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COMPILED BY THE  
MINISTRY TEAM OF THE  
7 CHURCHES BENEFICE

A 5-WEEK LENT COURSE TO GROW  
IN PRAYER AND FELLOWSHIP

‘PRAY TO YOUR FATHER IN THE SECRET PLACE  
AND FROM HIS MYSTERY, HE’LL ANSWER YOU.  
BE STILL IN THE SIMPLICITY OF GRACE,  
A SINGLE WORD SUFFICES, IF IT’S TRUE.’  
O LORD YOU CALL ME DEEPER INTO PRAYER  
AND BID ME WELCOME TO AN INNER ROOM,  
TO CLOSE THE OUTER DOOR, BE CENTRED THERE,  
AND BID MY WANDERING THOUGHTS TO KEEP AT HOME.  
YOU CALL ME OUT OF ALL HYPOCRISY,  
CALL ME AWAY FROM EMPTY LANGUAGE GAMES,  
OH HELP ME HEAR THAT CALL, THE MYSTERY  
THAT’S MASKED FOR NOW BY TRIVIA AND MEMES.  
OPEN THAT DOOR FOR ME, LORD, MAKE THAT SPACE,  
AND THEN TRANSFORM ME IN THE SECRET PLACE.

*Sonnet-Prayer by Malcolm Guite for the first year of the  
Diocesan Vision: Transformed by Christ: Prayerful*



# FOREWORD

Imagine a world without words or speech or even sign language... You have imagined a Christian without prayer. Indeed, it is worse than that. Imagine no communication at all. No smiles. No touch of encouragement. No company of any sort.

Prayer is any and all communication with God. It is sometimes silent and private. Sometimes it is loud and public, or sung in church. Without prayer we are cut off from God and can only join Jesus on the cross and cry out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” There are as many ways to pray as there are people. Some will be for you, and some will not. Thankfully, the Church has built up a huge wealth of experience to help us to deepen our life of prayer. There is bound to be something in this treasure chest for you!

The importance of prayer is such that Bishop Graham has called our diocese to focus on prayer this year as the foundation for our future together. New prayers and help to pray are steadily being published on the diocesan website:

<https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/mission-hub/ideas/transformed-by-christ-prayerful/>

In line with our bishop and diocese this booklet focuses on prayer. It has been written by your Ministers who share their love of prayer and, throughout this booklet, you will find they introduce ways of prayer that they have found helpful to them. This booklet is not simply about prayer, it is an invitation to explore the riches of prayer. Most of all, it is a call to pray.

God bless,  
Nigel.

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*What does prayer mean to me?*

*To me, prayer is being with, chatting with, and listening to God. Different ways of praying help me to do this in different ways and this Lent Course will encourage us all to try new ways of praying. I believe that God is love, and He longs to have a close, loving relationship with each one of us: He wants our prayers, but He doesn't need them. My praise does not, and cannot, increase His glorious majesty by one jot. No, it is me that needs to pray, to have that relationship with God. So, I pray that we will all be given God's grace and encouragement this Lent to deepen our prayer lives.*

*Lindy E*

*I remember the first time I prayed – I was eight years old and was scared. It was a very definite 'epiphany' moment (although I wouldn't have known what that was then) – but my reaction to the answer to that prayer began my journey with God. It was also a form of extemporaneous prayer – a prayer that came 'out of the blue'. This is what we are going to explore in this session – praying and believing that our God hears every word we think and speak.*

*Lynda M*

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This short 5-week course is designed to be undertaken in groups, in person or virtually. As a group, you are encouraged to journey through five sessions, each exploring two different types of prayer, some similar, some different. Throughout this booklet you will find short reflections on forms of prayer, activities to complete as a group and during the week. You will also find short testimonies from some of those who have contributed to the booklet, sharing in how prayer has impacted their lives.

You are encouraged to start your session with a time of fellowship, catching up and sharing with each other, perhaps with tea and coffee or other refreshments. When you are ready to start, you will find a block of pages for each week, within each block there will be two forms of prayer. We would suggest you start with the first, reading together what that type of prayer means, its history and some examples. For each type of prayer, you will find two activities, one to complete as a group and one in the week following.

You are really encouraged to take part in these activities, to share with one another and to learn together what you enjoy most or perhaps find most engaging. Perhaps you have experienced the type of prayer before, or can share a testimony about it? Remember to inspire one another along the journey of learning and growing in faith.

Having completed one form of prayer we would love you to move onto the second, repeating the process and examining another form of prayer. It is important to remember that not everything will suit everyone, there may be forms of prayer you do not like, or struggle to engage in. This course is as much about finding out forms of prayer you struggle with as those which you enjoy, we hope that you will find fruit in every form of prayer you try over the coming five weeks!

Following each group session, you might find a selection of other activities to complete on your own in the week. For some forms of prayer there is 'further reading' if you would like to explore them deeper and for others you are just encouraged to pay close attention to your conversations with God that week. It is worthwhile investing some time in researching and practising these forms of prayer midweek to continue to find what you enjoy and where you hope to grow.

A rough timeline for how you might choose to run your group is at the end of this page. You might choose to use it, or you might choose to go off-piste. Remember – this is your course – it is for you to choose how you might journey through the materials and grow in your prayer this Lent!

### **Suggested Group Sessions:**

**Shared fellowship and recap of last week, with any feedback on the midweek activities.**

#### **Form of Prayer A**

- Reading Together
- Completing the Activity Together
- Sharing Thoughts

#### **Form of Prayer B**

- Reading Together
- Completing the Activity Together
- Sharing Thoughts

**Close with the Grace / The Lord's Prayer / Or Similar**

# WEEK 1 – EXTEMPORE PRAYER

## Introduction

Extempore is a churchy word to describe prayers in our own words that are not pre-planned; whatever is on your heart. While for many Christians our entire prayer life uses extemporaneous prayer, others may find it perhaps a too informal way of communing with God.

This very informality can be treasured and has led this type of prayer to be called a conversation between you and God, but how do we have a conversation with an omnipotent being, who we can't visually see or audibly hear? And why? Below are a few ways to start exploring extemporaneous prayer.

If prayer can be a conversation with a Loving God then...

- You don't need to be eloquent or have something prepared. You can just talk from where you are, like you would to your closest friend.
- You listen as well as talk – conversations are two-way!
- You can do it anywhere – walking down the street, at home, at university, shopping, cycling, with friends or alone.
- You don't have to pretend to be happy, or pretend at all, God knows anyway – so what's the point? You can even complain, or scream if that's how you feel!

Examples of Extempore prayer:

1. When you hear bad news and need to pray there and then
2. When a prayer has been answered...
3. When you hear good news – give thanks.



## **Exploring Prayer Together**

As a group take a short time to practise this type of prayer (15 minutes or so). If it helps, use the acrostic ACTS to help people to choose something to pray about. It can be very short, just a sentence like: "Thank you Lord for George". Everyone is encouraged to join in, but no one should be pressured to do so!

The acrostic **ACTS**:

**A**doration      *Start by expressing your praise to God.  
(Luke 1:46-55)*

**C**onfession      *Admit your mistakes and shortcomings and offer up those parts of you that you wish to change. (Daniel 9:4-11)*

**T**hanks      *Give thanks for all that God has given and done for you.  
(Exodus 15:1-19)*

**S**upplication      *Asking for God's help and movement in the world is the last part of your prayer. (Genesis 25:21)*

Share your thoughts on using extempore prayer.

## **During the Week**

Try extempore prayer, i.e., for at least some of your time in prayer don't use anything pre-prepared. Use ACTS and see if ACTS helps or gets in the way of your extempore prayer.

## **Further Reading**

The Bible (Matthew 7:7, Mark 11:24, Philippians 4:6-7, James 5:14-16)

# WEEK 1 – LECTIO DIVINA

## **Introduction**

Lectio Divina is a ‘contemplative way of reading the Bible’ first established in a monastic culture by Benedict of Nursia in the 6th century. It follows a four-step approach consisting of: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. It is a practice that shapes our prayer life and provides spiritual sustenance through encounter with God. The name Lectio Divina is derived from the Latin meaning ‘divine reading’, it is literally to read the divine scripture before meditating upon it to consider how it impacts us today. One of the Church Fathers, Origen, said: “Seek with unwavering trust in God, the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, which so many have missed”.

There are four stages to the Lectio Divina process, firstly: to read scripture, taking a bible passage and hearing the words as written. Secondly: meditation, taking a short amount of time to consider what this passage means personally to us. Thirdly: prayer, offering our reflections and interpretations to God to allow the Holy Spirit to continue to speak to us about the passage. Finally: contemplation, to spend time yielding to God’s will.

Lectio Divina isn’t the same as a Bible study. Whilst it is a great way to study the Bible, it is more specific, more personal, and more prayerful. It is not about research, commentaries or looking at the whole Bible. Instead, it is about using a piece of scripture, a short section, verse, or even just a word to help illuminate Christ’s presence in our lives today.

Remember that Lectio Divina is about becoming immersed in scripture and using it to form our conversation with God – nothing is wrong, be led by the spirit!

## Exploring Prayer Together

As a group start by choosing one of the following bible passages to read:

*Luke 10:38-42 – Mary and Martha*

*Matthew 5:14-16 – You are the Light of the World*

*Acts 2:1-13 – Pentecost*

*John 1:1-15 – The World Became Flesh*

Once you have chosen your passage, take a moment of stillness to prepare yourself to start the Lectio Divina. Next, proceed through the four steps below over the next 15 minutes or so. This is a short amount of time for a Lectio Divina, but it will give you a taste of the four steps. Do feel free to extend this time if you are able.

### READ

Someone in the group should read the passage once as the rest listen and reflect, then pause before reading the passage again listening carefully.

### MEDITATE

Consider what stands out to you. Perhaps it is a phrase or word, or an image or idea. Share as a group what you feel has been placed on your heart.

### PRAY

Respond to the scripture and to God. Ask God what He wants you to take from it, perhaps offer thanks or forgiveness. You can offer these prayers together as a group or privately – both are okay.

### CONTEMPLATE

Finally, take time to rest with God, being aware of His presence, continuing to listen for His voice. In this stage you could ask God to open your heart to yield to His will.

## **During the Week**

Choose one of the other passages above, or any part of scripture you would like to bring before the Lord and complete the above steps. You might like to do this with a friend, family member or someone in your Lent Group. Equally, undertaking the parts of Lectio Divina on your own is encouraged, taking time to dwell in the presence of God, asking for His will to be done.

## **Further Reading**

James Wilhoit & Evan Howard – Discovering Lectio Divina

Jan Johnson – Meeting God in Scripture (40 Guided Meditations)

*App Recommendation* – Lectio365 – A digital, contemporary version of Lectio Divina with a guided daily reading and reflection.

(<https://www.24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365/>)

# WEEK 2 – THE LORD’S PRAYER

## **Introduction**

The Lord’s Prayer has its roots in the Gospels of St Matthew, where it forms part of the Sermon on the Mount and St Luke. It is probably the most used prayer across all denominations.

It can be a prayer of comfort and the one we turn to in times of danger and stress. Many people who are not Christians are more or less familiar with it.

There are many forms. When used as a reflex action most use one particular form, whichever is most comfortable or familiar to them. Because it is so familiar and often spoken so quickly, do we always think and appreciate what we are actually praying for?

## **Exploring Prayer Together**

Consider these questions as a Group, remembering that we all use prayer in different ways, and our opinions might not be the same as others, tackle this with grace and understanding!

1. It is said by some that it is a prayer complete in itself and nothing else is needed. Is this right, is anything missing and if so, does it matter?
2. The older forms (BCP etc.) pray: ‘in earth as it is in heaven’. Modern forms: ‘on earth as it is in heaven’. Is there any difference and if so, does it matter?
3. Trespasses or sins. Is there any difference and if so, does it matter?
4. Do we always think about it or just say it and if so, does it matter?

Pray these words silently to yourself several times. Pray each line slowly, reflecting on the words as you do so:

OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN,  
HALLOWED BE THY NAME;  
THY KINGDOM COME;  
THY WILL BE DONE;  
IN EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.  
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.  
AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES,  
AS WE FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US.  
AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION;  
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.  
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM,  
THE POWER AND THE GLORY,  
FOR EVER AND EVER.  
AMEN.

The leader will close this time of prayer by slowly saying this prayer out loud. Please join in.

### **During the Week**

Read as many different forms as you can find. Pray them and think how they affect or speak to you. Which one(s) did you find interesting? Which forms might you prefer to use from now on in your own prayer? Why?

### **Further Reading**

The Bible (Mathew 6:9-13 and 11:2-4)

Pete Greig – ‘How to Pray – A simple guide for normal people’

# WEEK 2 – IONA COMMUNITY PRAYER

## **Introduction**

The island of Iona is situated just off the west coast of the Isle of Mull in the Hebrides. Worship and prayer are part of everything the Community does – throughout their work, their lives and recreation. The Iona Community is a dispersed Christian ecumenical community working for peace and social justice, rebuilding of community and the renewal of worship. They are a community of people from different walks of life and different traditions in the Church engaged together in acting, reflecting, and praying for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation with people of goodwill across the world who are supporting them.

The community has over 280 members; there are three residential centres, and each centre is run by 25 people and assisted by about 30 volunteers from all over the world. Guests visit and are given a unique opportunity to experience life in worship, work, discussion, and relaxation. There are weekly programmes which often focus on themes relating to the concerns of the Community. They are committed to a daily devotional discipline, and a number of concerns have been identified as particular priorities:

1. They strive in their practice for the highest environmental goals. They travel by public transport wherever possible. They are committed to reducing energy consumption and environmental impact.
2. They deplore social injustice. They respect all members, staff, guests, and partners, irrespective of age, race, gender, religion, sexuality, disability, or health status. They actively campaign for

social justice at all levels and have a particular commitment to the inclusion of people living in poverty.

3. They support their work through their own giving and trading operations. They try to invest ethically and purchase fair-trade goods. The residential staff are paid the same, regardless of job.
4. Everyone can share in leadership in policy making and spiritual practice. Their structures are democratic. They give their leaders a mandate to act fast and effectively, but expect them to listen and respect the views of all.

### **Exploring Prayer Together**

Share your thoughts on the principles and values of the Iona Community. You might like to try out the following Iona Liturgy, leaving pauses between each response.

**LEADER:** The world belongs to God

**ALL:** The earth and all its people

**LEADER:** How good it is, how wonderful

**ALL:** To live together in unity

**LEADER:** Love and faith come together

**ALL:** These stones would shout aloud

**LEADER:** Let the light fall warm and red on the rock, let the birds sing their evening song and let God's people say, Amen

**ALL:** Amen



**LEADER:** Let the tools be stored away, let the work be over and done  
and let God's people say, Amen

**ALL:** Amen

**LEADER:** Let the flowers close and the stars appear, let heads be glad  
and minds be calm and let God's people say, Amen

**ALL:** Amen

### **During the Week**

In your prayer time, try to focus on the ethical and environmental themes. At this time particularly, we need to pray for our world – in every respect.

### **Further Reading**

Website – <https://iona.org.uk/>

*What does prayer mean to me?*

*Prayer – as I understand it – is communicating (that is speaking and trying to listen) with God, who is my Heavenly Father and is an essential part of my life; it means different things to me at different times, depending on the circumstances; it also takes various ‘forms’ – from a “Wow – thank you Lord!” at the sight of a lovely sunset – to an “Oh God” when I don’t know what to say or ask in moments of stress – to the use of liturgical prayers at the appropriate times. Can’t do without it!*

*Lyndy D*

*Prayer has meant a lot to me over the last few years – praying with people for comfort, praying for peace when we have needed it, praying for safety in troubled times... praying for the baby to fall asleep! I struggle to engage in formal times of prayer on my own – my mind wanders too much – but I find myself engaging in conversation with God all day, just doing life together. For me this is what prayer is!*

*Josh W*

# WEEK 3 – PRAYER WITHOUT CEASING

## Introduction

“16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NRSVA).

‘Praying without ceasing’ seems an impossible idea – how can anyone pray all of the time! It isn’t about shutting oneself away in a quiet place 24/7, but about keeping a connection with God throughout the day; you don't only have a morning prayer time, but you also walk with God and talk with Him as you move through the day. Jean-Pierre de Caussade, over 300 hundred years ago, wrote a spiritual classic entitled – ‘The Sacrament of the Present Moment’, in which he advocates that God speaks to us through every moment of every day.

Brother Lawrence, a cook in a monastic community in Paris in the late 17th century, practised the example of constant prayer whilst carrying out ordinary, daily tasks. His praying was from the heart rather than the head and at the centre of it was love – his love for God and his knowing that God’s love for him was boundless. Adoring God at every moment became as natural as breathing to him and a way of life. In his small book ‘The Practice of the Presence of God’, he tells us that we shouldn’t separate times of prayer from other times, and we should pray being aware of God’s presence at all times and in all places.

When we take on board that God (who is with us in our hearts, who walks with us through the day and in whom we live and move and have our being) actually wants to give us His love and also the power for us to love others, then we too can be empowered to ‘pray without ceasing’,

anywhere and at any time. Our prayer will be anything that is triggered by the presence of God in that particular place or moment in time. It might be praise, thankfulness, awe, or praying for the people around us or for a particular situation that has arisen. Whatever it is, it has its roots in love – our love for God, for His creation and for each other but first and most important, it has its roots in His love for us.

## **Exploring Prayer Together**

*You would normally keep your eyes open as you recognise God's presence and as you continue with what you are doing, but for this evening, we will close our eyes.*

1. Take a moment and look at your surroundings – the place you are in, the people around you. Then close your eyes and focus on the **GOD** who loves you, who died for you and who loves everything that He has made.
2. Spend some time in thankful **PRAISE**.
3. Focus on the people you are with – know that God loves them and that He **LOVES YOU** – open your mind to God and allow Him to lead your thoughts as you pray.
4. Think about the place you are in – ask God to show you how to **PRAY**.
5. **PRAISE AND THANK** God for His presence with you as you pray.

Spend about 15 minutes in quiet prayer. Then when you are ready open your eyes. If you would like to, you could discuss, with the group, how you found praying tonight.

## **During the Week**

As you go about your daily tasks, practise praising, being thankful and talking to God. Be open to God as you pick up on the things that are

happening around you. It might be something beautiful that you notice, or a person you meet or are working with, or something that is causing you to be anxious – bask in His presence and allow God to lead you in prayer in that moment.

### **Further Reading**

The Bible (Psalm 139, Psalm 84, Psalm 23 and Acts 17:28)

Brother Lawrence – The Practice of the Presence of God

Father Gary Caster – Prayer Everywhere (The Spiritual Life made Simple)

Henri Nouen – Spiritual Formation (Following the Movements of the Spirit)

Kelly O'Dell Stanley – [crosswalk.com](http://crosswalk.com)

# WEEK 3 – SILENT PRAYER AND MEDITATION

## **Introduction**

These terms describe similar ways of praying that focus on a quiet or silent mind as the foundation for prayer. This form of prayer is inspired by the example of Jesus seeking quiet for prayer. This form of prayer is closely linked to Celtic prayer and some forms of monastic prayer. Christian meditation has become popular again through the work of two Catholic priests, John Main and Anthony de Mello. Each tradition and teacher offer ways to quieten the mind, as well as focuses for prayer while in that inner silence. Simply resting in the silence within can result in a profound state of prayer, akin to that in charismatic worship.

## **Exploring Prayer Together**

*The leader should slowly read this text to help the group. You may have gentle quiet music in the background, or not, as you choose.*

Find somewhere quiet where you can sit comfortably but alert, with back straight and head upright. Before you begin, decide on a short prayer or phrase that you would like to pray. It could be a word, such as 'Jesus', it could be a short prayer that you know well. Close your eyes and begin to focus your attention on your breathing, notice the in-breath and the out-breath. Notice how the air feels as it enters and leaves your lungs. Notice how your chest or stomach rises and falls. If your breathing is fast or shallow, try the following: Take a long, slow, deep in-breath, completely filling your lungs, hold that breath for as long as you feel comfortable, then let your breath out as slowly as you can. Repeat this a few times and then focus on the natural rhythm of your breathing once again, it should now be a little slower and deeper. When thoughts intrude (and they will), do not fight them. Simply

notice them and let them drift away again, settling into the silence between your thoughts. Then focus once again on the rhythm of your breathing. Now begin to say your short prayer or phrase, repeating it slowly in your mind.

Remain in SILENT PRAYER for 15 minutes, then: Focus your attention on the rhythm of your breathing once again, bring your attention back into this room and, when you are ready, please open your eyes. Share your thoughts on this form of prayer with each other.

### **During the Week**

Consider trying this exercise during the week and see how you get on.

### **Further Reading**

The Bible (Psalm 46:10, Matthew 6:1 & 6:6, Mark 1:35 & 6:31, Luke 5:16 and Romans 8:26)

Anthony de Mello – Sadhana (A Way to God) and Wellsprings

John Main – Word into Silence (A Guide to Christian Meditation) and The Gethsemane Talks (A Simple Teaching on Meditation in the Christian Tradition)

### **Note for Next Week**

One of the activities next week will need: a lidded jam jar / tall glass and spoon, soil, grit and water!

*What does prayer mean to me?*

*I was always brought up to pray – as a child at night before I went to sleep, in church of course and at the start of each day, but what do we mean by prayer? It is important to start the day with regular prayer and worship and there are many options available to help us do just that, but for me there is more to prayer than set prayers; poetry, beautiful phrases, theological words, and intercession. Over the years, I've found my most profound prayers have been when I've been walking, driving (!) or enjoying the countryside. At its simplest, prayer is having a chat with God, but it's also spending time basking in His presence and being open to His voice in the world around, as one walks with Him wherever and whenever that might be. I love the verse from Acts 17:28 – for in Him we live and move and have our being ... for me it sets the scene for my prayer life and is central to the way I relate to God.*

*Sue A*

*I always found praying quite difficult as I thought I needed to be doing it a certain way! But, one day, I was reading Thessalonians and read the words “pray without ceasing”. I realised that God is not looking for something perfect – He just wants me to chat to Him. Since then, I think of prayer as chatting with my closest friend!*

*Beth W*



# WEEK 4 – HANDS TOGETHER, EYES CLOSED

## **Introduction**

*A member of the ministry team wrote the following:*

*“Hands together, eyes closed, words that were used daily during primary school assembly. So much so, that I came to think they were so difficult for me to do. Maybe it’s because I was concerned about what might be happening around me and that I might be missing out on. So far from helping me to pray, those words hindered me, and I spent so much time wondering what was going on, rather than talking to God. So, imagine what a surprise it was to find out in later years, that this was not the only way to speak to God. I have explored many different ways of prayer that have led me to find something that has helped to develop an authentic way of fully being myself before God, which means having open hands and eyes lifted and open.”*

This form of prayer has been influenced by following the example of St Francis and Brother Lawrence, a 17th century monk, both of whom knew the formality of church life and worship and yet discovered that time spent in prayer could be enjoyed, rather than endured, enabling them to free themselves from the constraints that so often can distance us from God until they were able to live life as prayer and prayer as life. Brother Lawrence came to understand that every little detail of his life was of great importance in his relationship with God.

## **Exploring Prayer Together**

Please sit back and relax, in a way that feels right for you, whether it is with open hands in your lap and open eyes or raised up, or slightly lowered head and hands together in your lap. The choice is yours.

Breathing slowly, just take in the images that are around you of the room, and then take a few moments to think about the things you have been involved in today and then take one thing – either cleaning the loo or having coffee with a friend – and recall how you dealt with those situations.

Now take a few moments to consider whatever you were doing and how it might have been if you had brought God fully into the circumstance, and looking upon it as something that you were doing for God.

When you are ready, take time to share with each other how this way of prayer was for you.

### **During the Week**

Take time during the coming week to repeat this exercise on your own and notice how you experience it.

### **Further Reading**

The Bible (Luke 10:25-37 and Luke 10:38-42)

Brother Lawrence – The Practice of the Presence of God

Mary Fairchild – Biography of Brother Lawrence – Practitioner of God's Presence

Learn Religions – Sep. 8, 2020, [learnreligions.com/biography-of-brother-lawrence-5070341](https://learnreligions.com/biography-of-brother-lawrence-5070341)

# WEEK 4 – WILD PRAYER

## **Introduction**

Natural Theology is a way of exploring God within the world outside. This theology and prayer form is expressly focused on not only engaging your senses, but also embracing movement; exploring a myriad of feelings and sensations through using all your body as you experience the world around you. It is a way to become ‘lost’ in the wonder of creation.

Revd Steve Chalke, founder of Oasis Global, observes that: “Venturing into the fresh air inspires us to see life differently ... to put our lives into perspective and discover new depths to our understanding of and relationship with the God of creation”.

## **Exploring Prayer Together**

For the prayer activity you will need: a lidded jam jar / tall glass and spoon, soil, grit and water! This activity has been devised with both Zoom and in-person group meetings in mind. A little preparation will be required, as this cannot be a step outside and ‘go with the flow’ opportunity (nature needs to be brought in!)

Wild Prayer invites you to step out into **GOD’S CREATION** and to deliberately use your imagination in a multi-sensory way to find, and dwell upon, the awesome splendour of God in the finest details of the world around you.

## **SOMETIMES THINGS AREN’T CLEAR**

1. Place some soil and grit in the jar / glass, add water, then put on the lid and shake / stir up the contents.
2. Reflect on how life is often **MESSY AND MUDDLED** and things are not clear...

3. With time and patience, these periods can begin to settle, and the way will become more **OBVIOUS AND APPARENT**.
4. Pause to watch the particles begin to fall, slow your breathing, and allow God some **EXTRA SPACE** in your life.

Share your feelings about this activity.

### **During the Week**

Step outside into nature. Stand or sit quietly for a little while and listen to the birds singing. This is best done at dawn (6am-ish during March 2022), however later in the day is often fine. Focus on the gradual joining of voices and song. Listen attentively. Can you still distinguish and hear the very first bird call? Is this peaceful or jarring to you? How could you respond to these calls? Listen out for God's word in your life. Ask God for the ability to discern it.

If you can't get outside, then you can use a recording of the Dawn Chorus such as this: [www.brecklandsdawnchorus.bandcamp.com](http://www.brecklandsdawnchorus.bandcamp.com)

### **Further Reading**

Alister McGrath – The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology  
Mary Jackson and Juno Hollyhock – Creative Ideas for Wild Church

# WEEK 5 – CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER

## **Introduction**

What is ‘Conversational Prayer’ and how is it different to other ‘forms’ of prayer? I hope the following quote from Philip Yancey will help to answer that question: “I have come to see prayer as a privilege not a duty. Like all good things, prayer requires some discipline. Yet I believe that life with God should seem more like friendship than duty”.

Surely one of the joys of friendship is chatting to a friend about the things that interest – bother – concern – worry you, as well as those things that delight – please and encourage you? And your friend will listen – hopefully without interrupting – while you tell them all about whatever is on your heart and mind – and when you are done – perhaps they will have a comment to make or something to add to what you have said – and – or – a story of their own to tell you. Conversation!

Sadly, time pressures often crowd out times for meaningful conversation; in an age where time has become something that we seem to have less of – ‘busyness’ takes over – and conversation with other people – by and large – has become shorter and less frequent and decidedly more cryptic than before – with texts on the mobile phone replacing conversation in ever increasing instances.

So – if our lives are to become more like friendship with God – let’s look at this ‘conversational’ way of talking to Him – and consider some of the dos and don’ts!

It should be:

- relaxed – but never casual
- quiet – little or no distractions from ‘outside’ or each other
- an opportunity to give thanks – gratitude is a large part of prayer
- it is a good practice to get permission before praying for people by name in group prayer.

Some don'ts:

- problems can arise when group prayer becomes a forum for passing on updates about someone you've been praying for (sometimes resulting in a breach of confidentiality)
- when one person dominates the time by praying long and involved prayers, often focusing on telling God what or what not to do
- when the people in the group do not listen to what is said / being prayed for – and so are not able to participate effectively
- It can be distracting and / or threatening to members of the group to feel they must pray in turn – remember this is a conversation, and people must be part of that in the way that is most comfortable for them – some prefer to listen and pray quietly – no one should feel pressured to pray out loud
- it is not necessary – or helpful – to end each prayer with the traditional “In the name of Jesus – Amen”.

### **Exploring Prayer Together**

Have a brief discussion about who and what to pray for before you start praying – lightly grouping topics together, e.g., people, situations – locally / internationally etc.

Each member of the group PRAYS INDIVIDUALLY around the agreed subjects – with the leader gently leading from one topic to the other. There are times when someone other than the person praying will want to agree with the prayers being prayed and should do so with a quiet comment – e.g. “Yes Lord” or “thank you Lord / please Lord / Jesus”; this also helps to keep people’s minds from wandering!

As each person finishes the prayer they are praying, a short silence tells the group that their prayer is complete. Please note that it is not necessary, or helpful, to end each prayer with the tradition “In the name of Jesus, Amen.” At the end the leader will make this clear by saying something like “In Jesus’ name, amen” and the ‘session’ is ended.

Share your thoughts on this form of prayer.

### **During the Week**

If possible, try this form of prayer with a friend or prayer partner. If this is not possible, reflect further on your experience in the group.

### **Further Reading**

Philip Yancey – Prayer

# WEEK 5 – PRAYING THE ALPHABET

## Introduction

I was first introduced to this way of praying by a man called Irvin, who attended the church that we went to as a family, when I was growing up. He told me that his grandad had taught him to pray like this when he was a boy and, since then, he had prayed in this way every day – a pretty amazing feat considering he was nearly 90 when he told me all about it!

Irvin explained that his praying through the alphabet (or his “chinwag with God” as he liked to call it) began when he woke each morning – simply by being **A**wake. He would begin here by thanking God for a restful night, and for the opportunity to begin a new day. He would then continue about his day until he came to something beginning with the letter **B**. This was often breakfast – he would thank God for the food that he was fortunate enough to be able to eat, give thanks for those who had worked to put it on his table, and he would pray for those who would not be eating breakfast that morning.

Irvin would carry on like this throughout his day, meaning that he was continually seeking God in the everyday routine of his life. He would progress through the alphabet throughout the course of his day, ending in the evening with **XYZ**...some tricky letters!

Irvin had, once upon a time, broken a bone in his foot, and there were now screws “holding him together” as he would say. Every evening he would look down at his foot and thank God for the **X**-rays that he had had that, ultimately, enabled him to walk! A tenuous link to the letter **X** perhaps, but Irvin knew that he wasn’t just thanking God for x-ray



machines – he was thanking God for the medical care that he had received, the science that went into that care and praising God for enabling it all. By praying about x-rays, Irvin was in fact acknowledging God’s presence in every aspect of his life.

Finally, as Irvin got into bed each night he prayed for sleep, or the “land of **Zzzzzzz**” as he called it!

This simple way of praying that Irvin taught me when I was a child, has really helped to bring me closer to God through prayer. Working through the alphabet and reaching out to God in such simple ways throughout the course of the day, helps to remind me that God is with me through everything. He is with me as I walk through Harleston and pray for the town and the people who live here. He is with me as I walk around Tesco and give thanks for the food on the shelves. He is with me as I watch the news in the evening and pray for all that is going on in the world.

### **Exploring Prayer**

In the group now, have a go at working around the room and starting at the letter **A**. Ask the first person to choose something beginning with the letter **A** and to pray to God about it. It could be the name of a place, a person, an activity – or, like Irvin, you could thank God for just simply being awake! Continue to work through the alphabet and around each person in the group until you reach the letter **Z**!

### **During the Week**

This week perhaps have a go at praying through the alphabet, starting at **A** in the morning and ending, in the evening, with the letter **Z**. You

might notice that by doing this you become more aware of God's presence with you throughout your day, in everything you do. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 139: "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?". Using the alphabet to maintain a constant pattern of prayer throughout the day reminds us of just this – the omnipresence of God.

# CLOSING REMARKS

We hope this course has given you some new tools in your 'prayer toolkit'. Everyone engages in prayer differently and there is such a wide range of types and methods of prayer out there, that there is something for everyone – hopefully this booklet has inspired you to explore more forms of prayer!

We would really encourage you to continue finding and exploring new ways to talk to God and to deepen your relationship with Him. You can always talk to any of the members of our ministry team if you would like to explore anything in further depth, or simply would like to pray with them!

*The 7 Churches Ministry Team*

THIS BOOKLET HAS BEEN WRITTEN BY THE  
MINISTERS OF THE 7 CHURCHES BENEFICE WHO  
SHARE A LOVE OF PRAYER. THROUGHOUT THIS  
BOOKLET YOU WILL FIND THEY INTRODUCE WAYS  
OF PRAYER THAT THEY HAVE FOUND HELPFUL  
TO THEM. THIS BOOKLET IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT  
PRAYER, IT IS AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE THE  
RICHNESS OF PRAYER. MOST OF ALL, IT IS A  
CALL TO PRAY.

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