

# Some Helpful Prayer Practices

## Welcoming Prayer

Start by breathing deeply. Then focus, feel and sink into whatever negative feeling you are experiencing, be it anger, anxiety or fear. Welcome the feeling into your body as an opportunity to learn and heal. Try to sense where you are experiencing the emotion in your body and place your hands on that area. Let go of your emotionally needy programming by repeating this:

*I let go of my desire for safety and security, power and control, and esteem and affection. I let go of the desire to change what I am experiencing, and I turn these feelings over to Jesus. Amen.*

## Centering prayer

Find a time and place where you can sit comfortably with as few distractions as possible. Ideally, you will be able to set aside 20 minutes for this practice. Set a timer so you do not have to think about it. Select a “sacred word” or “prayer word” that will symbolize your intent and consent to focus only on God during this time. It should be short and not distract you. Something simple like love, God, Jesus, peace will be fine. The word itself is not important—the intent to surrender is what’s important.

Close your eyes and tell God that you are willing to release your whole being in order to be one with God and that you are offering your sacred word to signify your intent. Ask Jesus to help you. Begin by slowly and silently letting the word rest in your mind. This is not a mantra to be repeated, it is only to signify intent, and your word will slowly drift away along with your thoughts. Whenever you notice a thought, emotion or memory, silently and gently offer your prayer word to replace it. Let your thoughts float by—do not be distressed by their presence, just acknowledge them and let them go with the help of your sacred word. Even “spiritual” thoughts or prayers—let them all go and allow God to work in your mind and heart, unencumbered by your “self.” At the end of your time, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a few minutes, allowing your thoughts to return.

## The Examen

This is best practiced in the evening as you look back over that day’s activities. Sit comfortably in silence with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders. To begin, listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Continue with regular rhythmic deep breathing. Allow tension to fade away from your body, and your spirit to be at peace.

Think back over the previous day (or the period of time since your last Examen). Trace the story of your life during this period of time and observe what happened. As you do so, consider the following two questions but remember not to evaluate or judge yourself; just be honest:

- 1) At what times during your story did you experience God's presence? What happened? How was God present? Were you aware of God being present at the time, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it? What did you do that enabled you to experience God? What was the outcome?
- 2) At what times during your story were you resistant to God's presence? What happened? How did you resist? Were you aware of resisting, or is it only now as you look back that you realize it? What were your feelings or beliefs about the situation and any person(s) involved, including yourself and God? What was the outcome? How could you have thought, acted or believed in a way that would have embraced the reality of God's presence, and channeled more love into the situation, with the person or yourself?

When you have finished reflecting on your story, continue with deep breathing for a few more minutes. Consider what these reflections reveal to you about what God is like. Invite God into the story that lies ahead of you, and ask God to reveal more of God's being to you. Ask God to help you be more embracing of God's presence tomorrow.

### **Lectio Divina: "sacred reading"—conversing with God through scripture**

**Read** a bible passage twice through, slowly and gently. Let the words flow over you. Savor each phrase, believing that God is present and has something for you. No need to search, simply listen for a word or phrase that somehow speaks to you or touches you. It might attract or even disturb you. Spend some time in silence with the word or phrase, just resting in it and allowing it to sink into your heart. Then read the passage slowly again.

**Reflect** or meditate on the word or phrase that stood out. How might it be speaking to you or challenging you? Allow memories, thoughts or situations evoked by the word to rise up gently. Allow God to reveal to you how the word or phrase applies to your life. Ask, "What meaning does this have for me here and now? What does God want me to know or to see?" Spend time in silence, reflecting on the phrase and allowing it to interact with your life. Now read the passage again.

**Respond** to God. Open your heart to God and openly and honestly share how you feel about your experience with the passage. These may be questions or doubts, or prayers of thanksgiving, petition, confession, lament, or praise.

**Rest** in God's presence. Allow your prayers to gently fade away and move into a time of simply resting in God's arms. Allow yourself freedom from thoughts, both mundane and holy. Open your mind, heart and soul to the fullness of God's love and peace. Rest.

## **Breathing the breath of life**

Sit comfortably with your back straight, your shoulders back, and your feet on the floor. Listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. Breathing accompanied by prayer will awaken you to God’s presence as you “breathe in” the love of God and calm your mind, heart and body. Use a short phrase that can be repeated interiorly in rhythm with breathing. Pray a prayer from scripture or from your heart, like “I breathe in Christ and all that is good,” and then “I breathe out Christ and release all that is fearful and false.” Continue the practice for five or ten minutes, always conscious of God’s love infusing your being. (Children can easily engage with this kind of praying. You can ask them to lie down and watch their stomach rise and fall as they breathe, or close their eyes and listen to the sound of their breathing through their mouth or nostrils.)

## **Practicing presence**

**Prepare.** Begin to let go of all thought of the future or past. Focus on your breathing. As you inhale, allow the Holy Spirit to come in as you breathe. As you exhale, let go of anxiety, stress and fear.

**Be present to where you are.** Consider the environment around you—your space, the natural beauty you may see, smells, sounds, the people nearby. Truly notice these things and thank God for providing them.

**Be present to who you are.** Ask God to show you what you are feeling at this moment. Where is there anxiety or concern? What are your emotions? Are you happy or sad? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you are trying to control, and release it.

**Be present to God.** Rest in this awareness, being mindful of where you are and who you are, and that God loves you and is present with you.

To close this time of prayer, thank God for being present and for loving you, and slowly return to your activities, bringing the Holy Spirit with you. Repeat often.