

Guides to Prayer

Much of this material was taken *from 'Practicing Prayer: A handbook' by Lowell E. Grisham. Published by Ascension Press, Order of the Ascension.*

[This is a highly recommended resource for additional guidance on prayer.]

Personal devotions – *Ktaphatic Prayer*: prayer with words and images

In our Lenten series on prayer, in the past two weeks we have explored.

Corporate prayer

Sacramental corporate prayer – Holy Eucharist (instructed Eucharist)

Nonsacramental corporate prayer – The Daily offices (can also be used in personal devotions)

Personal Devotions (two kinds)

Kataphatic prayer – with words or images

Apophatic prayer – without words or images

I. Preparation for Prayer

Example of Jesus:

1, Mark 1: 9 – 13

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming out of the water, he saw the heaven torn apart and the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon him, and a voice came from the heavens, "You are my son the beloved, with you I am well pleased.

And the spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts and the angels waited on him."

Luke 3: 21 – 22

Now when all the people were baptized and Jesus also had been baptized **and was praying**, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him on bodily for like a dove. And a voice came form heaven, you are my son the beloved; with you I am well pleased.

Luke 4: 1

Jesus full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tested by the devil. **He ate nothing at all during those days ...**

Luke 6:12

Now during those days, he went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when the day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve.

Mark 1: 35

[After healing Simon Peter's mother, and a long evening of many others brought to him for healing...] *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

Matt. 14:23 [after the feeding of the 5000...]

... Immediately, he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, **he went up to the mountain by himself to pray.**

Matt. 6: 5

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. But whenever you pray, **go into your room, shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret**, and your father who sees in secret will reward you.

When you are praying, **do not heap empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way [the Lord's prayer].

So, some features we see in Jesus' pattern of prayer.

1. He goes and **finds a place where he won't be disturbed** – away from crowds, on a mountain top, in a wilderness (deserted place) in a closed room.
2. **He finds a time where he won't be disturbed** – early in the morning away from crowds, before the busyness of the day begins. Goes up into the mountain *by himself to pray*. Schedule a regular time to meet with God.
3. **Establish relaxed concentration and awareness of God's presence.** Don't be in a rush. Jesus spends much time in prayer (described sometimes as 40 days, meaning an unhurried long time).
4. Jesus prays in silence, listening for God's guidance. No need to use many words." Do not heap empty words and phrases."
5. **Dealing with wondering thoughts.** "He was tested by Satan and was with wild beasts, and Angels ministered to him."

Some helpful steps to become quiet and alert in prayer.

1. **Posture**
- Make sure you are physically comfortable and alert. Make sure your spine is straight and your head is directly over your shoulders and your shoulders over your hips. Contract and relax muscles throughout the body.
2. **Three breaths – take three deep breaths.**
 - With *first breath* let go of everything you may have brought with you.

- With *second breath* be fully present here and now.
- With *third breath*, become open to what will happen during the period of prayer.

3. Breathing

Observe your breathing. Don't change it just observe it. Close your eyes and try to establish a pattern of slow, deep and even breathing. Let God's Spirit breathe you, inspire you. Be in the breath of God - relaxed, present.

4. Listening

Let the sounds be. No need to label or think about them. Let the sounds move through you freely. Sounds distract only when you try to fight them or label them.

Let the sounds be until a mood of quiet begins. Whenever you lose focus, gently return, don't get frustrated. If random thoughts disrupt you, don't try to fight them off, include them in your prayer. Let them lead you to God (Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, or in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest).

5. Sensations

Monitor body sensations until relaxation sets in.

II. Personal Devotions -

1. Kataphatic prayer ~ Praying with words and images.

There are various approaches to praying with words and images. Some of them are.

1. **Lectio Divina ~ Meditating on Scripture.**
2. Ignatian method of prayer - Invites you to use your imagination to enter physically into a scene from scripture and make it come alive.
3. Praying with Icons
4. Praying with a Rosary (Anglican Rosary).

Lectio Divina

Meditating on Scripture is a rewarding way to open ourselves to union with God.

How do you do this?

There are **four** movements in Lectio Divina

1. *Lectio* - reading and listening.
2. *Meditatio* - thinking/pondering.
3. *Oratio* - loving/praying.
4. *Contemplatio* - silence

Think of these movements as a flow that emerges naturally as a gift from your prayer, rather than steps to be marched through in a 1 - 2 -3 -4 sequence.

Prepare for prayer as discussed earlier and choose a scripture passage to read. The Daily Office Lectionary is a good place to start.

In the first step – **Lectio** – read in a way as to let the scripture speak to you personally. Trust the Spirit to inspire your listening. Read very slowly, a word a phrase at a time.

If a phrase begins to draw your attention and you begin to reflect on its meaning for you personally, you have flowed into the next movement – *meditatio*.

The second step **Meditatio** “*thinking in the presence of God.*”

Let a phrase from scripture enter your mind. Try to understand it; ponder it. Converse with it and listen to it. Why were you drawn to this word or phrase? What does it mean for you? If you have a good imagination, you might enter the gospel scene as if you were there, using all five senses to enter the scene. Chew on the passage, focus and concentrate on it from many angles.

As you think, feelings and emotions may begin to emerge from a deeper level. Now you are beginning the **Oratio** or *prayer from the heart*.

The third step **oratio** is the intentional act of opening your heart to God to allow God’s love to pour out upon you. *Oratio* is loving God with or without words. It is more important to love much than pray much. You may need to move back and forth between prayer of the heart, reading and thinking. Let the mind descent slowly into the heart. Love God.

The fourth step *Contemplatio, the deep silence*. It is time to surrender, let go, do nothing, be quiet and let God pray in you. This prayer is a gift. You can do nothing to accomplish it except be open to it. Gently rest with only the word or phrase that came to you from the reading. When distracted, gently return to your sacred word.