



The Prayer Practice

Practicing the Way

Overview

We never mature beyond any of the four stages of prayer we are exploring in this Practice, but the further we progress in prayer, the more we desire to speak to God, to listen to God, and to just be with God.

As a general rule, you can gauge the intimacy in a relationship by how comfortable you are being alone together in the silence. Early on, relationships are full of words and activity. As you grow closer over time, there are still words and activity, but you also come to deeply enjoy just being with each other.

In the later stages of prayer, all human metaphors fall short, but the most ancient metaphor for this stage is

marriage. There is a level of intimacy in marriage that is the intermingling of persons at the deepest level. It is wordless, yet it is a form of communication, and more, communion. Followers of Jesus have long considered this sacred love to be a picture of union with God.

This type of wordless prayer has come to be called “contemplation,” based on 2 Corinthians 3v18. Its most basic meaning is to contemplate: to look, to gaze upon the beauty of God, receiving his love pouring out toward you in Christ and by the Spirit, and then giving your love back in return.

In our final session’s exercises, we explore this way of being with God in love.

Practice

SESSION 04: BEING WITH GOD

The practice of prayer can transform us and our relationship with God. Consider how the Spirit is inviting you to engage in this practice through one, simple exercise.

01 Begin your daily prayer rhythm with silence and a breath prayer

The seventh century monk St. John Climacus gave this advice on contemplation: “Let the memory of Jesus combine with your breath.” Contemplatives have long used the God-ordained process of breathing to attune to the breath/spirit/*pneuma* of God within the “temple” of our body. God has designed deep, slow breathing to calm your body’s nervous system and center your mind. That makes breathing an especially helpful pathway to contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer is difficult because our mind is so distraction-prone, but the basic steps are simple.

- Find a quiet, distraction-free place to pray.
- Get seated comfortably, but where you can breathe properly and not slouch. We recommend either a dining chair with your feet on the floor and your back straight and shoulders upright, or sitting cross-legged directly on the floor, with a pillow or cushion under your backside to help with blood circulation. Not on a couch.
- Breathe slowly (five seconds on the inhale, then five on the exhale) from your belly. Relax. Become present to your body. And to the moment. Then, open your mind to God.
- You may just want to remain here, in loving attention to God. Remember: You’re not trying to pray words here. It’s your heart to God’s heart; this prayer is will to will, love to love.
- Or you may want to combine a prayer word to your breath. A prayer word is simply a word or phrase that you use to keep your attention fixed on God.

- Many use “Father” or “Abba” or “Jesus”
 - Others use a phrase from Scripture like “The Lord is my shepherd” (on the inhale), “I lack nothing” (on the exhale).
 - There’s no “right” prayer word. It’s just a tool to keep your wandering mind focused on God’s presence within you.
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- When distractions come, just gently set them aside the moment you realize your mind has wandered and come back to your breathing and prayer word. And they will come, way more than you think or want! That’s okay. It doesn’t mean you’re bad at contemplative prayer; it means you’re human.

Remain in God, receiving his love and giving yours back in turn. In the beginning, 1-2 minutes of this is a huge success, and 5-10 minutes is a home run.

Reach Practice

SESSION 04: BEING WITH GOD

We all learn differently. Some of us prefer reading, others listening, and others doing. If you'd like to go deeper, choose what resonates with you and give it a try! Even if you don't try a Reach Practice, remember to journal in the Prayer Reflection.

- 01 **Become aware** — Make yourself comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Become aware of your surroundings — the sounds, the temperature, etc. How does your body feel today? Heavy, light, sore, calm? Reconnecting with ourselves helps bring all of us to God in prayer.

- 02 **Sink into your heart** — Try and focus on where you feel the deepest within your body. It may be in your heart, your chest, or your belly. If you're not sure, try to imagine there is an elevator that descends down from your head, through your neck, past your collar bone and into your heart. Place those thoughts in the elevator and send them down into your heart. Don't deny them or try to get rid of them, just allow them to sink into your heart's center as you pray.

- 03 **Open yourself up to God** — While you're in that space, begin to open yourself up to God. If it's helpful, imagine that there are outward opening French doors within you, where your soul feels most present. As you picture them, imagine opening those doors to God and offering him every part of who you are. The good, the not good, the celebrated, and the vulnerable or ashamed. Imagine yourself having no part of you left hidden by choice from God. All is available to be seen.

- 04 **Look to God** — As you bring your whole self to him, look toward him. You might imagine Jesus' face, or you may simply look toward his loving presence. In John 15v9, Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." Allow yourself to see God gazing upon you with love, openness, compassion, and joy. Give him consent to reveal that love toward you personally. Imagine his gaze pouring through the doorway to your soul.

- 05 **Sit with God** — Without agenda, allow him to be however he longs to be with you. You may feel or see something beautiful. If not, this time is just as important. Let yourself just be open to God in whatever way today demands, allowing him to be with you. Notice how it feels to be fully seen by God and to be fully open toward him.

- 06 **Return your awareness** — As you finish your time together, take a moment to thank God for his love and for being present to you. Then, slowly come back into awareness of the sounds and sensations of the room around you.

Prayer Reflection

SESSION 04: BEING WITH GOD

As you come to the end of this Practice, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.