

Deepening Your Prayer Life

Examples of “prayer” in Scripture:

- Exodus 33: 12-23 – a conversation between God and Moses
- Mark 10: 46-52 – a blind man calling out to Jesus
- Matthew 6: 9-14 – Jesus’ example of how we can pray

Four (of many) types of prayer:

1. Centering Prayer

Brief explanation: Centering prayer is a type of prayer that is a radical contrast to the way western Christians normally pray (speaking to God, asking for his help, praying for the needs of others). Instead of speaking, we sit silently, relaxed, and in a receptive posture. Our only goal is to be present to God, “giving God the space to do the work He wants to do in us – which sometimes we are even unaware of in the moment.” We choose a word (a name of God, an aspect of God’s character) that we redirect our attention to when we become aware that we are distracted and that helps us to continue to pay attention to God’s presence in us and around us.

Tips for centering prayer:

- Don’t get mad at yourself or feel guilty for getting distracted – it’s a natural part of our human brains. Just try to release the thought, repeat the word you chose for yourself, and refocus.
- Resist the temptation to try to “get something” from this prayer. It is not meant to be productive in any sense, though paradoxically as a regular habit it can profoundly affect your awareness of God.
- Clarification: this is not meditation in the sense of eastern traditions of meditation. There are some similarities, but also stark differences. In most eastern meditation, the idea is to empty your mind, out of the belief that the truest experience of reality is through disengaging our minds. In contrast, centering prayer seeks to train our mind to become awake and aware of God’s presence.

2. Listening Prayer

Brief Explanation: Listening prayer is similar to centering prayer in that it is silent and contemplative. The major difference is that with listening prayer we choose to make ourselves available to hear something from God, where in centering prayer we are meant to just “be.”

Many times we can experience tension with the idea of “hearing from God.” We ask questions like “what does that look like?” “Does God actually speak to us in some way?” “How can I tell if something is from God?”

Tips for listening prayer:

- Many times, the best place to start is with a posture of faith rather than uncertainty. For example, instead of asking the questions above, we can ask questions like these:
 - Do I believe that I can have a dynamic relationship with God – that not only am I communicating with Him but that He is communicating with me?
 - If I believe that God can speak to me in other ways (through a sermon/message, a worship song, through creation, or through other people), can I believe that He is able to speak into my thoughts, ideas, and emotions?
 - What if “hearing from God” was more about being receptive and discerning what I experience in prayer, rather than trying to differentiate between “my thoughts” and “God’s voice”?
- Release yourself from placing *expectations* on God, and instead make yourself available to *be with* God, whether or not you feel like you’ve received something from Him.
- Start listening prayer saying a scripture that talks about God’s presence with us, or take a moment to thank Him that you have His spirit inside you and that He is fully capable of making Himself heard.
 - Psalm 131 is a wonderfully helpful scripture to help frame our expectations.
- Discerning whether something is from God: the Threefold Test:
 - Does it line up with how God reveals himself in scripture?
 - Is it affirmed by others in Christian community?
 - Does it line up with your own sense of who God is?

3. Prayer of the Hours (A Form of Liturgical Prayer)

Reasons why prayer of the hours or other liturgical forms of prayer are helpful:

- Regular patterns of prayer throughout the day help us to remain attentive to God.
- Liturgical prayer conveys deep theology that is meant to be helpful for us to remember or even help us course-correct when we become confused or uncertain.
- Liturgy can provide prayers for many different contexts or styles of prayer.
 - Lament
 - Praise
 - Intercession

- Confession
- Liturgy is a way of praying in community and in unity with other believers.

Helpful tips for those interested in learning more or practicing liturgical prayer:

- Many denominations or Christian communities have developed liturgies that are broadly applicable to any Christian (meaning there are many that don't contain divisive theology).
 - Some examples:
 - Anglican book of common prayer
 - Northumbria community prayer of the hours
- There are resources that compile liturgies by the type of prayer so that it is easy to find prayers for certain circumstances.
 - <https://www.bcponline.org/>

4. Intercessory Prayer

Brief explanation: Intercession literally means “the act of intervening on behalf of another.” When we pray this way, we are expressing our empathy and care to God and asking him to intervene as well. There are many ways to do intercessory prayer: keeping lists, prayer journals, choosing a specific time and place.

Scripture to guide our prayer: Romans 8:26-27 New International Version (NIV)

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

This passage shows us that the Holy Spirit is interceding for us already! So when we pray, we aren't the ones starting the conversation – we are actually joining in on a conversation that has already begun.

How to “join” the conversation:

1. Start by asking God to help you become aware of how he wants you to pray. Sit for a few moments in prayer listening.
2. As things come to mind, begin praying for them. If you feel confused about something that comes to mind, ask God for clarity or to shift your attention.