of these ways of hearing God do you need to develop?

4. Read through the following section on Lectio Divina and practice it as a group using a passage of your choice, e.g. John 10:2-6, Hebrews 1:1-3 or Philippians 4:4-7.

Practice 01 Lectio Divina

This is an ancient Latin phrase, first used by St. Benedict in the sixth century. It means “spiritual reading.” It’s a way of reading Scripture slowly and prayerfully, listening for God’s word to you.

While you do not need to follow this four-step process, there are four movements to *Lectio Divina* that you may find helpful.

First, get somewhere quiet and as distraction-free as possible. Open your Bible and pick out a passage that’s conducive to *Lectio* — a Psalm, a

portion of the Gospels, or a section of an epistle (another word for a letter such as Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, etc.). Take a few deep breaths. Then:

- **Read** — A passage of your choice, slowly and prayerfully. Pay special attention to any words or phrases or ideas that jump out to you, or that move you emotionally or deeply resonate.
- **Reflect** — Reread the passage again, slowly. This time, pause over the word(s) or phrase(s) that were highlighted to you during your first reading. Meditate on them. Turn them over in your mind. Savour them.
- **Respond** — Pray your impressions back to God. You can use your own words or simply pray the text directly to God.
- **Rest** — Take a few minutes in silence to breathe deeply and rest in God's loving word to you.

Repeat this 3-5 times this coming week.

If you're doing this as a group, try to be as quiet and distraction-free as possible while you do this. Then share your impressions with one another and pray them together to God.

If you have run out of group time, the rest of this material can be used as "homework."

Practice 02 Listening Prayer

First, find somewhere quiet and distraction-free. Then:

- **Breathe** — Take a minute or two to just breathe slowly and deeply, clearing your mind to receive God's word to you. You may want to simply pray, "Father" or "Jesus" or "Come Holy Spirit" as you inhale and exhale each breath.
- **Silence** — Ask God to silence the voice of the enemy in your mind, to clear the air around you, to shield and guard your imagination.
- **Ask the Spirit to speak to you**

- **Open your mind and heart to listen** — 1 Corinthians 6v19 tells us our body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit within you has direct access to your imagination. Wait quietly with a surrendered heart. He may come to you in a:
 - Word or phrase
 - Scripture
 - Thought
 - Metaphor
 - Picture in your mind
 - Short film, kind of a series of pictures in your mind
 - Feeling in your heart
 - Sensation in your body

If nothing comes, don't judge yourself, or God. Just give thanks for his love and try again later. Our job is to be present to God and to listen for his voice when he desires to speak to us.

Test whatever you “hear” against Scripture and in community.

Finally, if God's word to you was directional, obey Him. Go and do what he said!

GOING DEEPER THIS WEEK

Reading Read chapters 6-8 of *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Stanton (pp. 115-162).

Podcast Listen to episode 3 of the Prayer series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: Praying the Examen

This exercise, the Examen, was developed by St Ignatius of Loyola as a way of reviewing our day with God. St Ignatius taught that God often speaks through our emotions, and that, by becoming aware of them, we may also become aware of the Spirit's movements in our own lives. He also encouraged others to talk to Jesus as a friend, sitting with and sharing our lives with him. The Examen was designed as a regular practice for the end of the day or week.

You can follow this QR code to a video tutorial from Strahan Coleman that will guide you step by step using prayer prompts.



Or you can follow the written tutorial below.

- 1 **Become aware of God** — Review the day with the eyes of the Spirit, asking God for the light to see. It may seem rushed to you, a blur or chaotic. If you feel overwhelmed or struggle to focus, ask the Spirit to help you see and bring focus to your mind.
- 2 **Look back with gratitude** — As you explore your day, take note of moments where you can thank God for what's been. It may be as simple as noting the provision of food and waking in the comfort of your bed. Think about the people in your day and the connections made. Where was God in each relationship or conversation? Recall the little things about your day, simple everyday pleasures, and discover God among them.
- 3 **Notice your emotions** — Reflect on your feelings throughout the day.
What do you notice? Without judging what you felt, did you feel anger? Contentment? Empathy? Happiness? Embarrassment? Trusting that God speaks through our emotions, what do you think God was saying amidst them?
- 4 **Pray over one aspect of your day** — Allowing the Spirit to highlight one element of your day, be it positive or negative, ask him to speak to you about it. Consider it with him and allow it to lead you to prayer, whether it's gratitude, intercession, petition, repentance, or praise.
- 5 **Look ahead to tomorrow** — Finally, ask God to prepare your heart for tomorrow. Notice how you feel about it — anxious, excited, nervous, overwhelmed — and invite the Spirit to speak to those joys and concerns. Ask for clarity for the day ahead and for peace to approach it with confidence. Ask for wisdom, for hope, for discernment.

Before Next Week

If you want to get the most out of this Practice, you need to do it and then *reflect* on it. Before your next time together with the group for Week 04, take five to ten minutes to journal your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Week Four | **BEING WITH GOD**

1. Introductory Questions (if not watching the video or only watching the teaching)

1. What was your experience of trying listening prayer?
2. Did you sense God saying anything to you this week?
3. As you sat with God, did the Spirit convict or comfort you in any area of your life?

2. Watch the video or read this Overview

We never mature beyond any of the four stages of prayer we are exploring in this Practice, but the further we progress in prayer, the more we desire to speak to God, to listen to God, and to just be with God.

As a general rule, you can gauge the intimacy in a relationship by how comfortable you are being alone together in the silence. Early on, relationships are full of words and activity. As you grow closer over time, there are still words and activity, but you also come to deeply enjoy just being with each other.

In the later stages of prayer, all human metaphors fall short, but the most ancient metaphor for this stage is marriage. There is a level of intimacy in marriage that is the intermingling of persons at the deepest level. It is wordless, yet it is a form of communication, and more, communion. Followers of Jesus have long considered this sacred love to be a picture of union with God.

This type of wordless prayer has come to be called “contemplation,” based on 2 Corinthians 3v18. Its most basic meaning is to contemplate: to look, to gaze upon the beauty of God, receiving his love pouring out toward you in Christ and by the Spirit, and then giving your love back in return.

It includes:

1. Looking at God, looking at you, in love.
2. Yielding to his love.
3. Resting in God’s love.

Contemplative prayer is not easy! Three major challenges are:

1. **Distraction.** This is normal and it can be calmed with dedicated practice – but it will never go away.
2. **Hurry.** We need to create space to give God our time and loving attention.
3. **Fear.** Heart issues surface in contemplative prayer, but if you persevere you will move through inner turmoil to a kind of surrender, freedom and peace.

3. Bible: Soaking in Scripture can help us to engage in contemplative prayer.

- Read 2 Corinthians 3v12-18.

What does this tell you about looking at God, looking at you, in love?

- Read Matthew 27v37-46.

What can you learn from Jesus about yielding to God's love?

- Read Ephesians 3v16-19.

What does Paul's prayer tell us about resting in God's love?

We are all challenged by distraction, hurry and fear when we turn to contemplative prayer.

What have you found to be helpful in beginning to overcome these challenges?

4. Read through the following section on developing a prayer rhythm with silence and breath. Then practice it as a group.

Practice 01 Begin your daily prayer rhythm with silence and a breath prayer

The seventh century monk St. John Climacus gave this advice on contemplation: “Let the memory of Jesus combine with your breath.” Contemplatives have long used the God-ordained process of breathing to attune to the breath/spirit/ *pneuma* of God within the “temple” of our body. God has designed deep, slow breathing to calm your body’s nervous system and center your mind. That makes breathing an especially helpful pathway to contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer is difficult because our mind is so distraction-prone, but the basic steps are simple.

- Find a quiet, distraction-free place to pray.
- Get seated comfortably, but where you can breathe properly and not slouch. We recommend either a dining chair with your feet on the floor and your back straight and shoulders upright, or sitting cross-legged directly on the floor, with a pillow or cushion under your backside to help with blood circulation. Not on a couch.
- Breathe slowly (five seconds on the inhale, then five on the exhale) from your belly. Relax. Become present to your body. And to the moment. Then, open your mind to God.
- You may just want to remain here, in loving attention to the Trinity. Remember: You’re not trying to pray words here. It’s your heart to God’s heart; this prayer is will to will, love to love.
- Or you may want to combine a prayer word to your breath. A prayer word is simply a word or phrase that you use to keep your attention fixed on God.
 - Many use “Father” or “Abba” or “Jesus”
 - Others use a phrase from Scripture like “The Lord is my shepherd” (on the inhale), “I lack nothing” (on the exhale).
 - The Eastern church uses the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ” (on the inhale), “have mercy on me” (on the exhale).

- You can also use your own phrase, like, “In you I live” (on the inhale), and “In you I delight” (on the exhale).
- There’s no “right” prayer word. It’s just a tool to keep your wandering mind focused on God’s presence within you.
- When distractions come, just gently set them aside the moment you realize your mind has wandered and come back to your breathing and prayer word. And they will come, way more than you think or want! That’s okay. It doesn’t mean you’re bad at contemplative prayer; it means you’re human.

Remain in God, receiving his love and giving yours back in turn. In the beginning, 1-2 minutes of this is a huge success, and 5-10 minutes is a home run.

If you have run out of group time, the rest of this material can be used as “homework.”

Reading Read chapters 9-10 of *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton (pp. 163-216).

Podcast Listen to episode 4 of the Prayer series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: Beholding Prayer (The Window of the Soul)

This exercise is one way to practice beholding for contemplative prayer. What’s important is that we bring ourselves to God and allow him to be present with us with compassion, kindness, and love. Setting our eyes on the God that is, and not the one we assume or fear. It can take practice to become comfortable with this kind of prayer, so don’t worry if you don’t fully connect the first time. The most important part is our being lovingly available to God.

You can follow this QR code to a video tutorial from Strahan Coleman that will guide you step by step, using prayer prompts.



Or you can follow the written tutorial that follows.

- 1 **Become aware** — Make yourself comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Become aware of your surroundings — the sounds, the temperature, etc. How does your body feel today? Heavy, light, sore, calm? Reconnecting with ourselves helps bring all of us to God in prayer.
- 2 **Sink into your heart** — Try and focus on where you feel the deepest within your body. It may be in your heart, your chest, or your belly. If you're not sure, try to imagine there is an elevator that descends down from your head, through your neck, past your collar bone and into your heart. Place those thoughts in the elevator and send them down into your heart. Don't deny them or try to get rid of them, just allow them to sink into your heart's centre as you pray.
- 3 **Open yourself up to God** — While you're in that space, begin to open yourself up to God. If it's helpful, imagine that there are outward opening French doors within you, where your soul feels most present. As you picture them, imagine opening those doors to God and offering him every part of who you are. The good, the not good, the celebrated, and the vulnerable or ashamed. Imagine yourself having no part of you left hidden by choice from God. All is available to be seen.
- 4 **Look to God** — As you bring your whole self to him, look toward him. You might imagine Jesus' face, or you may simply look toward his loving presence. In John 15v9, Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." Allow yourself to see God gazing upon you with love, openness, compassion, and joy. Give him consent to reveal that love toward you personally. Imagine his gaze pouring through the doorway to your soul.
- 5 **Sit with God** — Without agenda, allow him to be however he longs to be with you. You may feel or see something beautiful. If not, this time is just as important. Let yourself just be open to God in whatever way today demands, allowing him to be with you. Notice how it feels to be fully seen by God and to be fully open toward him.
- 6 **Return your awareness** — As you finish your time together, take a moment to thank God for his love and for being present to you. Then,

slowly come back into awareness of the sounds and sensations of the room around you.

As you come to the end of this Practice, take five to ten minutes to journal your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Material from www.Practicingtheway.org/prayer with minor adaptations.
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