

pray **first** 
Resource Guide



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Letter from Pastor James

I am so excited for this year's "PRAY FIRST" focus in our church. We will be carrying this focus through every ministry and age-level in our church. Because I want prayer to become an automatic first response for every one of us. For example:

- ◆ When we start our day — Pray First
- ◆ Before we walk into work or school — Pray First
- ◆ After we get a good or bad report from the doctor — Pray First
- ◆ When we have a big decision to make — Pray First
- ◆ When something doesn't go our way — Pray First
- ◆ Before we send that text or email — Pray First
- ◆ At the dinner table — Pray First
- ◆ Before bed — Pray First
- ◆ In every moment of our day and in every circumstance — Pray First

I want prayer to become our first response for every person in our church, not our last resort. I want us to naturally pray throughout our day knowing that God is with us and for us in every moment.

This invitation to Pray First comes directly from our theme verse as a church this year:

So, first and foremost, I urge God's people to pray. They should make their request, petitions, and thanksgivings on behalf of all humanity. [1 Timothy 2:1 \(VOICE\)](#)

I think most Jesus-followers really believe in the power of prayer and want to pray first and even pray more. But if we're honest, many of us are not comfortable with prayer or maybe even feel like we've never been taught how to pray. That is what this Pray First Resource and Journal is all about — helping us learn how to pray first, pray often, pray everyday, and pray in many different ways.

I am so excited for you and our whole church family to take this Pray First journey together. I know God is going to meet us and deeply form us in Christ this year.

James Grogan

Senior Pastor, Community Church Movement

Introduction: What is Prayer?

Prayer is, simply, a conversation with God. It is a way for us to thank and praise him for his goodness, as well as a way to bring our concerns to him. As with our conversations with friends, prayer is two-way — we speak to God and God speaks to us.

While prayer is often understood primarily as a private individual practice that deepens our relationship with God, scripture teaches that prayer is both personal and communal. The Lord's Prayer, Jesus' very own model of prayer, is a communal prayer that teaches us to pray to "our" Father. In praying this way, the Body of Christ participates in the life of the Triune community of love — the eternal union of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Through shared prayer, the church is formed into a people marked by unity, mutual care, and shared mission. And within this communal life, the Holy Spirit continues the deep work of reshaping our inner life — our desires, affections, and character — so they increasingly reflect the heart of Jesus. As our inner life is transformed in love, we grow in attentiveness to the needs of others and to God's call to embody compassion in the world.

Personal and communal prayer are therefore not competing practices but mutually reinforcing ones — our private communion with God equips us to pray with and for God's people, and our shared prayer strengthens and enriches our personal prayer life. Indeed, it is our hope that as you regularly engage this Pray First Resource and Journal you will deepen both your relationship with God and your concern for and participation in the mission of our church — ***people helping people find and follow Jesus.***

Four Spheres of Prayer: *Heart, Home, Church and City*

Prayer is where God invites us into his transforming presence — shaping who we are, who we love, and the world we help to create. As we pray together, we turn our attention to four essential spheres of life where God desires renewal — our hearts, our homes, our church, and our city. Each sphere is interconnected. As God forms our inner life, he also equips us to bring healing, unity, and hope to the relationships and communities we inhabit. Through prayer, we join God’s ongoing work of restoring all things through and in Christ.

Pray for Your Heart

Our inner life is the wellspring of everything else, and scripture reminds us that transformation begins within. Like the psalmist who prays, “Search me, O God, and know my heart...” ([Psalm 139:23-24](#)), we invite God to reveal and heal what lies beneath the surface. God also promises, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you” ([Ezekiel 36:26](#)), reminding us that renewal is his work in us. As we resist being shaped by the patterns of this world and instead open ourselves to be “transformed by the renewing of our mind” ([Romans 12:2](#)), the Holy Spirit forms Christlike character and produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, and more ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Ask God to reveal places that need healing, surrender, or renewed trust.
- ◆ Pray for spiritual hunger, humility, and a heart anchored in his love.
- ◆ Invite the Holy Spirit to produce fruit — love, joy, peace, patience, and more.

Pray for Your Home

Our homes are often the first space where God’s love is practiced, received, and tested. Moses instructs God’s people to keep his words close and to “impress them on your children...talk about them at home” ([Deuteronomy 6:6-7](#)), showing that spiritual formation begins in ordinary rhythms. We depend on God to build and sustain the places we inhabit, because “unless the Lord builds the house,

the builders labor in vain” ([Psalm 127:1](#)). As we foster relationships marked by compassion, humility, and forgiveness — virtues described in [Colossians 3:12-14](#) — we echo Joshua’s declaration, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” ([Joshua 24:15](#)). Prayer grounds our homes in grace, belonging, and Christlike love.

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Pray for peace, grace, protection, and reconciliation in strained relationships.
- ◆ Lift up children, spouses, roommates, and extended family — by name.
- ◆ Ask God to make your home a place of belonging, compassion, and encouragement.

Pray for Our Church

The church is a Spirit-formed community where Jesus’ love becomes visible. Jesus tells his disciples, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another: ([John 13:34-35](#)), making love the hallmark of Christian witness. The early church embodied this through shared worship, sacrificial generosity, and steadfast prayer ([Acts 2:42-47](#)). Paul urges believers to live with “humility and gentleness...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit” ([Ephesians 4:2-3](#)), reminding us that unity is both gift and calling. And the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages us to meet faithfully and “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” ([Hebrews 10:24-25](#)). As we pray for our church, we ask God to deepen community, strengthen mission, and reflect Christ together.

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Pray for unity across differences, and healing where there has been hurt.
- ◆ Intercede for pastors, ministry leaders, volunteers, and new believers.
- ◆ Ask God to deepen our worship, strengthen our discipleship, and expand our witness.

Pray for Our City

God’s heart extends to every neighborhood, institution, and system in our cities. Through Jeremiah, God calls his people to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city...and pray for it” ([Jeremiah 29:7](#)), revealing his desire for the flourishing of all people. Micah 6:8 anchors this calling in justice, mercy, and humility — virtues that form our public witness. Jesus describes his followers as “the light of the world” ([Matthew 5:14-16](#)), meant to shine hope in places of struggle. And Isaiah 58 reminds us that acts of compassion, advocacy, and solidarity cause “your light [to] break forth like the dawn” ([Isaiah 58:6-9](#)). When we pray for our city, we align ourselves with God’s restorative mission in the world.

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Intercede for those in need — the hungry, isolated, displaced, or unseen.
- ◆ Pray for local schools, the military, first responders, and civic leaders.
- ◆ Ask God to reveal opportunities for his people to love and serve boldly.

Conclusion

As we pray for our hearts, homes, church, and city, we remember that prayer is not merely something we do — it is a way of partnering with God for the sake of others. Every whispered longing, act of intercession, moment of silence becomes a seed of transformation planted in faith. Be attentive to the Holy Spirit, be courageous in his mission, and hopeful for his kingdom to come — in our hearts, our homes, our church, and our city.

How to Use this Resource

This Pray First Resource and Journal is designed to help you foster a deeper and more intentional prayer life, and to nurture a vibrant culture of congregational prayer across our movement of churches. It contains helpful information on different ways to connect with God through private and corporate prayer. You will find a wide array of prayer methods ranging from the contemporary to the ancient. You need not master any of them. Start with one method, try it on for size, and see if it works for you.

There is no right or wrong way to pray. And thankfully, we can look to Jesus as our model for cultivating a life of prayer. Jesus often found a place of solitude to connect with God the Father ([Mark 1:35](#)). Among many examples in scripture, we witness Jesus praying before making big decisions ([Luke 6:12-13](#)), when grieving the death of his cousin John the Baptist ([Matthew 14:23](#)), and when he was in deep agony over his imminent death ([Luke 22:41-44](#)). Jesus not only modeled prayer but he also taught his disciples how to pray ([Matthew 6:5-15](#)).

In light of Jesus' example, here are a few suggestions to keep in mind as you begin developing a daily habit of prayer.

- ◆ **Find Time.** Commit to spending time daily in conversation with God. Whether it's as soon as you get up in the morning, or before you hit the sack at night, get in the habit of setting aside time every day to pray.
- ◆ **Pick a Place.** Create a space where you won't be distracted or interrupted. Let that quiet place be your sanctuary where you go to encounter Jesus. While it would be cool to have your daily prayer time at the beach, the park, or atop a mountain overlooking a great expanse, that may not be ideal. Keep it simple and pick a place you can easily get to.
- ◆ **Select a Plan.** Pick a plan from the various methods offered in this resource. You might want to try several until you settle with one or two that fit you best. Or you might change it up a bit from season to season. The important thing is that you are intentional about your time with God.
- ◆ **Pray Always.** While committing to specific times of the day to pray is a great way to begin cultivating a life of prayer, scripture also encourages us to always pray ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)) — for anything and everything ([Philippians 4:6-7](#)). Since prayer is just having a conversation with God,

talk to him anytime anything comes up for you. In the ordinariness of life — taking a walk, washing the dishes, mowing the lawn, driving in your car — God is also present and waiting to hang out with you.

As you journey through this resource, remember that prayer is not a task to accomplish but a relationship to enjoy. God is already drawing near to you with love, invitation, and delight. May these practices help you become more aware of God's presence in every moment — whether you set aside in quiet stillness or moving through the ordinary rhythms of your day. May you discover that prayer is not something you must do perfectly, but a gift that forms you into the likeness of Jesus as you simply show up with an open heart.

Prayer Patterns

Prayer does not have to be complicated, but it can feel intimidating — especially when we're unsure how to begin or what to say. The good news is that followers of Jesus have been learning and practicing prayer for thousands of years, leaving us simple, meaningful patterns that can guide us into conversation with God.

In this section, you'll find a few well-utilized and trusted frameworks — the Lord's Prayer, P-R-A-Y, A-C-T-S, and praying out loud — that help shape our words and focus our hearts. These models are not formulas to get prayer "right," but tools to help us grow in confidence and stay rooted in biblical truth. Whether you are praying privately or with others, these approaches can give structure to your thoughts, draw your attention to God's character, and lead you into deeper trust and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Try one practice for a week, or rotate between them. As you learn new ways to pray, allow them to stretch your imagination and help you discover fresh joy and freedom in drawing near to God.

P-R-A-Y

While prayer is a conversation with God, it is certainly not a technique for getting God's attention. Rather, prayer is an ongoing relationship shaped by trust, presence, and participation in the life of God. In prayer, we bring our lives honestly before God and open ourselves to God's transforming work. The posture of our heart matters as much as the words we speak. When we approach prayer as listening — rather than simply speaking — we learn to receive God's love, respond to God's guidance, and rest in God's will.

Theologian Dallas Willard understands prayer as a conversational relationship between God and his children. Like any deep friendship, this conversation grows through attentive listening. We are formed not only by the truths we speak to God, but by the truths God speaks into us. The P-R-A-Y rhythm, adapted from author and church planter Pete Greig's framework, offers a simple way of positioning the heart to hear God's voice: Pause, Reflect, Align, and Yield. These movements are not steps to master but a posture to inhabit — an inward stance that helps us become present to God in love. As you sit down to pray, center yourself and open your heart to God's presence through observing these movements. Use the spiritual practices offered in this section to settle into conversation with God.

P - PAUSE

To pause means “to stop temporarily, or to linger for a time.” It is to resist the momentum of our hurry and enter the unhurried life of God’s kingdom. Pausing, then, is an invitation to linger in the presence of God, being slow to move or to act, or rather, as [James 1:19](#) tells us, “be slow to speak and quick to listen.” The pause is where prayer begins. It quiets our inner noise so we can attend to God’s voice. Silence is not empty — it is an active waiting on God. In quietness, we discover that God has already been present, inviting us into communion.

Spiritual Practice

Sit quietly for one minute. Let your breath slow and your shoulders soften. Whisper: “Speak Lord. Your servant is listening” ([1 Samuel 3:10](#)). Without judgment, notice what arises in silence.

R - REFLECT

Listening to God requires tuning our ears to hear what the Spirit is saying. One way to do this is to reflect — to think deeply or carefully about his word tells us that those “whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditate on his law day and night,” are like “a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither — whatever they do prospers” ([Psalm 1:2-3](#)). Reflection is more than thinking about or reading scripture; it is allowing scripture to read us. By meditating on God’s word, we invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate parts of us that resist love, truth, or grace. As we reflect, God’s word becomes living and active, reshaping the imagination, and forming Christ’s character within us ([Hebrews 4:12](#)).

Spiritual Practice

Read a short passage of scripture slowly, out loud if possible. Ask: “What word or phrase is drawing my attention?” Sit with it gently. Allow God’s word to speak to your desire, fear, or hope today.

A - ALIGN

Pausing throughout the day and setting aside time to regularly reflect on God’s word helps to align our hearts with God’s heart. To align means “to be in or come into precise adjustment or correct relative position.” Alignment happens as the inner life bends towards God’s heart. As we listen, we discover where our desires move in harmony with God’s will and where they are dissonant. Alignment is a practice of trust, believing God’s will is good even when it is costly. It is in aligning ourselves to the Father’s heart that prayer becomes transformative. Jesus was a master at aligning his will to his Father. As Willard teaches, Jesus had a settled disposition to do God’s will, even to the point of death. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done” ([Luke 22:42](#)).

Spiritual Practice

Ask God: “Shape my desire toward your heart.” Name one place of tension between what you want and what Christ wants. Invite the Spirit to reshape that desire in love.

Y - YIELD

To yield is to relinquish one’s advantage, as Jesus did: “Though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself...becoming obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross” ([Philippians 2:6–8](#)). Yielding is the culmination of prayer because through it we entrust our whole life to God. It is not passive resignation but active participation in Christ’s obedience. We yield not from weakness but from confidence in God’s love, entering the way of Jesus — open-handed, humble, and free.

Spiritual Practice

Picture placing your concern, decision, or desires into God’s hands. Pray, “Not my will but yours be done.” Rest knowing God’s will is rooted in love.

Conclusion

As you grow in this posture of prayer, remember that God delights in being with you. We can learn something from what philosopher Alan Watts once wrote: “Stop measuring days by degree of productivity and start experiencing them by degree of presence.” In the context of our relationship with God, prayer is not measured in eloquence or productivity, but by presence — your presence with God, and God’s presence with you. The P-R-A-Y rhythm simply helps you notice and respond to the One who is already near. May these moments of pausing, reflecting, aligning, and yielding nurture a heart continually formed by Christ’s love, shaped by the Spirit’s leading, and strengthened for the everyday journey of faith.

A-C-T-S

This simple pattern — Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication — has been widely used in evangelical churches as a way of giving shape and balance to daily prayer. It helps us approach God with an open heart — praising him, confessing our shortcomings, expressing gratitude, and lifting our needs and the needs of others to him. You can pray through these movements in just a few minutes or linger with God as long as you need.

A - ADORATION

Begin your prayer by contemplating on how God's goodness has affected your life. There is evidence all around us of God's handiwork; you can't help but give God praise and honor for all that he is doing in the world and in your life.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. [Psalm 145:3 \(NIV\)](#)

C - CONFESSION

Invite the Holy Spirit to bring to mind any attitudes, actions, or patterns that aren't aligned with Jesus' way. Confession isn't about shame — it's a practice of honesty and healing. God welcomes our vulnerability and responds with mercy.

If we confess our sins, [Jesus] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [1 John 1:9 \(NIV\)](#)

Take a moment to release the burdens you've been carrying and rest in God's forgiveness.

T - THANKSGIVING

Recall all that God has done for you today, this week. Is there something you can be thankful for? You can start with thanking him for forgiveness of sins through Jesus. Then verbalize what else you are grateful for in your life and in the world around you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. [Psalm 136:1 \(NIV\)](#)

S - SUPPLICATION

Another word for supplication is petition. Scripture tells us that Jesus is our mediator (our go-between) and that anything we ask in the power of his name God will hear. Therefore, bring your requests to God, however big or small.

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. [James 5:16b NLT](#)

Conclusion

Praying through A-C-T-S provides a simple and meaningful structure that keeps our hearts centered on God while inviting us to bring our whole selves into conversation with Him. As we praise, confess, give thanks, and offer our requests, we learn to trust God more deeply and recognize his presence in every part of our lives. Over time, this rhythm forms us into people who live with humility, gratitude, and bold dependence on the Lord — cultivating a vibrant prayer life that draws us closer to his heart.

The Lord's Prayer: A Guided Practice

Prayer is about a relationship with God. When Jesus' disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray," he didn't give them a ritual. He gave them a pattern for connection, trust, worship, surrender, forgiveness, and protection.

This guide is a simple way to pray through each movement of the Lord's Prayer. It invites you to slow down, enter God's presence with honesty and hope, and allow the Spirit to shape you through prayer. Whether you are new to prayer or deepening a long-held practice, this can become a daily rhythm that forms your heart in the Way of Jesus.

Take your time. Breathe. Listen. Pray with expectation.

Lord, teach us to pray. [Luke 11:1 \(NIV\)](#)

Jesus gave his followers a model for prayer — not merely to recite, but to shape how we relate to God. This guide will help you move slowly through each movement of the Lord's Prayer, aligning your heart with Jesus' way of praying.

BE AMAZED

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. [Matthew 6:9 \(NKJV\)](#)

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. [1 John 3:1 \(NIV\)](#)

Jesus teaches us to begin prayer not with our needs but with a relationship — God as our loving Abba Father. We approach him with awe because the one who is holy and is set apart has drawn close to us in love. Wonder is the doorway into worship.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ When you pray, do you first picture God as powerful, or close and caring? Why?
- ◆ Which attribute of God do you need to remember most today?

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Praise God for his character — love, wisdom, strength, holiness.
- ◆ Thank God that he is not distant but near — a good father who cares for you.

Spiritual Practice: Name God's Goodness

Speak or journal three names of God that remind you who he is for you today. For example: shepherd, healer, provider, redeemer.

BE SURRENDERED

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

[Matthew 6:10 \(NKJV\)](#)

Not my will, but yours be done.

[Luke 22:42 \(NLT\)](#)

Surrender is not passive resignation — it is active trust in God’s reign and purposes. We let go of the illusion that we are in control and invite God’s kingdom to shape our desires, decisions, and direction. As Jesus surrendered in the garden, we learn to yield our lives into the Father’s loving hands.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Where are you struggling to trust God’s will right now?
- ◆ What would surrender look like in your relationships? Your schedule? Your plans?

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Ask God to align your desires to his purposes.
- ◆ Pray for God’s kingdom to transform you, your family, your church, and your city.
- ◆ Release areas of control, fear, or anxiety into God’s care.

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Pray with your hands turned upward, slowly praying: God, your kingdom come. Your will be done — in me.

BE PRESENT

Give us this day our daily bread. [Matthew 6:11 \(NKJV\)](#)

Don’t worry about tomorrow... Each day has enough trouble of its own.

[Matthew 6:34 \(NIV\)](#)

God invites us into the sacredness of today. Daily bread reminds us we are dependent, not self-sufficient. Jesus meets us with the grace we need right now — strength for today, hope for today, provision for today.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ What do you need most from God today — strength, peace, clarity, comfort?
- ◆ Who else needs God’s provision right now?

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Ask God to nourish you in his presence — spiritual bread for your soul.
- ◆ Present your needs and the needs of others one by one.
- ◆ Thank God for his care in ordinary things.

Spiritual Practice: Breath Prayer

As you inhale, say: *You are my provider.*

As you exhale, say: *Give me what I need today.*

BE CLEANSED

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. [Matthew 6:12 \(NKJV\)](#)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [1 John 1:9 \(ESV\)](#)

Confession is not about shame — it is about coming home. God removes what separates us from His love and restores the joy of our relationship with Him. As we receive God’s forgiveness, he frees our hearts to extend forgiveness to others, breaking cycles of hurt and setting us on a path of healing.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ What burdens or regrets are you carrying that God wants to release today?
- ◆ Who might God be inviting you to forgive so you can live freely again?

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Confess specific attitudes, actions, or words that have wounded yourself or others.
- ◆ Thank God for completely cleansing and restoring you.
- ◆ Pray for strength to offer grace to those who have wronged you.

Spiritual Practice: Release and Receive

Hold your hands closed as you silently name what you need to confess. Then open your hands as a sign of releasing guilt and receiving God’s mercy.

BE DELIVERED

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. [Matthew 6:13 \(NKJV\)](#)

The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.
[2 Thessalonians 3:3 \(NLT\)](#)

Jesus leads us toward freedom. Temptation is real, but so is God’s power to guide and guard us. We pray with confidence, knowing that Christ has overcome and that the Spirit strengthens us to resist anything that draws us away from God’s life and love.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Where are you most vulnerable right now?
- ◆ How can you stay close to Jesus when temptations come?

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your steps away from harmful paths.
- ◆ Pray for protection over your mind, body, and relationships.
- ◆ Name any temptations and ask for God’s power to choose what is good.

Spiritual Practice: The Way of Escape

Take a slow walk. With each step pray: Lead me, Jesus. Notice how he directs your attention toward peace.

DOXOLOGY

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

[Matthew 6:13 \(NKJV\)](#)

To the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. [1 Timothy 1:17 \(NIV\)](#)

We end where we began: with worship. Praise anchors our prayers in who God is and reminds us that all power, all goodness, and all victory belong to him. In doxology, we declare our trust in God’s story — a kingdom without end.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ How does this ending in praise change how you feel after praying?
- ◆ What truth about God do you want to carry with you today?

Prayer Prompts

- ◆ Thank God for hearing and responding to your prayers.
- ◆ Declare God’s greatness over every part of your life.

Spiritual Practice: Spoken Praise

Speak one sentence of praise aloud. Let your voice join the worship in heaven. All glory to you, God!

Conclusion

The Lord's Prayer is more than a prayer to memorize — it is a way of life. Each movement draws us deeper into God's presence, aligns us with his kingdom, frees us from what hinders us, and reminds us of his power and glory.

Use this guide often: daily, weekly, or whenever you need to recenter your soul. Over time, these words become part of you — forming trust, gratitude, courage, humility, and love.

Praying Scripture

While many tend to think of prayer and bible reading as separate spiritual practices, they can be even more powerful when combined into one practice of praying scripture. Praying through the scriptures allows you to use the words and emotions of the bible to gain more confidence in your own prayers.

It is a great tool we can use to help us pray with understanding and focus. When we pray scripture, we focus on God's will instead of our own, we begin to understand the verses we're praying in a deeper way, and, because the bible is the word of God, we learn more about him as we pray in this way.

What do we mean when we say "pray scripture"? It is simply ordering a time of prayer around a particular text in the bible. This can mean either praying the prayers of the bible word-for-word as your own prayers, or personalizing portions of the scriptures in prayer to your own needs or situation.

PRACTICING PRAYING SCRIPTURE

- ◆ **Say the scripture out loud.** Don't just read it; pray it from your heart, agreeing with what you're saying.
- ◆ **Paraphrase the scripture.** Meditate on the passage until you understand it well enough to put it in your own words. No one else needs to hear or read your paraphrase but this is a great way to share with God your understanding of his word. Speak it through or write it down as you begin to understand it deeper.
- ◆ **Make it personal.** Put "I" and "me" or the name of someone you love into the text. For example, in [Psalm 91](#), instead of "He who takes refuge in the shelter of the Most High will be safe in the shadow of the Almighty," you could say, "When I take refuge in the shelter of the Most High, I will be safe in the shadow of the Almighty." Or in verse 4, instead of "like a bird protecting its young, God will cover you with his feathers, will protect you under his great wings," you could say, "like a bird protecting its young, God will cover my child with his feathers, he will protect [your child's name] under his wings."

Try praying scripture with these passages: [Psalm 23](#), [Psalm 46](#), [Psalm 51](#), and [Psalm 91](#). Also try [Isaiah 40:28-41](#), [Romans 12](#) or [Philippians 4](#).

Conclusion

Praying scripture invites us to engage both heart and mind as we speak God's word back to him. It shapes our desires to align with his, draws us closer to his character, and gives language to our praises, confessions, and hopes. As we learn to pray the truths of scripture — whether spoken aloud, paraphrased, or personalized — we discover a powerful rhythm of formation that strengthens faith, deepens trust, and reminds us that God's promises are for us today.

Prayer Walk

Prayer does not have to happen sitting still. If quiet, stationary prayer feels difficult or distracting, a prayer walk can be a meaningful alternative. A prayer walk invites you to talk with God while you are on the move, engaging both your body and your attention. As you walk, you become more aware of God's presence in the places and people around you — and you allow what you see to shape what you pray.

WHAT IS A PRAYER WALK?

A prayer walk is simply praying while walking. It is often a form of praying for others — lifting before God the needs of people and places you encounter, even when you don't know their stories. God does.

Choose a location such as your neighborhood, a school campus, a park, or around the church building. Walk slowly and attentively. As you pass homes, people, classrooms, or streets, let each sight prompt a prayer. Pray for friends, family, teachers, leaders, neighbors, and even strangers. Don't rush. Let the rhythm of your steps guide the pace of your prayers.

Below are some prayer prompts to get you started.

PRAYER PROMPTS

For Neighborhood Households

- ♦ *God, heal every illness, calm every fear, soothe every heartache, and meet every need.*
- ♦ *God, may grace, mercy, and peace rest on this household.*
- ♦ *God, fill their minds with wisdom, fill their hearts with joy, fill their homes with peace, fill their hands with strength, and fill their pockets with blessing.*
- ♦ *God, draw them towards Christ.*

For Our City

- ◆ *God, open my eyes to see the needs of the communities that our church is a part of.*
- ◆ *God, help our church to do our part to participate in the flourishing and renewing of our cities.*
- ◆ *God, may we radiate the love of Christ as we meet the physical, material and spiritual needs of our communities.*

For Revival, Restoration, and Reconciliation

- ◆ *God, reawaken your Church to its mission to spread the Good News of Jesus through every sphere - in our hearts, in our homes, in our church, and in our cities.*
- ◆ *God, bring repentance and widespread renewal to the Church, in our homes, our city, our country.*
- ◆ *God, draw the lost, the last, and the least to faith in Jesus Christ.*

Conclusion

A prayer walk reminds us that prayer is not confined to a quiet room — it can accompany us into the ordinary places of our lives. As you walk and pray, trust that God is already present and at work. Your prayers become an act of attention, love, and partnership with God’s ongoing work in the world.

Everyday Prayer: Praying for and with Others

Prayer is one of the primary ways God forms our hearts in love for others. In this section, we explore how everyday intercessory prayer shapes us as people who attend to God's presence in everyday life — praying for others in quiet faithfulness and, at times, praying with them out loud, through spoken prayer. These practices help foster attentiveness, courage, and trust, as prayer becomes not only something we do, but a way we participate in God's ongoing work in and through us.

While prayer often begins quietly within us, learning to speak our prayers aloud can deepen our awareness of God's presence and create meaningful moments of connection with others.

Praying Out Loud

If you've mostly prayed silently, speaking your prayers aloud can bring a new sense of connection and energy to your prayer life. When we pray out loud, the same parts of the brain we use in everyday conversation are engaged — and it can feel more like a real, living dialogue with our heavenly Father. Speaking aloud makes the moment more relational and memorable, like sharing your heart with someone who loves you.

Scripture shows that God's people have always prayed aloud. The Psalms are spoken prayers ([Psalm 142:1](#)). Jesus prayed out loud to the Father. The early church raised their voices together in prayer ([Acts 4:24–31](#)). When our words take shape in sound, we may feel God's presence more tangibly.

Sound waves have physical properties. Our spoken prayers take up space in the world God created. Speaking aloud can help us feel grounded — our faith has a voice, not just a thought. And imagine the unity created when families, friends, and churches lift their voices together — faith made audible, reminding us we belong to one another and to God.

Praying aloud often stretches us beyond our comfort zone. For many of us — especially depending on how we grew up or the traditions we come from — vulnerability feels risky. It's not easy to speak to someone we cannot see. But as

you speak to God aloud, you may find that God feels more real. Your identity as God's beloved child becomes something not only known but trusted. Your spoken prayers can become a gift to God — and a cherished memory for you.

PRACTICING PRAYING OUT LOUD

- ◆ **Make it conversational.** Speak to God the way you talk to a friend. You don't need overly spiritual language — authenticity matters more than eloquence.
- ◆ **Listen to what you are saying.** Relax into God's loving presence. Notice what you are saying. Are you only focusing on yourself? Are you lifting others? Praising God for who God is?
- ◆ **Keep it simple.** Short, sincere prayers can be deeply powerful ([Matthew 6:7–8](#)). Let your heart lead. God loves honesty more than polish.

Spiritual Practice

Try one of these this week:

- ◆ Speak aloud one simple prayer each morning: *God, thank you for being with me today.*
- ◆ Choose a moment in your commute or walk to whisper a sentence prayer of gratitude.
- ◆ Ask a trusted friend or family member to pray aloud with you for 30 seconds--each one taking one turn.

Sample Scriptures to Pray Out Loud

- ◆ *God, I lift up my voice to you for mercy.* [Psalm 142:1](#)
- ◆ *God, thank you for being near to [name of person]. Please give them your peace and calm what feels heavy today.* [Philippians 4:6-7](#)
- ◆ *Father, thank you for hearing me.* [John 11:41-42](#)
- ◆ *God, give [name of person] wisdom for what they're facing. Help them know the next right step and trust you.* [James 1:5](#)
- ◆ *Out of the overflow of my heart let my mouth speak.* [Luke 6:45](#)
- ◆ *God, please strengthen [name of person] where they feel tired or overwhelmed. Renew their hope and carry them today.* [Isaiah 40:29-31](#)

Whether spoken or silent, prayer for others is rooted in love, attentiveness, and trust in God's care — offering simple ways to hold people before God in every season of life.

How to Pray for and with Others

Praying for others is one of the most loving ways we join God's work in the world. Scripture urges us to lift people before God with compassion and hope: "*I urge you...that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people*" ([1 Timothy 2:1](#)). When we intercede, we are not trying to fix people — we are participating in what the Holy Spirit is already doing — healing, guiding, comforting, transforming, and drawing hearts toward God.

Paul models this kind of prayer beautifully when he asks God that believers' "*love may abound more and more...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ*" ([Philippians 1:9-11](#)). Our prayers carry similar desires — for God's presence, wisdom, healing, renewal, and spiritual growth to take root in those we love.

Sometimes the deepest longing of our prayers is that someone we love would come to know Jesus personally. Scripture reminds us that salvation is ultimately God's work — "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them*" ([John 6:44](#)) — yet God invites us to pray boldly and faithfully for those who have not yet responded to his grace. We do not pray to pressure anyone; we pray because we entrust them to the God who pursues, saves, and loves them even more than we do.

This is why intercession is both powerful and necessary: "*Pray in the spirit at all times...for all believers everywhere*" ([Ephesians 6:18](#)) and "*pray for each other...the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective*" ([James 5:16](#)). When we pray, we hold people in God's presence and trust him to do what only he can do.

Often, praying for others begins quietly. We notice someone's stress, pain, or joy and whisper a prayer in our hearts. That kind of prayer matters. God hears it. But sometimes, God invites us to take a small step further — to pray **with** someone, out loud, right in the middle of everyday life: at home, at work, during a walk, or over casual conversations.

Many people feel shy about praying out loud for someone on the spot. That's perfectly normal. Vulnerability takes courage, and most of us were never taught how to do this simply and naturally. But boldness grows as our faith grows. In fact, scripture reminds us that, "*God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline*" ([2 Timothy 1:7](#)). Praying out loud with and for others doesn't require special language or long prayers. It simply requires willingness — to love someone enough to invite God into the moment.

As you engage in everyday activities and in casual conversation, you may feel the nudge of the Holy Spirit to pray with someone. Listen to that nudge and

simply ask the person you're speaking with, "Would you mind if I prayed for you right now?" Many people experience this is a meaningful gift — to be seen, supported, and entrusted to God in real time. Even short prayers — just one or two sentences — can be profoundly life-giving ([Matthew 6:7-8](#)).

Praying for others — especially out loud is something you can grow into over time. Celebrate the small steps. Silent prayers count. Simple words matter. Every prayer spoken in faith, whether whispered or out loud, is received with thanksgiving and love.

Here are some suggestions for praying with others on the spot — in 20 seconds.

- ◆ **Ask permission:** Would it be okay if I prayed for you right now?
- ◆ **Keep it simple:** Use one or two sentences. You don't need fancy words. (See the Prayer Prompts to Try below.)
- ◆ **Name what you heard:** God, you know what [name of person] is facing..."
- ◆ **Invite God's care:** Ask for peace, help, wisdom, healing, strength, etc.
- ◆ **End gently:** Amen.
- ◆ **No pressure. No performance**

PRAYER PROMPTS TO TRY

For Someone to Receive Christ

- ◆ *Lord, open [name of person] heart to your love and truth. Help them to see Jesus clearly and draw them toward new life in him.*
- ◆ *Remove any barriers — fear, confusion, past hurt — that keep them from trusting you fully.*
- ◆ *Let your kindness lead them toward repentance and, and give them the courage to take a step of faith.*
- ◆ *Surround [name of person] with people who love you and love them, and can speak your hope and grace into their life.*

For God's Presence and Peace

- ◆ *Lord, let your peace guard [name of person]'s heart and mind today. Surround them with your presence in every place they go.*
- ◆ *Draw near to them in whatever they are facing. Let them sense your love in a tangible way.*
- ◆ *Calm every anxious thought and let them rest in your steady, faithful care.*
- ◆ *When they feel alone or overwhelmed, remind them that you are Emmanuel — God with them.*

For Guidance and Wisdom

- ◆ *God, give [name of person] clarity for the decisions before them. Light their path and give them courage to follow your leading.*
- ◆ *Guide their thoughts, calm their anxiety, and help them discern what is good, wise, and life-giving.*
- ◆ *Open the right doors and close the ones that would lead them away from your best.*
- ◆ *Help them hear your voice above the noise of life and trust the direction you provide.*

For Strength and Healing

- ◆ *Strengthen [name of person] where they feel tired or overwhelmed. Renew their hope and restore their joy.*
- ◆ *For any wounded or anxious places — bring your healing. Touch their body, mind, and spirit.*
- ◆ *Give them resilience for today and rest for what feels heavy on their heart.*
- ◆ *Where there is brokenness, bring wholeness; where there is pain, bring comfort; where there is fear, bring courage.*

For Blessing

- ◆ *Jesus, bless [name of person] with your kindness today. Open doors, provide what they need, and protect their steps.*
- ◆ *May your favor rest on them and their household. Let them experience your goodness in unexpected ways.*
- ◆ *Surprise them with moments of joy that remind them of your love.*
- ◆ *Let their work be fruitful, their relationships strengthened, and their day filled with small mercies.*

For Spiritual Growth

- ◆ *Lord, deepen [name of person]'s love for you. Form Christlike character in them and draw them into your purposes.*
- ◆ *Increase their faith. Let them notice you at work in both the small and the significant parts of their day.*
- ◆ *Grow in them a hunger for your word and a desire to live in step with your Spirit.*
- ◆ *Shape their heart to reflect your humility, generosity, truth, and grace.*

For Surrender and Trust

- ◆ *God, hold what [name of person] cannot hold. Carry what feels too heavy. Help them trust in your steady, faithful care.*
- ◆ *Teach them to rest in your love even when life feels uncertain.*
- ◆ *Release their fears and teach them to anchor their confidence in your promises.*
- ◆ *Help them let go of striving and lean into your peace that surpasses understanding.*

Conclusion

Praying for and with others invites us to live with open hearts and attentive spirits, ready to respond to God's promptings in everyday moments. As we grow in these practices — sometimes quietly, sometimes out loud — prayer becomes less about performance and more about presence. Over time, we discover that even the simplest prayers can become powerful expressions of love, creating space for God's grace to meet people right where they are.

Formational Prayer Practices

For many believers, prayer begins with words — requests, praises, confessions, and thanksgiving. But as our relationship with God matures, prayer expands. We discover that God not only listens to our words but also meets us in silence, desire, memory, and breath. Throughout the history of the church, Christians have cultivated ways that slow us down, soften our hearts, and open us more fully to God’s presence and shaping work within us.

This section introduces several time-tested approaches — drawn from scripture, rooted in Christian tradition, and widely practiced across generations of faithful disciples. These practices are invitations — to listen rather than to strive, to notice rather than to rush, to rest rather than to perform. They help us become more aware of God in all things and more responsive to the transforming grace of his Spirit.

If you are curious about deepening your prayer life, take your time with each practice. Experiment. Be gentle with yourself. Pay attention to what stirs in you and trust that God desires to meet you here — in stillness, in silence, and in the very center of who you are.

Lectio Divina: Prayer that Attunes Us to Scripture

Lectio Divina, meaning “divine reading” or “sacred reading,” is an ancient Benedictine monastic practice of praying the Holy Scripture. It comprises four movements: **reading** (lectio), **reflection** (meditatio), **prayer** (oratio), and **rest** (contemplatio). This practice involves slowly reading a short passage of scripture (three to four verses) several times and focusing on a phrase or word that resonates with you. You will then reflect on its meaning, respond to God in prayer, and then rest in God’s presence. The primary goal is to connect with God through the slow sacred reading of scripture in a more personal and intimate way, moving from acquaintance to friendship to communion.

PRACTICING LECTIO DIVINA

- ♦ Find a quiet comfortable space away from distractions and interruptions.
- ♦ Choose a short passage of three to four verses. Here are suggestions that align with the four spheres of prayer we are focusing on:
 - ♦ For your heart: [Psalm 24:3-7](#)

- ♦ For your home: [Colossians 3:12-15](#)
- ♦ For our church: [Acts 2:42-45](#)
- ♦ For our city: [Isaiah 58:9-12](#)
- ♦ Don't rush. Enjoy the time spent in God's word.
- ♦ Invite God's presence in the room with you.
- ♦ Engage in the following four movements
 - ♦ **Lectio (*reading*)**: Read the passage aloud slowly twice or three times. Hear the words and let them sink in.
 - ♦ **Meditatio (*reflection*)**: What phrase or word stood out to you? Meditate on it for a few minutes and notice what stirs in you. A thought? A feeling? Consider journaling.
 - ♦ **Oratio (*prayer*)**: Talk to God about what you're experiencing or whatever thoughts might arise. You might be drawn to simply praise him, or to ask him for something.
 - ♦ **Contemplatio (*rest*)**: Rest in God's presence. Be still and listen to what God might be saying, dropping in your heart. End with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Conclusion

Lectio Divina helps us slow down and listen to God's voice, allowing scripture to move from information to transformation. By creating sacred space in our minds and hearts, we become more attentive to the Spirit's gentle invitations and more receptive to God's love. This ancient rhythm reminds us that God is always speaking, guiding, and forming us through his word, and that lingering in his presence can cultivate deeper intimacy, trust, and joy in our journey of faith.

Prayers that Ground Us in God's Presence

In the midst of our hurried and often fragmented lives, prayer becomes an anchor — drawing our attention back to God who is always near. Some prayer practices help settle our bodies, quiet our minds, and open our hearts so we can dwell in God's love. The following two practices invite us into the simplicity of God's presence through breath and stillness.

BREATH PRAYER

Breath prayer is an excellent practice of praying without ceasing as the Apostle Paul admonished believers to do. It has the potential to become as natural as breathing. Breath prayer is intended to be a very short prayer of praise or petition, just six to eight syllables. The words of prayer can be easily adjusted to your heart's desire. Many contemporary spiritual formation writers, for example Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, describe breath prayer as a way of joining the ancient

“Jesus Prayer” tradition of everyday life.

Praise is expressed by calling on one of the names of God such as Jesus, Lord, Father, Christ, or Spirit or you may prefer another name of adoration. Your request consists of the words following the chosen name.

The breath prayer is usually said silently, but it’s your prayer; use it your way.

You may also use the breath prayer for a focused time during a daily spiritual practice. Simply repeat the prayer over and over keeping your attention on the prayer. If your attention wanders, gently return to the prayer.

Begin with five minutes and gradually increase the time to fifteen to twenty minutes as you become disciplined with the prayer practice. You may want to use a timer to free yourself from watching the clock. Some find it useful to write in a journal of their experience with this practice.

Practicing Breath Prayer

- ◆ Close your eyes and recall the verse, “*Be still and know that I am God*” ([Psalm 46:10 NIV](#)). Be still, calm, peaceful, and open to the presence of God.
- ◆ With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Imagine that God is asking, “*[Your name], what can I do for you?*” Like the blind man on the road to Jericho, Jesus kindly looks at you in the eyes and asks, “*What do you want from me?*”
- ◆ Give God a simple and direct answer that comes honestly from your heart. Write down the answer. If you have more than one answer, write them down. Your answer may be one word such as peace or love or help. It may be several words or a phrase such as “*feel your presence,*” or “*lead me into life.*” Whatever your answers, they are the foundation of your breath prayer.
- ◆ Select the name that you are most comfortable using to speak with God. Combine it with your written answer to the question God asked you. This is your breath prayer.
- ◆ Breathe in the first phrase/word (generally your invocation of God’s name) and breath out the second phrase/word (request or need).

You may need to compose several prayers before you find one that truly arises from your needs. So look carefully at your prayer. Does it reflect the heart of your needs?

There’s no limit really to developing your breath prayer. It may be the same from day to day or it may change.

Sometimes you may want to reverse the practice a bit by sitting in silence and letting the Spirit pray through you. Ask for God to reveal your name, and God’s

desire for you. This can be a profound experience. You may wind up hearing something like, “Beloved, you are enough,” or “My child, rest.” Wait on God and see how you may be renewed.

Sample Breath Prayers

- ◆ *Jesus, let me feel your love.*
- ◆ *Oh Lord, show me your way.*
- ◆ *Jesus, have mercy.*
- ◆ *Father, let me feel your presence.*

Conclusion

Breath prayer is a simple yet profound way of remaining rooted in God’s presence throughout the ordinary moments of life. As you allow prayer to follow the gentle rhythm of your breathing, you are continually reminded that God is nearer than your next breath — sustaining, comforting, and forming you in love. Whether whispered in moments of quiet or held silently in your heart throughout the day, this prayer draws you back to the One who hears, knows, and delights to meet you with grace. May each inhale and exhale become a reminder that you live and move in the presence of God ([Acts 17:28 NIV](#)).

The Spirit of God created me, and the breath of the Almighty gave me life.

[Job 33:4 \(NCV\)](#)

CENTERING PRAYER

Centering prayer is a method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, prayer in which we experience God’s imminent presence with us. Centering prayer is grounded in relationship with God, through Christ, and is a practice to nurture that relationship.

Centering prayer complements and supports other modes of prayer — verbal, mental, or affective prayer, and facilitates resting in God’s presence. Centering prayer offers a way to grow in intimacy with God, moving beyond conversation to communion.

As Thomas Keating emphasizes, the source of centering prayer, as in all methods leading to contemplative prayer, is the Indwelling Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The focus of centering prayer is the deepening of our relationship with the living Christ.

Practicing Centering Prayer

- ◆ Sit in an upright, attentive posture in a way that allows for a straight spine and open heart. Place your hands on your lap.

- ◆ Gently close your eyes and bring to mind your sacred word — perhaps one that you came up with in the previous exercise on Breath Prayer. Or maybe an image as your symbol to consent to the presence and action of God within you. Your sacred word or image is intended to be the same one every time you engage in centering prayer. It will help ground you in the present moment, allowing you to give your undivided, loving, and yielded attention to God. Choose a name for God or a characteristic of God, like love, peace, etc.
- ◆ Silently, with eyes closed, recall your sacred word. As you notice intrusions, distractions, or interruptions entering your thoughts, gently return to your sacred word. Do this however many times you notice these pulling you away from the present.
- ◆ When your centering prayer session is over, transition slowly from your prayer practice to your active life.

Conclusion

Centering prayer reminds us that God's presence is not something we must earn or chase — it is a gift already given. By quietly consenting to the love of God within us, we learn to rest rather than strive, to abide rather than achieve. Over time, as you increase the length of your practice from a few minutes a day to several minutes throughout the day, centering prayer will gently reshape your inner life, cultivating a deep trust that God is at work even in silence. As you continue to return to your sacred word and open your heart in stillness, may you discover that the God who dwells within you is always inviting you into communion, peace, and renewal.

The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. [2 Corinthians 13:14 \(MSG\)](#)

Prayers that Deepen Stillness and Awareness

Stillness is not the absence of noise but the presence of God. The following prayer practices — Contemplative Prayer and Welcoming Prayer — help us slow down internally so we can notice how God is moving within us and around us. When we become more aware — of our emotions, our longings, and the subtle whispers of the Spirit — we learn to respond to life from a place of peace rather than pressure. The prayers in this section stretch us into a deeper attentiveness to God’s nearness, inviting us to experience communion with God not just in quiet spaces, but in the very center of ordinary moments.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Contemplative prayer is a grace-filled movement from speaking to simply being with God. It is not concerned with words, thoughts, or requests but with loving attention. In contemplative prayer, we allow ourselves to be held by God — fully present, fully loved.

Rooted in a long Christian tradition, contemplative prayer emphasizes a mutual, relational stillness in which God reveals himself intimately to our hearts. Rather than focusing on what we do for God, contemplative prayer is about what God does within us.

Contemplative prayer incorporates degrees of solitude, silence, and stillness. As you grow in your relationship with God and in your prayer practices, we encourage you to practice contemplative prayer in solitude, silence, and stillness.

Practicing Contemplative Prayer

- ◆ Prepare a quiet space. Sit comfortably, grounded, with a relaxed but attentive posture.
- ◆ Gently settle into silence. Let go of the need to think about God and simply be present to God.
- ◆ Turn your inner attention toward love. No striving or clinging — just a steady awareness that God loves you.
- ◆ When distraction arises (they will!), acknowledge them without judgment and return to this loving awareness.
- ◆ Prepare to pray Psalm 46:10 in five consecutive diminishing sentences.
 - ◆ Pray: Be still and know that I am God.
 - ◆ Pause and take a couple of breaths.
 - ◆ Pray: Be still and know that I am.
 - ◆ Pause and take a couple of breaths.
 - ◆ Pray: Be still and know.

- ◆ Pause and take a couple of breaths.
- ◆ Pray: Be still.
- ◆ Pause and take a couple of breaths.
- ◆ Pray: Be.
- ◆ Remain silent for ten to twenty minutes. End your practice with gratitude, slowly reengaging your surroundings.

Conclusion

Contemplative prayer invites us into the quiet center of God’s love, where words fall away and grace does its deepest work. As we simply rest in God’s presence, we discover that we are fully known, fully seen, and fully loved — without needing to earn or prove anything. Over time, this practice nurtures a gentler way of being in the world: grounded, attentive, and shaped in love. In the silence of contemplative prayer, God forms in us a deeper capacity to notice beauty, extend compassion, and live from a heart rooted in divine space.

WELCOMING PRAYER

Welcoming Prayer invites us to encounter God right in the midst of everyday real life -- especially where stress, discomfort, or strong emotions surface. Instead of resisting or suppressing what we feel, we pause and welcome God into it. This practice offers us the opportunity to freely choose to respond instead of react to the present moment.

Welcoming Prayer reminds us that God is present not only in the still moments of prayer but also amid tension, fear, frustration, and longing.

Practicing Welcoming Prayer

When you notice a difficult feeling, physical tension, or anxious thought:

- ◆ Focus, feel, and sink into the feelings, emotions, thoughts, and sensations in your body.
- ◆ Welcome God into those feelings, emotions, thoughts, and sensations in your body by saying “Welcome, Lord, into this part of me.”
- ◆ Let go by praying the following sentences, or something similar.
 - ◆ *“I let go of the desire for security, affection, and control.”*
 - ◆ *“I let go of the desire to change this feeling.”*
 - ◆ *“I open myself to your will.”*
- ◆ Release the demand that the situation must change for you to be okay.
- ◆ You may repeat this flow until the intensity softens or when your heart feels at rest.

Conclusion

Welcoming Prayer teaches us to embrace the present moment with open arms, trusting that God is with us in every experience — not just the pleasant or peaceful ones. As we welcome God into the places where we feel fear, discomfort, or resistance, we are liberated from the need to control outcomes or protect ourselves from vulnerability. This practice forms resilience and inner freedom, reminding us that transformation often begins right where we are. By inviting God into our honest emotions, we discover that nothing in our lives is beyond the reach of grace.

Contemplative and Welcoming Prayer Recap

As you grow in contemplative and welcoming prayer, may you discover that God meets you not only in silence but also in struggle. These practices foster a spacious heart — one that can welcome God’s love in joy and sorrow, clarity and confusion. Over time, they reshape the soul with gentleness, teaching us to trust God’s presence in every breath, every emotion, and every circumstance. Stillness becomes not an escape from life but a way of dwelling more fully with God in the midst of it all.

Examen: Prayer that Examines and Integrates Life with God

Examen is a prayerful practice of reflection that helps us become more aware of God’s presence in our everyday lives. Rooted in Ignatian spirituality, developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, this practice invites you to pause, gently review your day, and notice where God has been at work — through joy, struggle, silence, or surprise.

Rather than judging yourself harshly, come with gratitude, honesty, and openness before God. Over time, this rhythm trains you to discern how the Holy Spirit forms Christ’s character in you and leads you toward deeper love, peace, and faithfulness.

PRACTICING EXAMEN

The practice involves five moments, an adaptation of which is offered below.

- ◆ **Express Gratitude:** Recall moments — even small ones — when you sensed grace, goodness, beauty, or connection. Thank God for the gifts that came through people, tasks, rest, surprise, or delight.
- ◆ **Invite the Spirit’s Awareness:** Pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate your reflections. Ask for clarity and gentleness without self-condemnation. You are looking with God’s loving eyes.
- ◆ **Reflect on Your Day:** Review the events of your day or week. Notice your

reactions, desires, emotions, thoughts, and choices. Where did you feel most fully alive, at peace, and near to God? Where did you feel anxious, disconnected, resistant, or closed off? These experiences are often called consolation (movements toward God) and desolation (movements away from God). Even when God feels far, God is still near — notice and name those feelings in prayer.

- ♦ **Confess and Release:** Were there moments in your day or week when you neglected to love or be loved, resisted God's leading, or acted from fear or pride? Receive God's mercy, which meets us even in our shortcomings.
- ♦ **Renew Your Commitment:** Pray for the grace you need for tomorrow — new eyes to see God's presence and new courage to participate in what God is doing. Entrust yourself to God with hope.

Conclusion

The more regularly this practice shapes your day, the more you begin to notice God not only when reflecting back -- but as you live forward. Examen helps you stay awake to grace in ordinary moments, attentive to the Spirit's invitations, and confident that God is faithfully forming Christ within you. It becomes a way of life: grateful, discerning, and continually renewed in the love and presence of Jesus.

28 Days of Prayer and Fasting

Introduction

This *Pray First: Pray and Fast Devotional Guide* is an invitation to step deeper into the heart of God through prayer and the intentional spiritual practice of fasting. This resource is a shared all-church journey designed to bring unity and focus to our prayers as a church for 28 days.

Over four weeks, we will focus on four essential spheres of prayer: **our heart**, **our home**, **our church**, and **our city**. As we pray for God's grace to transform us from the inside out, we also join together as a community — learning to pray not only individually, but as a church family united in purpose.

Each week offers fasting suggestions, as well as an invitation to daily engage in scripture, to reflect, pray, rest, and do a spiritual practice. We offer these tools to help us grow in deeper dependence on God. Finally, the last day of the week offers an opportunity for Examen prayer, a reflective practice that helps us notice God's presence in our everyday lives.

Our hope is that by the end of our fasting and prayer journey, our hearts will be renewed, our homes strengthened, our church empowered, and our city blessed — because God hears and responds when his people pray ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#)).

A Brief Guide to Fasting

Fasting heightens our hunger for the Spirit and deepens our awareness of God's presence. We fast from food so we can feast on God; starve the flesh to feed our spirit; deny our flesh to awaken our spirit; and as we recognize our physical hunger, we are reminded of our need for spiritual hunger.

Throughout scripture, God's people fasted for wisdom, breakthrough, and renewal ([Matthew 6:16](#) – 18; [Acts 13:2–3](#)).

There are many meaningful ways to fast:

- ◆ **Food Fast:** Limit meals, choose simpler foods, or drink liquids only.
- ◆ **Daniel Fast:** Plant-based eating; avoiding meat, sweets, and processed foods.

- ◆ **Digital Fast:** Reducing screen time, social media scrolling, or mindless entertainment.
- ◆ **Lifestyle Fast:** Limiting excess, negativity, or unhealthy habits.

Choose a fast appropriate for your health and season of life. The length of your fast is also up to you. However, we recommend you select a length that would allow you to sufficiently feel a strong hunger for the thing you are fasting from to be reminded of your need for spiritual hunger. **Examples:** *fast a meal a week and spend that time in prayer, fast from a form of entertainment and use that extra time in prayer, etc...*

Above all, let fasting be a way of saying, “*Lord, I want you more. More than food, more than pleasures, more than anything I want you Jesus.*”

How to Use This Resource

We are going to begin our 28 days of prayer all together as a church on Monday, February 2nd. You may repeat this 28 days of prayer another time in the year as the Spirit leads you.

You can journey through this devotional individually, together with family, or as part of a growth group. Set aside 15–30 minutes each day. Create a quiet space, free from distraction. Ease into your time with God, quiet your mind and heart and expect him to speak to you. Slow down. Do not rush through the movements. Look forward to connecting with God.

Each day includes the following six movements:

- ◆ **Read:** Follow along with the daily readings. You can use whatever version of the bible you enjoy most. We have chosen various translations throughout this Devotional. Read slowly and attentively, expecting God to speak through his Word. Make note of the word or phrase that draws your attention.
- ◆ **Reflect:** Ask yourself, “*What might God be saying to me through the passage?*”
- ◆ **Pray:** Pray honestly, offering gratitude, questions, or desires to God. We have provided short prompts to help you create your own heartfelt prayers.
- ◆ **Rest:** Sit quietly in God’s presence, simply being with God.
- ◆ **Spiritual Practice:** Each day you are invited to reflect on and act upon how you might live out the passage for the day.
- ◆ **Closing Prayer:** To end your prayer time, we offer a written prayer you may pray aloud or you may choose to pray as the Spirit leads.

On the seventh day, we offer an Examen, which is a prayerful practice of reflection that helps us become more aware of God’s presence in our everyday

lives. Rooted in Ignatian spirituality, it invites us to pause, look back over our day or week, and notice where God has been at work — through joy, struggle, silence, or surprise.

Rather than judging ourselves, we practice gratitude, honesty, and openness before God. As we reflect, we learn to discern how the Spirit is leading us forward in hope, peace, joy, love, and faithfulness.

The practice involves six moments, an adaptation of which is offered below.

- ◆ **Express Gratitude:** Recall moments — even small ones — when you sensed grace, goodness, beauty, or connection. Thank God for the gifts that came through people, tasks, rest, surprise, or delight.
- ◆ **Invite the Spirit's Awareness:** Pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate your reflections. Ask for clarity and gentleness without self-condemnation. You are looking with God's loving eyes.
- ◆ **Reflect on Your Day:** Review the events of your day or week. Notice your reactions, desires, emotions, thoughts, and choices. Where did you feel most fully alive, at peace, and near to God? Where did you feel anxious, disconnected, resistant, or closed off? These experiences are often called consolation (movements toward God) and desolation (movements away from God). Remember that even when God feels far, God is still near — notice and name those feelings in prayer.
- ◆ **Confess and Release:** Were there moments in your day or week when you neglected love, resisted God's leading, or acted from fear or pride? Receive God's mercy, which meets us even in our shortcomings.
- ◆ **Renew Your Commitment:** Pray for the grace you need for tomorrow — new eyes to see God's presence and new courage to participate in what God is doing. Entrust yourself to God with hope.
- ◆ **Closing Prayer:** Close your time with God in however way the Spirit leads you — in praise and thanksgiving, in confession of sin or burden, or in praying for others.

As you go through your daily readings and weekly Examen, may you encounter Jesus in ways both familiar and unfamiliar, in the mundane or extraordinary. But most of all, in life-giving ways. May you be blessed through this fasting and praying journey.

DAY 7 | *Weekly Examen* — *Heart Reflection*

Today is an invitation for you to become more aware of God's presence in your everyday life. Take a moment to prayerfully read through any of the following passages that resonated with you this week: [Ezekiel 36:26-27 \(NIV\)](#), [Psalm 139:23-24 \(NLT\)](#), [Proverbs 4:23 \(NIV\)](#), [Psalm 51:10-12 \(NLT\)](#), [Colossians 3:1-2 \(NIV\)](#), and [Hebrews 13:9 \(NIV\)](#). Reflect on the passages using the following five movements. Pause for a few moments in between movements and listen for what the Holy Spirit may be saying. You may want to journal your sense of God's presence, any questions you might have of God, or thoughts you want to share with him. End your time with the suggested prayer, or pray as the Spirit leads you.

- ◆ **Express Gratitude:** Where did God renew or soften your heart?
- ◆ **Invite the Spirit's Awareness:** How did God speak or nudge you this week?
- ◆ **Reflect on Your Week:** When did your heart feel most alive?
- ◆ **Confess and Release:** Offer God any burdens from the week.
- ◆ **Renew Your Commitment:** What will you carry into tomorrow?
- ◆ **Closing Prayer:** Jesus, shape my heart to love like Yours.

A Word of Encouragement: God is already transforming you from the inside out. Trust His ongoing work.

WEEK 1 | *Recap*

Celebrate every way — big or subtle — that God has renewed your heart. As we move into Week 2, expect that God's work in you will overflow into the place closest to you: your home. God delights in the transformation that begins small and grows steadily. Continue leaning into his love.

DAY 12 | *Raise them In the Lord*

Parents and caregivers are spiritual influencers — shaping faith in everyday moments. God invites us to weave his love and truth into meals, car rides, bedtime prayers, and heartfelt conversations. Raising children in God’s way isn’t about perfection — it’s about presence. Today, ask God to help you model faith that is practiced in real life, generous with grace, and grounded in love.

Read:

And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

[Deuteronomy 6:6-9 \(NLT\)](#)

Reflection: What everyday moments can become spiritual moments in your home? How can you better model a lived-out faith for your children, younger siblings, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, or children you have influence over? What is one hope or prayer you have for each child God has placed in my life?

Pray: Ask God to help you teach and model his love in daily moments; to strengthen your patience, creativity, and presence; and draw their hearts toward him.

Rest: Rest in the truth that God loves each child he’s placed in your life even more than you do.

Spiritual Practice: Share a short scripture, prayer, or blessing with a child in your life today.

Closing Prayer: Lord, help me guide and love the children in my life with your wisdom, compassion, and joy. May they grow to know and trust you deeply. Amen.

DAY 14 | *Weekly Examen — Home Reflection*

Today is an invitation for you to become more aware of God's presence in your everyday life. Take a moment to prayerfully read through any of the following passages that resonated with you this week: [Psalm 127:1 \(CEB\)](#), [Colossians 3:14 \(NIV\)](#), [John 14:27 \(NIV\)](#), [Galatians 5:13-14 \(MEV\)](#), [Deuteronomy 6:6-9 \(NLT\)](#), and [Proverbs 18:21 \(NIV\)](#). Reflect on the passages using the following six movements. Pause for a few moments in between movements and listen for what the Holy Spirit may be saying. You may want to journal your sense of God's presence, any questions you might have of God, or thoughts you want to share with him. End your time with the suggested prayer, or pray as the Spirit leads you.

- ◆ **Express Gratitude:** What brought peace or joy to your home?
- ◆ **Invite the Spirit's Awareness:** How did God show up in ordinary moments this past week?
- ◆ **Reflect on Relationships:** Reflect back on the couple of days or this past week. When did love or unity deepen? When did thoughts, words, or actions cause harm or widen divisions?
- ◆ **Confess and Release:** Surrender tensions or hurts to God.
- ◆ **Renew Your Commitment:** How can you contribute to a healthier home this coming week?
- ◆ **Closing Prayer:** Lord, let our home be a sanctuary of your presence.

A Word of Encouragement: God is forming new rhythms of grace in your home. Keep going faithfully.

WEEK 2 | *Recap*

Small daily shifts create a powerful ripple of transformation. As you continue practicing love and peace, your home becomes a living testimony of God's presence. As we move into Week 3, we expand our circle of prayer to include our spiritual family — the Church.

DAY 21 | *Weekly Examen* — Church Reflection

Today is an invitation for you to become more aware of God's presence in your everyday life. Take a moment to prayerfully read through any of the following passages that resonated with you this week: [1 Corinthians 12:27 \(NLT\)](#), [Acts 2:42-47 \(NIV\)](#), [Acts 4:32 \(NIV\)](#), [Ephesians 3:16-18 \(CEV\)](#), [1 Peter 4:10-11 \(NLT\)](#), and [Matthew 5:14-16 \(ESV\)](#). Reflect on the passages using the following six movements. Pause for a few moments in between movements and listen for what the Holy Spirit may be saying. You may want to journal your sense of God's presence, any questions you might have of God, or thoughts you want to share with him. End your time with the suggested prayer, or pray as the Spirit leads you.

- ◆ **Express Gratitude:** Where did you see God working through our church this week?
- ◆ **Invite the Spirit's Awareness:** How is God shaping unity and mission within our church?
- ◆ **Reflect on Engagement:** Where did you feel most connected to our church this week?
- ◆ **Confess and Release:** Release any frustrations or divisions.
- ◆ **Renew Your Commitment:** What is one way you can strengthen community this week?
- ◆ **Closing Prayer:** Lord, build your church through us.

A Word of Encouragement: Your prayers bless our whole church family. God is using your faithfulness in meaningful ways.

WEEK 3 | *Recap*

Thank you for lifting our church in prayer this week. God is strengthening us and shaping us into a community that shines his love. As we step into Week 4, we turn our prayers outward — seeking God's heart for our neighborhoods and city.

DAY 28 | *Weekly Examen* — *City Reflection*

Today is an invitation for you to become more aware of God’s presence in your everyday life. Take a moment to prayerfully read through any of the following passages that resonated with you this week: [Jeremiah 29:7 \(HCSB\)](#), [Luke 19:9-10 \(NLT\)](#), [Micah 6:8 \(CEV\)](#), [Matthew 9:35-37 \(NET\)](#), and [Matthew 5:14-16 \(VOICE\)](#). Reflect on the passages using the following six movements. Pause for a few moments in between movements and listen for what the Holy Spirit may be saying. You may want to journal your sense of God’s presence, any questions you might have of God, or thoughts you want to share with him. End your time with the suggested prayer, or pray as the Spirit leads you.

- ◆ **Express Gratitude:** What in your city are you thankful for?
- ◆ **Invite the Spirit’s Awareness:** Where is God already at work around you?
- ◆ **Reflect on Compassion:** What stirred your heart this week — and why?
- ◆ **Confess and Release:** Release fear, apathy, or judgment to God.
- ◆ **Renew Your Commitment:** How can you join God’s work in your city this week?
- ◆ **Closing Prayer:** Lord, give me your heart for this city.

A Word of Encouragement: You are a light where God has placed you — and the city is better because you are here.

WEEK 4 | *Recap*

Thank you for praying for where we live, work, learn, and gather. God has heard every word. As we continue forward, ask God to use the transformation in your heart, home, and church to bring hope and blessing to the world around you.

A Final Word

We pray that this *Pray First Resource & Journal* and accompanying *28-Day Fast & Pray Devotional Guide* has enriched you and deepened your relationship with Jesus. Thank you for inviting God into your heart, your home, our church, and our city.

May prayer remain your first response and not your last resort. May Jesus be your source of peace and strength in every season. May the Spirit continue to form you into the likeness of Christ. And may the love of God flow through you: into your home, into our community, and into our world.

Whatever the circumstance you find yourself in, keep praying first. Keep trusting Jesus. Keep joining God's mission of renewal.

To him alone be the glory, praise, and honor, forever. Amen

Recommended Resources

Digital Resources

- ◆ Bible in One Year APP: bible.alpha.org/en/#start
- ◆ Lectio 365: lectio365.com
- ◆ Pray as You Go - Lectio Divina: prayasyougo.org
- ◆ EastLake Church - Prayer and Fasting: eastlake.church/prayer-and-fasting

Books

PRAYER

- ◆ [Lead with Prayer: The Spiritual Habits of World-Changing Leaders, by Ryan Scoog, Peter Greer, and Cameron Doolittle](#)
- ◆ [How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People, by Pete Greig](#)
- ◆ [Pray First: The Transformative Power of a Life Built on Prayer, by Chris Hodges](#)
- ◆ [Praying Like Monks, Living like Fools: An Invitation to to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer, by Tyler Staton](#)
- ◆ [Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life, by Tish Harrison Warren](#)

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND EXAMEN

- ◆ [The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life, by James Martin, SJ](#)
- ◆ [The Cloister Walk, by Kathleen Norris](#)

LECTIO DIVINA

- ◆ [Meeting God in Scripture: A Hands-On guide to Lectio Divina, by Jan Johnson](#)
- ◆ [Opening to God: Lectio Divina as Prayer, by David G. Benner](#)
- ◆ [Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina, by Michael Casey](#)

BREATH PRAYER

- ♦ [Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us, by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun](#)
- ♦ [Seeking God Together: A Guide to Group Spiritual Direction, by Alice Fryling](#)

CONTEMPLATIVE THEOLOGY

- ♦ [Contemplative Prayer, by Thomas Merton](#)
- ♦ [Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer, by Richard Rohr](#)

EXAMEN - IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

- ♦ [Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel, by Thomas Keating](#)

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- ♦ [Uncomplicate It: Permission to Enjoy God in Your Unique Way, by Hosanna Wong](#)
- ♦ [Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God, by Dallas Willard](#)
- ♦ [Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God, by Dallas Willard](#)
- ♦ [Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation, by Ruth Haley Barton](#)
- ♦ [Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us, by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun](#)
- ♦ [Celebration of the Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, by Richard Foster](#)
- ♦ [The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self, by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.](#)

