

GETTING STARTED

Prayer isn't a technique; it's a relationship. It's not about trying to persuade a reluctant God to do something, or to craft a perfect set of words to win God over. It's a friendship, with many different dimensions. It starts in the most ordinary, instinctive reactions to everyday life:

- **Gratitude:** good things are always happening to us, however small.
- **Wonder:** we often see amazing things (e.g. in nature) but pass them by.
- **Need:** we bump into scores of needs every day.
- **Sorrow:** we've messed up.

Prayer is taking those instincts of gratitude, wonder, sorrow and the desire to help, and stretching them out before God. Everyone has those instincts, so prayer is making our responses intentional and focusing them towards God. We therefore need to give prayer that most scarce commodity – time. The rule here is: **Start small; Stay natural; Be honest.**

PRAYER AS RELATIONSHIP

Like all good relationships (marriage, children, close friends), our relationship with God has different elements:

'Just getting on with it': we don't need to get overly precious about the relationship; we just get on with life, secure in the knowledge that God is present and loving at all times.

Chatting: ordinary interaction through the day: arrow prayers, trigger prayers, walking prayers, practising the presence of God (see over).

Talking: as in marriage, special time is needed if a relationship is to grow. Day by Day, quiet time, holy reading. Sometimes we may want to argue!

Intimacy: in deep relationships we get beyond words and into touch and intimacy. This is a time for the love-language of silence, symbols and sacraments.

REMEMBER:

- These different elements will vary with our temperament and the stage of our lives.
- Talking and intimacy require special times and places to be designated.
- Prayer can often seem to be an introvert activity and as so many of the population are extroverts different approaches may be needed, such as: seeing daily living as 'for God', seeing loving action as prayer because it's offered to God, prayer with prayer partners or prayer groups and 'just getting on with it' as above.

SILENT PRAYER

Many people find themselves longing for more silence at some stage on their spiritual journey. Just as when we are reading a page we need both black print and white space, so we may need both words and silence in our life of prayer. Deep beneath the turbulence on the surface of the sea there is a gentle stillness, and so there may be in us. Silent prayer doesn't try to achieve anything; we open ourselves to God who is beyond anything our minds and our words can imagine – and wait.

- **Centring** – Go to a special place, light a candle, take up a specific bodily position, still the body (relax the shoulders and forehead etc, let the tension seep away), perhaps imagine you are going down in a lift descending to a deeper level of your being.
- **Focusing** – Take a short biblical verse or phrase as a focus e.g. 'come, Holy Spirit', 'my Lord and my God,' or simply 'Jesus'. Start to use the phrase as a rope to hang on to or a stone to keep lobbing into the pool.
- **Waiting** – repeating the phrase slowly and lovingly whenever you need to return your focus to God. It's like being distracted when driving on the motorway – you have to keep turning back to the road. It doesn't matter how often you wander off (it's inevitable) or how little you 'feel'. This is time given to God as a gift. The rest is up to God.
- **Ending** – with the Lord's Prayer, to unite you with the whole family of God.

FURTHER READING

How to Pray
John Pritchard, SPCK, 2002

Praying through Life
Stephen Cottrell, CHP 1998

Taste and See
Margaret Silf, DLT 1999

Approaches to Prayer
ed. Henry Morgan,
SPCK new edn. 2009

> The priorities of Living Faith as represented in the Living Faith diagram



PRAYER

A SIMPLE GUIDE

At the heart of Living Faith for the Future is the priority of 'Sustaining the Sacred Centre'. This is a priority for us as individuals and as church communities if we are to deepen our enjoyment of God and to recognise God's presence in everyday life. Here are some ideas to help.



THE LIVING FAITH PRAYER

*Gracious God,
you call us to a living faith in the future
as well as in the present;
open our eyes to the opportunities before us
in our parishes and deaneries,
and in the daily discipleship of our own lives.
May we sustain and nourish our inner lives,
so that we can serve others effectively,
and offer to all people the transforming love
of Jesus Christ our risen Lord.
Amen.*

John Pritchard
Bishop of Oxford



PRAYING WITH THE BIBLE

1. The quiet time

The classic way of reading a passage of the Bible, perhaps using Bible reading notes (from BRF, Scripture Union, or Reflections for Daily Prayer), and then praying about the way the passage has struck you. Prayer can continue in a number of ways, e.g.

- TCP (Thanksgiving, Confession, Petition)
- A book of prayers
- Five-finger exercise:
 - index finger** (points) – for people who guide and help us
 - middle finger** (tallest) – for leaders in politics, media, church
 - ring finger** (weakest) – for those in need
 - little finger** (modest) – for ourselves
 - thumb** (strongest) – for the most important people/ things in our lives

2. Holy reading

A way of feeding and meditating on the Bible.

- **Read:** Take a passage and start to read slowly until a phrase captures your attention.
- **Reflect:** Chew the phrase carefully, drawing the goodness out of it. Repeat it, roll it around your mind, suck it slowly for its meaning.
- **Respond:** Pray about the thoughts and feelings that have emerged.
- **Rest:** You may just want to stay in silence for a while.
- **Repeat:** Carry on with the passage.

3. Ignatian meditation

A way of entering a gospel event with the senses of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing.

- Read the passage slowly and attentively. Put the Bible down.
- Close your eyes and re-run the story, using the senses to enter it imaginatively (see the various people, smell the sea air, listen to the voices, feel the stones underfoot...) Watch the story unfold.
- At the end, move closer in to Jesus and get into conversation with him about what has just happened. Let that conversation (prayer) go on as long as necessary.
- Reflect on what you've learned, and give thanks.

DAY BY DAY: A SIMPLE DAILY OFFICE

A daily office is an ordered way of keeping going in prayer. It carries us along, however we are feeling, and makes sure that we are fed with a regular diet of scripture, psalms and prayer. What follows can be adapted in many ways to suit individual preferences.

Preparation

O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise

Psalm or a portion of a long psalm

Start at no.1!

Reading

Use the lectionary, or your own scheme, or Bible reading notes, followed by silent reflection ('What does this passage say to me?')

Prayer

Perhaps using TCP, five-finger exercise or a book of prayers.
The Lord's Prayer

Offering of the day:

Lord, I offer this day to you: the work I do, the people I meet, the pleasures and the problems, that in everything I may know the love of Christ, and be thankful. Followed by silent offering of the day's activities and appointments to God.

Concluding prayer:

Keep me, Lord, in the joy, the simplicity and the compassionate love of the gospel. Bless me this day, and those who you have given to my care, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with me and with the whole Church evermore. Amen.



PRAYING THROUGH THE DAY

STARTING THE DAY

Short way: Repeat Col. 3.17: 'Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'
Think about the day's events and appointments, asking God to help you to 'do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus...'
Lord's Prayer (say it slowly if you can)

Long way: (if you have time) Day by Day or another Daily Office
Quiet time
Holy reading, Ignatian meditation
Silence

DURING THE DAY

Practise the presence of God – remember God's presence at odd moments and in gaps between activities and appointments.

Trigger prayers – in a queue, pray for people who have to wait; turning on a tap, pray for those who can't; hearing a siren, pray for the emergency; reading a magazine, pray for those who can't read; signing a letter, pray for the person receiving it; after a phone call, pray for the person you've just spoken to.

Arrow prayers – of need or thanksgiving, at any time, about anything. Short, spontaneous, literary merit not required!

Prayer as you walk – to work, to school, to the shops, with the dog. Hand cross – keep one in your pocket.

END OF THE DAY

Compline/Night Prayer – as in Common Worship Daily Prayer

Survey the day – run through the day like a video and freeze frame the emotional 'hot spots', the moments where something special happened, turning the memory into thanksgiving, or apology, or prayer for someone in need.

Read a lighter spiritual book – (preferably with short sections) so you are focused on God as you go to sleep.