

4 Ways

A ONE HOUR PRAYER RETREAT

2 Pray

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STAMFORD
CHURCH OF CHRIST

SUNDAY,
FEBRUARY
26, 2023

11 AM EST
IN-PERSON/ ONLINE



SCHEDULE

Welcome/ Announcements
Overview
Prayer in Song
Jesus' Table of Prayer (Communion)
Practicing Prayer (+ Children's Church)
Prayer in Song

OVERVIEW

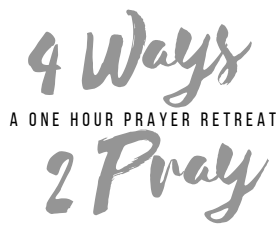
The life Jesus envisions in his Sermon on the Mount is a life that includes prayer (Matt. 6:5-15). In this text, Jesus envisions the God to whom we pray as one ...

- who is certain to meet us in our quiet moments of prayer (*"pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you"*),
- who doesn't have to be manipulated or persuaded to attend to our prayers (*"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him"*), and
- who welcomes in prayer everything from our ordinary needs for daily bread to our extraordinary desires for shalom and justice over all the earth (*"Pray, then, in this way ... May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread"*).

For this time of prayer practicing, we will use Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount as the launching point for a variety of experiences with prayer. In particular, you'll be invited to experience four types of prayer:

- 1) prayer that borrows someone else's words;
- 2) prayer that speaks your own words;
- 3) prayer that listens for God's words; and
- 4) prayer that savors God without words.

We'll devote about ten minutes to each of these four ways of praying. With each way you'll be provided two practices. You can choose one or both of these practices. I will briefly introduce each ten-minute prayer time and then dismiss you to engage in the practices listed.



PRAYER PRACTICE #1: BORROW SOMEONE ELSE'S WORDS

Prayer can be me borrowing someone else's words, letting the fullness of their words fill the emptiness left by the absence of my own words. Like a respirator breathing for me until my lungs heal and strengthen enough to breathe alone, someone else's words can pray for me until my soul and spirit heal and strengthen enough to pray with words of my own. For the next ten minutes practice either (or both) of the two options below:

OPTION 1: Breath Prayer

This is called a breath prayer because the words of the prayer intentionally aligns with the experience of inhaling and exhaling. It's a prayer meant to go where you go, used anytime during the day. And, because it's done with a focus on breathing, it's a type of prayer that tends to calm you and destress you. Try any or all of these three examples (silently say these words to yourself as you breathe):

Jesus Christ [*as you inhale*],
Son of God [*as you exhale*],
have mercy [*as you inhale*],
on me [*as you exhale*]

Be still [*inhale*],
and know [*exhale*],
that I [*inhale*]
am God [*exhale*]

Christ before me [*inhale*],
Christ behind me [*exhale*],
Christ with me [*inhale*]
Christ in me [*exhale*]

OPTION 2: Ready-Made Prayer

Take several minutes to slowly and silently pray through one or more of the three prayers below which are written by others. As you do, pay attention for ways in which the prayer puts something into words that you've not been able to voice, or engages you in a topic you've not been talking to God about. Turn the page to get started (these prayers/ texts have been revised (e.g., changing to first person; changing phrases to addressing God rather than describing God) so that you can read them/ pray them directly as a prayer):

4 Ways
A ONE HOUR PRAYER RETREAT
2 Pray

Trust in the Slow Work of God

Above all, I trust in your slow work, God.
I am, quite naturally, impatient in everything,
wanting to reach the end without delay.
I would like to skip the intermediate stages.
I am impatient from being on the way
to something unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress,
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability,
and that it may take a very long time.
And so I think it is with you.
My ideas mature gradually – I will let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
I won't try to force them on,
as though I could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on my own good will)
will make of me tomorrow.
Only you God can say what this new spirit
gradually forming within me will be.
I give you Lord the benefit of believing
that your hand is leading me,
and accept the anxiety of feeling myself in suspense and incomplete.
-- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955)

Psalms 13

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.
But I trust in your steadfast love; my heart will rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to you Lord because you have dealt bountifully with me.
-- New Revised Standard Version updated Edition

4 Ways
A ONE HOUR PRAYER RETREAT
2 Pray

Liturgy for Embracing Both Joy and Sorrow

Do not be distant, O Lord, lest I find this burden of loss too heavy, and shrink from the necessary experience of my grief.

Do not be distant, O Lord, lest I become so mired in yesterday's hurts, that I miss entirely the living gifts this day might hold.

Let me neither ignore my pain, pretending all is okay when it isn't, nor coddle and magnify my pain, so that I dull my capacity to experience all that remains good in this life.

For joy that denies sorrow is neither hard-won, nor true, nor eternal. It is not real joy at all.

And sorrow that refuses to make space for the return of joy and hope, in the end becomes nothing more than a temple for the worship of my own woundedness.

So give me strength, O God, to feel this grief deeply, never to hide my heart from it.

And give me also hope enough to remain open to surprising encounters with joy, as one on a woodland path might stumble suddenly into dapplings of golden light.

Amidst the pain that lades these days, give me courage, O Lord; courage to live them fully, to love and to allow myself to be loved, to remember, grieve, and honor what was, to live with thanksgiving in what is, and to invest in the hope of what will be.

Be at work gilding these long heartbreaks with the advent of new

joys, good friendships, true fellowships, unexpected delights.

Remind me again and again of your goodness, your presence, your promises.

For this is who we are: a people of The Promise—a people shaped in the image of the God whose very being generates all joy in the universe, yet who also weeps and grieves its brokenness.

So we, your children, are also at liberty to lament our losses, even as we simultaneously rejoice in the hope of their coming restoration.

Let me learn now, O Lord, to do this as naturally as the inhale and exhale of a single breath:

To breathe out sorrow, to breathe in joy.

To breathe out lament, to breathe in hope.

To breathe out pain, to breathe in comfort.

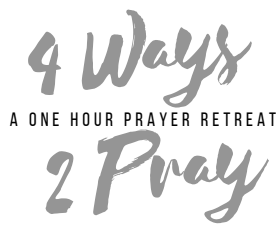
To breathe out sorrow, to breathe in joy.

In one hand I grasp the burden of my grief, while with the other I reach for the hope of grief's redemption.

And here, between the tension of the two, between what was and what will be, in the very is of now, let my heart be surprised by, shaped by, warmed by, remade by, the same joy that forever wells within and radiates from your heart, O God.

Amen.

-- *Every Moment Holy*, Vol. 2: Death, Grief & Hope (Douglas McKelvey)



PRAYER PRACTICE #2: SPEAK YOUR OWN WORDS

Prayer can also be me speaking my own words, no matter how few, feeble or unformed they feel. My free-flowing conversation with God can be as raw, honest, short, long, casual or formal as it needs to be. For the next ten minutes practice one or both of the options below (or return to one of the options in Prayer Practice #1):

OPTION 1: Talk to God About What's Wrong

The Christian tradition calls this lament. Some of us were taught that this type of praying is wrong because it demonstrates a lack of faith. Lament, however, actually demonstrates a great deal of faith. It shows that you trust that God can handle your heaviest hurts and worst words. The most common type of psalm in Scripture is actually the lament psalm. Jesus used these while on the cross (eg., Ps. 22). Be open and honest about what's bothering you. Use this structure, loosely based on Ps. 13, to write or silently say a prayer about what's wrong:

1 - God, here's what's wrong in my life/ my world:

2 - God, here's what I want you to do about what's wrong:

3 - God, here's why I want you to do something about what's wrong:

4 - God, here's what I know to be true about you even in the midst of what's wrong:

OPTION 2: Talk to God About What's Right

We often call this praise, thanksgiving or gratitude. It can be one of the easiest ways to re-engage with prayer because, most often, most days have at least one or two things that went right, even if they were small. Take several minutes to write down as many things that are good and right in your life/ world, big and small, and give thanks to God for them:

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 - _____ | 5 - _____ | 9 - _____ |
| 2 - _____ | 6 - _____ | 10 - _____ |
| 3 - _____ | 7 - _____ | 11 - _____ |
| 4 - _____ | 8 - _____ | 12 - _____ |

PRAYER PRACTICE #3: LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORDS

Prayer can be me listening for God's words, giving God space to speak when I can't find the energy to speak or make the effort to speak. God doesn't always need me to speak. If prayer truly is dialogue, God longs for my silence so he can speak. Chose one or both of the options below to practice for the next ten minutes (or return to any of the options in Practices #1 or #2):

OPTION 1: Lectio Divina

Popularized by St. Benedict, this phrase means "divine reading" and is an ancient way of using Scripture to listen, not merely to learn. Follow the four-step outline below:

4 Ways
A ONE HOUR PRAYER RETREAT
2 Pray

1 - READ the text below, slowly, two or three times. As you read, circle or underline a word or phrase that seems to stand out to you:

38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, 42 but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."
(Lk. 10:38-42 NRSVue)

2 - REFLECT on the word or phrase you've circled or underlined. That is, what's going on in your life right now that needs that word or phrase? Why might God have drawn your attention to that word or phrase right now? Write down some of your reflections below:

3 - RESPOND to God in prayer based on what you've considered about the importance of that word or phrase. If that word or phrase has led you to thanksgiving, then give praise to God. If it has led you to repentance, then confess and repent in prayer to God. If it has uncovered a need, express that need to God in prayer.

4 - REST for a moment in the presence of God.

4 Ways
A ONE HOUR PRAYER RETREAT
2 Pray

OPTION 2: Visio Divina

This phrase means "divine seeing." It refers to the practice of meditating on an image, like an icon, painting, or even something in nature like a sunrise or snowfall. It's based in a belief that God may choose to speak to us through the details of something we prayerfully gaze upon. For this option, we'll use the painting *The Annunciation*. A large reproduction of this painting hangs in the sanctuary foyer--you can get up and go to it for this exercise. Or you may choose to use the small reproduction below. [The Annunciation, 1898, Henry Ossawa Tanner]



4 Ways
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2 Pray

1 - GAZE upon the painting, taking it all in, noticing every detail you can. As you do, be attentive to a detail in the painting that seem to catch your attention.

2 - REFLECT upon this detail and its significance to you. What's happening in your life right now that seems to resonate with that detail? What might God be speaking to you through it?

3 - RESPOND in silent prayer about what you've noticed in the painting and why it seems important to you.

PRAYER PRACTICE #4: SAVOR GOD WITHOUT WORDS

Prayer can be simply savoring God without any words at all. Silence can be a form of prayer when done intentionally, a way of saying, "I'd like to just be with you for a bit." For the final ten minutes choose one or both of the options below (or return to any option in Practices #1, #2 or #3):

OPTION 1: Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is about practicing silence before God. God may choose to speak to you in this time, but that's not its primary purpose. You might desire to speak to God in this time, but that's not its primary purpose. The goal is just to be with God, in complete silence. Some who are visual by nature find it helpful to picture in their mind an image of God/ Jesus/ Spirit that helps them focus in the silence. Others find it best not to bring any image at all to mind. One thing that most experience in this time is distracting thoughts. In Centering Prayer we address distracting thoughts with a "sacred word." Before going into your silence, choose a word that is meaningful to you (e.g., Jesus, Savior, Spirit, Shepherd, etc.). Each time you find your mind wandering, silently say this sacred word. It's not meant to be repeated like a mantra. It's spoken silently just to acknowledge the distracting thought and to help you return to a centered space. Try to spend several minutes in silence with God right now.

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2 Pray

OPTION 2: Praying in Color

Praying in Color involves coloring a shape/ image that helps focus you upon God. The physical movement engages your body and helps your mind to remain centered and grounded. Some coloring pencils are available in the back of the sanctuary (if you're doing this at home, grab some crayons or colored pencils). Take a few moments to begin coloring the image below as a way of just being with God.



and know that I am God.

Psaln 46:10