

Prayer

Participating in the Life of God¹

There are many ways of opening ourselves to God in prayer. The following are just seven areas of prayer that can return positive dividends as we approach God:²

1. Preparing to pray: practising mindfulness
2. Reviewing consciousness
3. Claiming freedom
4. Living in the Word
5. Praying in the Kingdom
6. Conversing with Jesus
7. Imaginative intercession
8. Praying In The Spirit
9. Beginning and concluding prayer and scripture reading

¹ In part developed from *Sacred Space* <http://www.jesuit.ie/prayer/index.htm#advice> with considerable additions, alterations deletions by D Newton. August 2004, October 2006, March 2011, June 2012. May 2013.

² All text in blue is hyperlinked.

As I sit here, the beating of my heart,
the ebb and flow of my breathing, the movements of my mind
are all signs of God's ongoing creation of me.

I pause for a moment,
and become aware of this presence of God within me.

How am I really feeling? Light-hearted? Heavy-hearted?
At peace, distracted, happy to be here, frustrated, worried or angry?

I acknowledge how I really am,
I surrender my thoughts and feelings to Christ – it is the real me whom the Lord loves.

I ask for the grace
to let go of my own concerns
and be open to what God is asking of me,
to let myself be guided and formed by my loving Creator and Redeemer.

I read the Word of God slowly, a few times over,
and I listen to what God is saying to me.

I envision myself in the story
and I discover the presence of Jesus.

“... whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door
and pray to your Father who is in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
... for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
Pray then in this way...”

What is stirring in me as I encounter Jesus?
Am I consoled, troubled, left cold?
I imagine Jesus himself standing or sitting at my side,
and share my feelings with him.

I am seeing my friend / my enemy.
They are coming before Jesus,
full of his redeeming love.
They are forgiven, made whole;
they give praise before the throne of grace.

“Lord, Holy Spirit, you blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks,
inside and outside the fences, you blow where you wish to blow...”
come, Holy Spirit of Jesus, blow over me...

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

1. Preparing to Pray – Practising Mindfulness

As I sit here, the beating of my heart,
the ebb and flow of my breathing, the movements of my mind
are all signs of God's ongoing creation of me.
I pause for a moment, and become aware
of this presence of God within me.

Awareness of the Presence of God

If someone asked you to give them another word for 'God', you could use the word 'Presence', for it is God's presence which lies at the core of God's dealings with humanity:

- God walks with the first humans in the garden (Genesis 3:8).
- After the flood, God swears never to completely abandon his fallen creation again (Genesis 9:15).
- Implicit in God's covenant with Abram is God's commitment to remain *with* Abram and his seed as a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3).
- When Moses asked Yahweh his name, Yahweh replied, 'I am who I am', meaning 'I am present' (Exodus 3:14).
- One of the senses of John 1:3-4 f.f., is that God is intimately present to everything, and especially to us.
- Matthew brackets his Gospel with statements concerning God's continuing faithfulness of presence: In 1:23 Matthew draws attention to Isaiah's prophecy in making sense of Jesus' identity as "...Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us'". Matthew's Gospel ends with the marvellous statement "...*Know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time*" (Matthew 28:20).

In part, prayer is intentionally becoming part of God's presence – God's immanence , God's nearness – to us, *even in Jesus' absence* (John 16:4-24, esp. 23-24). So in prayer, there is a presence even in the midst of God's hiddenness.

Prayer is connecting to God. It involves words and silence, our bodies, hearts and minds, our souls and spirit – all of us turned in submission to God. This is hard but there are some very simple, practical things that can help us prepare for prayer by *disposing us to being open to God's presence*. Some traditions refer to these as practising *mindfulness*:

- [Body exercise](#)
- [Listening exercise](#)
- [Breathing exercise](#)
- [Mantra praying & praying in tongues](#)

It is important that you choose a *regular time* and *place* for these spiritual exercises – somewhere quiet and private is good. Take your time with each exercise. Discover which is best for you as you prepare to engage with God.

Distractions ~ a note before you start

If you are uncomfortable, or itch or want to move position, just acknowledge the discomfort, assure yourself that it is all right and continue to focus attention on your exercise.

The mind rarely leaves us long in peace to do this, but begins to demand attention with comment and questions: *This is dumb. I feel silly. This is a waste of valuable time. What has this to do with prayer? Is this some kind of new age thing? What is the point of it?*

You can deal with these interruptions either as you dealt with the itch (acknowledge them, then return to your exercise), or simply surrender them to Christ with a simple word or phrase (see (2) [Review of Consciousness](#) and [Dealing With Distractions](#) below).

NB: You are not trying to think about focusing but, rather, just to focus – if you get the difference? The former is engagement once removed. The latter is simply engagement.

i. **Breathing Exercise** ³

This exercise involves concentrating all your attention on the physical feelings of breathing in and breathing out, without deliberately changing the rhythm of your breathing.

- Sit in your chair, upright but comfortable, with your back supported.
- *Focus attention* on feeling the cold air entering your nostrils and the warm air when you exhale. At first you may become self conscious about your breathing and find it becomes irregular, but this does not, as a rule, continue.

Most people find that on doing this exercise the pattern of their breathing changes, the breath becoming deeper and slower, and they begin to feel drowsy. Our goal however is *mindfulness* – not *mindlessness*, so if you become too relaxed refocus and move onto the next exercise.

ii. **Body Exercise** ⁴

- Sit in your chair, upright but comfortable, with your back supported. Let your body relax (without slouching), with your feet on the floor in front of you and your hands at rest on your thighs or joined in your lap.
- Close your eyes, or fix them on some point in front of you.
- Now let your **whole attention focus on what you can feel in your body**. You may start at your feet and work upwards... let your attention dwell on whatever part of the body you can feel... do this perhaps only for a few seconds – although the longer you can hold attention on one part, the better... shift attention from one part of the body to the other... your attention is on what you are feeling, not on thoughts about feeling.

iii. **Listening Exercise** ⁵

- Sit in your chair, upright but comfortable, with your back supported. You may wish to close your eyes...
- Now just notice the sounds that you can hear... just hear them, don't even try to name them...
- Notice fainter sounds... then sounds which are nearer... just listen... become aware of them...

³ Adapted from *God of Surprises* by Gerry W Hughes SJ.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Adapted from *Praying in Lent* by Donal Neary SJ.

- And the sound of your own heartbeat, faint, but your own rhythm of life...
- And the sound of silence in your place of prayer, the silence within yourself...
- Listen like this for a few minutes.

iv. Mantra Prayer ~ Praying In Tongues

After settling yourself through one or all of the above techniques, you can, move into evoking God's presence in prayer by repeating to yourself (aloud if you like and are on your own), St Paul's phrase: *In him I live, and move, and have my being*. Alternatively you may wish to repeat a helpful phrase such as: *Come Holy Spirit* or *Lord, hear my prayer*. Others prefer to simply repeat the name of *Jesus* or *Emanuel* as a way of inviting God's special presence.

Still others with the gift of tongues find it helpful to simply speak quietly to themselves in their special tongue (read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 – especially v.10). 'Praying in the Spirit', though, is more than speaking in tongues – see 7. [Praying In The Spirit](#) below. Speaking in tongues is a very useful way of "zoning into" God's presence.

Though this is something you are doing on your own, if it is new to you, you may feel embarrassed or find it strange. Don't let this be a barrier to moving into this important preparatory form of prayer. Eventually you will find it very rewarding.

End Prayer

An ending prayer might be:

Holy and eternal God,
 in you I live and move and have my being.
 In all my cares and occupations,
 guide and govern me by your Spirit,
 that I may both remember and reveal your presence;
 through my Saviour Jesus Christ.
 Amen.

2. Reviewing Our Consciousness (*jujitsu* prayer)

How am I really feeling? Light-hearted? Heavy-hearted?
 At peace, distracted, happy to be here, frustrated, worried or angry...
 I acknowledge how I really am,
 I surrender my thoughts and feelings to Christ
 – it is the real me whom the Lord loves.

What is a Review of Consciousness?

If it is true that God is at work in every detail of our lives (see [Living In The Word](#) below), how do we begin to recognise God's action and our reaction?

At the end of the day, especially before going to sleep, the mind, without any conscious effort on our part, tends to play back some of the events of the day so vividly that if the day has been particularly eventful we can find it difficult to get to sleep. We may find ourselves re-enacting a quarrel, thinking of the clever and cutting things we might have said if we had been more quick-witted; we may recall some disturbing news on TV or the radio and start fretting over it, we may be just "stressed out" and so on.

The Review of Consciousness is based on this natural tendency of the mind. It can help us to be more aware of God's presence and action in our daily lives (even the difficult parts), and to be more sensitive to where we are *cooperating with God's grace* and where we are refusing it.

The Review of Consciousness does this by taking all those things that we might think get in the way and, instead of denying them, using them to allow God deeper into our soul; instead of pushing back, roll with the problem, accept its natural force, takes its energy and flip it over on its back, turn it into something else – *jujitsu* prayer.

How to do a Review of Consciousness

- Assume a comfortable yet alert sitting position.
- Let your mind drift over the last 24 hours, refraining from any self-judgement, whether of approval or disapproval, attending to and relishing only those moments of the day for which you are grateful. Even the most harrowing day includes some good moments, if only we take the trouble to look. When people attempt this exercise, they are usually surprised at the number and variety of good moments in the day which otherwise would have been quickly forgotten – obscured, perhaps, by a painful experience in the day.
- Having remembered the events for which you are grateful, thank and praise God for them.
- After thanksgiving, the next step is to recall your inner moods and feelings, noting, if you can, what led to them, but again refraining from any self-judgement. Be with Christ as you look at these moods and beg him to show you the attitudes which underlie them. **The important thing is not to analyse our experience, but to contemplate it in Christ's presence. Let Jesus show us where we have allowed him be with and in us, and where we have refused to allow him.**
- Thank Jesus for the times you have 'let his glory through' and ask forgiveness for the times you have refused him entry.

Remember: Christ never refuses forgiveness (1 John 1:9). He knows our weakness far better than we do (Romans 8:26-27; Matthew 6:8). All we have to do is show it to him and he can transform our weakness into strength.

You can conclude with a short prayer like the one below, that looks back over the day that has been and forward to the one to come and asks for God's help. ⁶

Gracious God,
you have given me much this day;
grant me also a grateful heart,
a thankful spirit.

Into your hands I commend myself
and those I love.

Be with me still,
and when I take my rest,
renew me for the service of your Son Jesus Christ.
Amen.

⁶ Traditionally, Benedictines would use **Psalm 6** for this in their *Night Prayer* service. See the NZPB p.200 for a good translation.

3. Claiming Our Freedom

I ask for the grace
to let go of my own concerns
and be open to what God is asking of me;
to let myself be guided and formed
by my loving Creator and Redeemer.

Praying for Freedom

Christian freedom is freedom to *worship* and *serve* God in holiness and truth.⁷ This involves being *open to God unconditionally*, not turning God into a tribal God made in our own image, tamed to do our bidding when we want.⁸ If we are to be free in Christ, then we have to let God be God in our lives.

Christian freedom is also something we have to ***intentionally lay hold of***. Without doing this we will tend to swap one slavery for another:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

Christian freedom, then, involves our submission to the person of Jesus Christ – not to a set of rules or social and cultural morés. The prayer above helps us to put ourselves at God’s disposal. St Ignatius describes this ‘Preparatory prayer’ as asking for:

*“...the grace that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the praise and service of the Divine Majesty.
(The Spiritual Exercises, no. 46)*

In preparing for your personal prayer time (after practising mindfulness and maybe a review of consciousness), before intercessions or before your day ahead, in addition to the prayer above you might try the prayers below. Read them through once. Then pray through one or the other slowly, making the prayer your own. Don’t be afraid to pause or wait on God as you pray or when you have finished:

Lord, I want to prepare well for this time;
I want to make all of me ready, attentive and available to you.
Please help me to clarify and purify my intentions...

In all that I am today, all that I try to do,
all my encounters, reflections – even the frustrations and failings
and especially in this time of prayer,
in all of this, I place my life in your hands.
Lord, I am yours. Make of me what you will.
Amen.

or alternately...

⁷ The Exodus story is one of **salvation as liberation** but a liberation to be as a light for the nations, liberty to serve and reveal God’s righteousness within the creation (see Exodus 3:3-6; see also both Mary’s and Simeon’s songs – Luke 1:46-55;2:29-32).

⁸ Something the Children of Israel constantly tended towards and something we, as God’s people, still tend towards.

O God,
the author of peace and lover of righteousness;
to know you is eternal life,
to serve you is perfect freedom.

Remember, merciful Lord,
what you have made of me and not what I deserve;
and as you have called me to your service,
so make me worthy of my calling;
through Jesus Christ my Saviour.

Amen.

Try committing one of these prayers (or one similar you write yourself) to memory.

4. Living In The Word

I read the Word of God slowly, a few times over,
and I listen to what God is saying to me.
I envision myself in the story
and I discover the presence of Jesus.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not

clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:25-33

Christian contemplation differs from, say, Eastern contemplative technique in that the goal is not to empty the mind or heart but *to be filled of the presence of Christ*. It is in the imaginative grasp of the Word that the Spirit is let loose in the one who contemplates.

i. Listening to the Word

Benedictine spirituality is very much word and prayer based. The two are connected – the Word forming the basis of the life of prayer. Prayer in this way is *formational prayer*. To the extent that Benedictine spirituality has deeply influenced Anglicanism, the same could be said of an Anglican approach to prayer and, from it, to spiritual formation.

Being ‘soaked’ in *the* Word so that the very cadences of scripture become our language of prayer, is the goal of ‘divine reading’ – *lectio divina*. Kenneth Leech sees this ‘brooding’ on the Word as the beginning point for the life of prayer.⁹ The 1662 Catechism saw scripture as something we should “read, mark, lean and inwardly digest”. The following exercise takes elements of all these:

- Ask our Lord for *grace* to be touched as you contemplate his Word. Formulate your own prayer to use whenever you begin a spiritual exercise (as, for instance, in the exercises below; see ii. Entering Into The Word).
- Read over the passage from Matthew’s Gospel (above) slowly, several times. Ask God to ‘quicken’ a Word – a verse, phrase, sentence, word – to you from the passage above ...
- See if any word or phrase stands out for you, and stay with that phrase for as long as you like before turning your attention to any other:
 - Move into your Word – repeat it to yourself, let it soak in.
 - Push away thoughts with your Word.
 - Move further into your Word – re-read it, chew it over.
 - Quietly thank God for your Word.

The process is a bit like sucking a lollie. Take your time. Enjoy it. Don’t try to analyse the Word (you don’t normally break up a lollie and subject it to chemical analysis before tasting it). Often a phrase will catch the attention of our subconscious mind’s needs long before our conscious mind is aware of the reason for the attraction. That is why it is good to remain with the phrase for as long as possible without trying to analyse it.

It takes time and skill to meditate on scripture well. I may find all sorts of distractions running through my mind. Yet some thoughts, far from being **distractions**, can become the substance of my prayer. It is as though the phrase of Scripture is a **searchlight** which plays upon my stream of consciousness – my thoughts, memories, reflections, daydreams, hopes, ambitions, fears – and I pray out of the mixture of God’s Word and my inner thoughts and feelings.

There is an *inner dialogue* going on between ourselves and scripture which can inform our prayer life. There can be profit in our articulating this dialogue. Pause at

⁹ See Kenneth Leech, *Spirituality & Pastoral Care*, Sheldon Press 1986, pg.15

the end of your lectio to talk with Jesus – see 5. [Conversation](#) below.

Dealing with ‘Distractions’

As we have noted before, when trying to pray like this it may well happen that the mind begins to fill with questions and apparent distractions: *How do I know that I am not just reading myself – what I want to hear – into God’s word? How do I know these words are true, that God really does communicate through them?*

These are valid questions and we will come back to them (see iii. below) but, for now, let them wait. Leave them with God.

Having left the questions aside for now, what do I do with all the other distractions which flood my mind? I may begin to wonder if I left the gas on, or remember an e-mail I forgot to send. If it is urgent, like the gas, the safest thing is to go and check. With matters that can wait, perhaps jot them down for later. Anything else which comes to mind, rather than being a distraction, can become the substance of my prayer – again, see [jujitsu prayer](#) above.

Scripture as a Searchlight

When I engage with scripture emotionally, when I mull scripture over, let it become part of me and take my intuitive responses to it seriously, then I allow scripture to “read me”, I allow scripture to show me my preoccupations and where I need to grow.

For this to happen, it is important that I do not hide my inner person from the Word or from myself. Honestly and courage is important here. We are often so trained that we think it wrong to allow negative feelings entry into prayer, especially negative feelings about God. We have to learn to grow out of this training, expressing our feelings and thoughts freely before God and trusting that God is big enough to accept us as we are and transform us into Christ’s likeness.

There is no point in pretending before God – the one who knows us better than we know ourselves. There is no thought, feeling or desire within me which cannot become the substance of my prayer in the light of God’s Word, when I know that God loves the chaos that is me and that his Spirit working in me can do infinitely more than I can think or imagine.

So, let’s move on...

ii. Entering Into The Word

The Ignatian approach to scripture is meditative and mystical. It calls on us to enter both the text and the story of scripture, imaginatively engaging with God. Ignatian contemplative Spirituality is not orientated to understanding so much as *encounter*. It is discovering the presence of the living Christ in scripture that is the purpose of the meditation.

It is this presence that provides the impetus and platform for our prayer. As Christ becomes present for us imaginatively, we find ourselves engaging with him in prayer (see 5. [Conversing With Jesus](#) below).

The Ignatian Spiritual exercises are relatively simple in their structure though at first complex in practice and take time and practice to get the most out of (originally they were meant as part of a thirty day retreat!)

Continued use of the exercises leads to greater simplicity with more time devoted to a quiet resting in and dialogue with Jesus. This will not be without struggle and deep emotional engagement, however, so be prepared for a bit of a roller-coaster ride as you develop your Ignatian contemplative life. This is an ‘engaging’ form of Spirituality, not a ‘detaching’ one. The object is not self improvement or relaxation but an encounter with the living God.

Ignatius instructs us to use the three faculties of *memory*, *understanding* and *will* to form the body of the meditation before the intimate resting in Jesus is reached. The pattern is: Preparatory prayer; two ‘preludes’; a transitional time entering as we enter into a ‘colloquy’ or friendly conversation with God; concluding prayer.

To unpack...

- Choose a story from scripture where Jesus figures prominently. Choose a story appropriate for the time of year (e.g. lent or Holy Week) – use a lectionary for this (see ‘Gospel reading’ for the day). Alternatively, to begin with, read one of these stories:
 - Jesus at the wedding in Cana – John 2:1-11.
 - Jesus and the woman caught in adultery – John 7:53-8:11.
 - Jesus heals a man born blind – John 9:1-41.
- **Preparatory Prayer:** Before you begin to read the story ask God for grace to identify with / enter into it. This is important. To encounter Jesus is a gift not a technique. Ignatius taught that we must dispose our soul correctly in order be open to meeting with God: Ask for *grace* that all your intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty (see [Claiming Our Freedom](#) above).
- **Prelude 1:** Now we need to *set the ‘scene’* in which the story takes place. Read the story through. Take your time. As you do, ask yourself:
 - What is the scene like? What does it look like (buildings, landscape / geography etc.)? Are there shops or workplaces or fields nearby? What does it smell like? Is it hot or cold? Is there a wind blowing?
 - Who is in the scene? Who is directly involved, who is listening in, passing by etc? How are people behaving? What are they doing (on a journey, working, eating, hanging about etc.)?
 - Where is Jesus in this scene? Do you see him face to face or from behind?
 - Take your time doing this – look, mark and contemplate the story from different angles. When you have finished reading / contemplating, then pause before you...

- Decide with whom you *identify* in the story. Put yourself in the scene and into the person you have identified with in that scene. It is through this identification that you engage with the Word at an experiential level. If it helps, re-read the scripture again as above but from this person's *point of view*. The idea is for you to enter the story in a direct / unmediated way.
- **Prelude 2:** Next, ask our Lord for what you want from your encounter – Jesus knows your real need and deep desire better than you do, yet you need to ask – this is the paradox and mystery of prayer.
- The petition should relate to the story. That is, for example, if the Wedding at Cana then joy and a sense of celebration or sense of mystery; if the woman caught in adultery then acceptance and forgiveness; if contemplation of the blind man being healed then gratitude, and so on.
- Remember you are asking the Lord to reveal to you what aspect of his grace you need to experience *from this story*. There are different graces available within the story and I approach the story according to on what grace I am praying for and believe God has for me.
- At some point in the meditation you are going to sense the action of God in imparting the grace you are asking for. When this happens, let the experience grow. Leave the narrative and enter into the presence of Jesus. This is a movement into intimacy with God – let go. See what happens...
- At the end a '*colloquy*' emerges from the meditation. Ignatius saw this as an intimate conversation with God – the three divine persons in one being – yet spoken as if talking with a very close friend. Just speaking with Jesus is also good. See 5. [Conversation](#) below for more on this.
- Finish your time with Jesus with the 'Our father...' prayer or the trinitarian doxology (see 8. [Conclusion](#) below).

iii. A Caution

In the end biblically based meditation and prayer cannot be just an expression of myself, untethered to a solid hitching post. **These exercises assume I am thoughtfully studying and wrestling with the scriptures elsewhere.** They also assume I am **reciting scripture** (Psalms, spiritual songs, liturgy etc. – see Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), as part of my regular worship so that the words of scripture **form** me and become part of the warp and woof of my spiritual 'language' / expression. They assume I am doing this both alone and with others.

Without such a touchstone 'listening' can become self referential and, ultimately, risks becoming idolatrous – projecting me onto God rather than forming me in God's image, reading myself into scripture instead of allowing scripture to speak to me and so shape my prayer and worship, my life in God.

The issue with imaginative meditation and prayer is one of discernment and the environment which makes this possible. **This environment has to be the 'texted' or 'storied' living community of God's people** – that is, *a community grounded and bathed in the text and story of scripture.*

5. Praying in the Kingdom

“Lord, teach us to pray... he said to them:

Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial...

... and whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door
and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will
reward you... for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
Pray then in this way...”

God speaks (communicates / comes) to us in Christ, the scriptures and creation.
“God’s Word is always the first word”(Eugene Peterson). Prayer is our response to
God’s goodness – creation, salvation and providence. We pray in gratitude. We pray
out of need (see bullet 4 below and [Praying in the Spirit](#) below).

We use words, then, as an “outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible
grace” of God at work within us and about us.

Prayer has content – it is not a relaxation exercise. It may seem silly to pray (what
language does God speak – English?) It may seem that we are simply involved in
“self talk” or “displacement behaviour”. Yet, though silence is important, so are
words which give shape to our response and in turn shape us.

A good way to start is to use the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ as a framework. Taking Luke’s
version of Jesus’ prayer we can observe some key elements:

- **“Our Father...”** Prayer is personal. God desires us to pray because our Father wants a personal relationship (see also Luke 11:5-12 – not a stone but bread). We pray, then, to “Our Father...”, the one who cares for us.
- **“...hallowed be your name”...** Start with God’s praise. Acknowledge with awe who God is – holy, just and good.
- **“Your kingdom come.”** Call for God’s Spirit to be with you and fill all in all: call for God’s authority and rule over his creation. Keep your prayer focussed on God’s present and future activity within his world.
- **“Give us each day our daily bread.”** Petition for needs. Be mindful that the prayer is entirely couched in the plural (“us”, “our”), and so your prayer is for others as much as yourself. It is here one can use other types of prayer (e.g. ‘imaginative intercession). Acknowledge with thanks and gratitude your dependence on God your creator and provider. Thank your heavenly Father in advance for his provision for you.
- **“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those indebted to us.”** Seek forgiveness and let other’s sins against you go. Repent of the wrong you have done – intentionally or otherwise. Some self -examination is good here but

don't dwell on the bad or lash yourself. Thank God for His love and justice toward you – even when you don't experience it. Ask God to grant you insight into practical ways you can forgive the “indebtedness” of others to you.

- **“And do not bring us to the time of trial.”** Pray for our persecuted, oppressed and sisters and brothers throughout the world. Ask for God's grace and mercy and protection to extend to them as well as the church here in New Zealand, as God works his purposes within his creation. Pray also that you and your loved ones will know God's blessing and protection.

6. Conversation

What is stirring in me as I encounter Jesus?
Am I consoled, troubled, left cold?
I imagine Jesus himself standing or sitting at my side,
and share my feelings with him.

Conversing With Jesus

When we read scripture, when we engage with it, when we make it part of us, God speaks to us. In prayer we intentionally enter into God's presence and we speak with God. Then God speaks to us, no longer through the Word only, but directly in words to us. (Adapted from E Stanley Jones)

Imagine you see Jesus sitting close to you. In doing this you are putting your imagination at the service of your faith. Jesus isn't here in the way you are imagining him, but he certainly is here, and your imagination helps to make you aware of this...

Now, speak to Jesus... If no one is around, speak out in a soft voice... Listen to what you imagine Jesus to say in reply... That is the difference between thinking and praying. When we think, we generally talk to ourselves. When we pray, we talk with God. (Adapted from Anthony de Mello SJ, Sadhana)

St Ignatius calls this conversation a ‘colloquy’, and says:

A colloquy is made, properly speaking, in the way one friend speaks to another, or a servant to one in authority – now begging a favour, now accusing oneself of some misdeed, now telling one's concerns and asking counsel about them... In the colloquies we ought to converse and beg according to the subject matter; that is, in accordance with whether I find myself tempted or consoled, desire to possess one virtue or another, or to dispose myself in one way or another, or to experience sorrow or joy over the matter I am contemplating. And finally I ought to ask for what I more earnestly desire in regard to some particular matters. (The Spiritual Exercises nos:54, 199)

- At the end of your lectio, or scripture meditation, converse with Jesus in the way de Mello and St. Ignatius describe.
- Imagine Jesus sitting close to you... Just his presence. Now begin to talk with him.

7. Imaginative Intercession

I am seeing my friend / my enemy.

They are coming before Jesus,
full of his redeeming love.

They are forgiven, made whole;
they give praise before the throne of grace.

Imaginative intercession is an extension of Ignatian meditation and prayer. Here, instead of seeking Jesus' presence for ourselves, we seek to bring others to him instead. In this sense, like all intercession, prayer becomes participating in the activity of God – Christ's work in his world. Why Jesus desires this of us or how this sort of prayer works is ultimately a mystery. Moreover, often intercessory prayer is hard – partly because it requires effort and discipline, and also because it is difficult to know our own deep needs let alone those of others. Again, we are in need of God's grace for this sort of prayer.

- **Prepare** for prayer using the appropriate exercises ([above](#)). After (or instead of) your [mantra prayer](#) you may wish to recite these scriptures - thoughtfully:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:44...48)

- Pause... ask that God will grace you with empathy and insight in your prayer. Ask God to guide you in this prayer. When you are ready, either...
- Imagine someone you love or know who may be in need. Picture them as you know them... Now imagine they are coming to Jesus. Imagine them filled with joy. Note how their body, their face, changes. Imagine them before the throne of God praising...

or...

- Pray for the grace and courage to pray for your enemy – someone who has done you wrong and doesn't care and may even do it again. When you are ready...
- Imagine the same as above for this person. This can be a powerful and transformative way of praying – both for the person and for you.
- Using words can also be helpful here – try moving between imagining and praying. Talk to Jesus (see [Conversing With Jesus](#) above) concerning any special needs that come to mind for this person... Thank God for the grace to pray for them. Conclude by saying the 'Our father...' and the doxology (below).

8. Praying In The Spirit

“Lord, Holy Spirit, you blow like the wind in a thousand paddocks, inside and outside the fences, you blow where you wish to blow...”

(Baxter, *He Karakia Mihinare* p.157)

come, Holy Spirit of Jesus, blow over me...

Paul talks about praying in the Spirit (Eph.6:18). This implies we can pray out of the Spirit. So how do we decide what praying in the Spirit is like? At least four hallmarks suggest themselves from the New Testament:

- **Praying in the Truth** (John 16:13-15)
 - for humanity – especially the saints (Ephesians 6:18-20)
 - to the glory of God – through Christ (John 16:14).
- **Arising from need** (Romans 8:18-25)
 - connected to creation’s groaning – part of our alienated condition as we wait...
- **Enabled prayer** – Spirit prayer (1 Corinthians 12:3)
 - searched from our hearts – beyond words (Romans 8:26-27,34).
 - received by Jesus (Hebrews 7:25)
 - who intercedes within the heart of God (Romans 8:34).
- **Mystical prayer** an enabling gift from God (1 Corinthians 12:4-11 – esp. v.10b ; Romans 14:1-5)
 - to be eagerly sought – in good order (1 Corinthians 14:39-40)
 - as part of building up the church (1 Corinthians 14:4-5).

Double click on this embedded PowerPoint presentation (or look for the PPT listed separately) for details on each of these points.



8. Conclusion

Always begin and end your time with God by acknowledging who God is, in whose presence and to whom you pray. Pray the trinitarian doxology:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.