

LORD, TEACH ME TO PRAY



Exploring Ways to Pray

(Prepared by Sue Hodgkins, St John's Burscough)

- The Examen
- Prayer Beads
- Meditation/Mindfulness
 - Journalling
 - Books
- A creative activity

The Examen

"The prayer of the Examen is the specific searching everyday to find where God's love is active in this day, where God's love is leading today, to discern what within me may be resisting that leading, and to discover the growth to which God is calling me tomorrow so that this deepest desire can be increasingly fulfilled. (Timothy Gallagher. The Examen Prayer)

There are five stages

1. Gratitude
I note the gifts that God's love has given me this day, and I give thanks to God for them.
2. Petition
I ask God for an insight and a strength that will make this Examen a work of grace, fruitful beyond my human capacity alone.
3. Review
With my God, I review my day. I look for the stirrings of the heart and the thoughts that God has given me this day. I look also for those that have not been of God. I review my choices in response to both, and throughout the day in general.
4. Forgiveness
I ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God who, with love and respect for me, removes my hearts burdens.

5. Renewal

I look to the following day and, with God, plan concretely how to live in accord with God's loving desire for my life.

Prayer Beads

(A Bead and a Prayer – Kristen E Vincent)

"Prayer beads are a tool for prayer. Just as a hammer and nails help us to construct a house, so prayer beads help us to construct a life of connection with God. The beads are not the end; they are the means to an end, which is communion with God... Prayer beads can help develop rich lives of prayer, deepening their connection with God."

As with all these ideas, using prayer beads is a suggestion for those of us who need to make prayer meaningful through different ways, those of us who need different stimulation to help us to make prayer meaningful and stop us getting into the pattern of prayer becoming repetitive and meaningless.

How you design and use the beads is up to you. I like to be able to use one set of beads in different ways just to keep me from doing prayers by rote. There is no wrong or right way!

Meditation/Mindfulness

From *How to be a Mindful Christian* – Sally Welch. Canterbury Press pxix

"Through mindful prayer, we start from where we are and with what we have, and we discover that we have already reached our destination for we journey with Christ, our companion and our goal. If we release ourselves from the internal running commentary that is the backdrop to our lives, we will discover stillness. Within that stillness, we will find an attention to the moment, to the now, in its purest form. Within that 'now' we will find God.

"Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love."

Teresa of Avila

This form of prayer is about living in the moment as Sally Welch states. Even the basic everyday tasks can bring you into the Presence of God, if you involve Him in what you are doing! e.g. (Even if you have a dishwasher, try going back to washing up for the odd occasion!) to help get you into the 'moment' be aware of every action that is involved in the preparation of washing up, the bowl it's shape, colour, feel. The washing up liquid - take pleasure in the squirting action and its cleansing smell, the water, listen to the sound as it hits the bowl and then as you place the dishes etc into the soapy water, use this as a prayer time. You can bring to God people who you care about etc as each item is washed, cleansed and placed on the draining rack/board. Be mindful of them, picture them wherever they may be and see your prayer as an act of bringing them before the Lord. When you have finished, and you find a piece of cutlery left behind, use that for someone known or unknown to you, who is lost and pray that they like the lost sheep may be brought to God.

And tip out all the water, listen to the sound as it goes down the plughole and praise God for this special moment with Him.

This is just an example, you will be able to think of many different every day tasks that you can apply this idea to!

Journalling

Writing what has happened during your day and looking where God has been in it. I find this not just useful at the time of the recording the day but looking back and reminding me of God moments. Personally I do not always do it every day but when I have had one of those God 'nudges' or have felt particularly close to Him, I will note the event down and the feelings and emotions that this has caused in me. It is particularly helpful to me when I am in what Ignatius calls a time of 'desolation' – a time when I wonder where God has gone; when I am not feeling on a spiritual high. I can thumb through my journal and remind myself of what he has been doing in my life and that helps me to be brought back to Him.

I would suggest, you either buy a plain book and decorate it/personalise it or you buy a lovely patterned/coloured hardback book so that it is special to you and so that you can easily find it on a book shelf.

You can also put in quotes from the Bible that have spoken to you, or you can include drawings or include wise sayings that you have read or heard by Christian authors. It's your 'holy' book so it is up to you! (a special pen is also good)

Books

There are many Christian Authors whose experiences, ideas, prayers can help with our own personal journey with God. Some I can recommend are David Adam, Sheila Pritchard, Henri Nouwen, Timothy Gallagher.

These authors have helped me by sometimes presenting some challenging thoughts and allowing me to sit down with God to work my way through, others have just inspired me and encouraged me in my spiritual life.

A Creative Activity

This can take any form whether it is using your hands, feet or whole bodies! We were born in the image of God, our Creator, so it stands to reason that we all have some form of creativeness in us.

You may be good at dancing, sports, or be musical or artistic with clay, paint or any other media. You may be green fingered, you may be able to carve wood! The list is endless.

What better way to explore your relationship with God by seeking and using the talents He has given you.

You may surprise yourself but I can guarantee you will have fun finding out which is for you!

You might also want to explore:

- Going for a walk with God
- Praying using your body – e.g. kneeling, standing with arms outstretched, lying down etc
- Looking for God in a piece of art work
- Examining the natural world with a magnifying glass
- Looking at the stars

Quotes to think about!

ALL OF LIFE WOULD BECOME PRAYER

“If we knew how to listen to God, if we knew how to look around us, our whole life would become prayer. For it unfolds under God’s eyes and no part of it must be lived without being freely offered to him. At first we communicate with God through words which may be dispensed with later on....Words are only a means. However the silent prayer which has moved beyond words must always spring from everyday life, for everyday life is the raw material of prayer.”

Michel Quoist p 22 - Prayers of Life

“To discover prayer, we have to first discover God. And this means turning ourselves inside-out. It means we have to let God be our God – not just Lord of the Universe, majestic and remote, but Lord of our lives. We must get out of the limelight, vacate the stage, and make our hearts his royal throne.”

Andrew Knowles – Discovering Prayer

“I can see why a number of saints spoke of prayer itself as simply receiving the ever-benevolent gaze of God, returning it in kind, mutually gazing, and finally recognising that it is one single gaze received and bounced back.”

Richard Rohr – Falling Upward