

The Prayer Practice

Practicing the Way

Welcome

Welcome to the Prayer Practice. You may have joined this Practice because you're new to following Jesus and learning to pray for the very first time. Or you may be at a stage in your apprenticeship to Jesus where you desire to not just *learn about* God, but to *experience* God. Or you may just find prayer boring or tedious, but you have a growing sense there's something you've yet to discover.

Whatever your motivation, we're so happy you've chosen to go on this four-session journey into a deeper life with God. In the hurry, distraction, and noise of the modern world, few things are more difficult, or more rewarding, than developing a life of prayer.

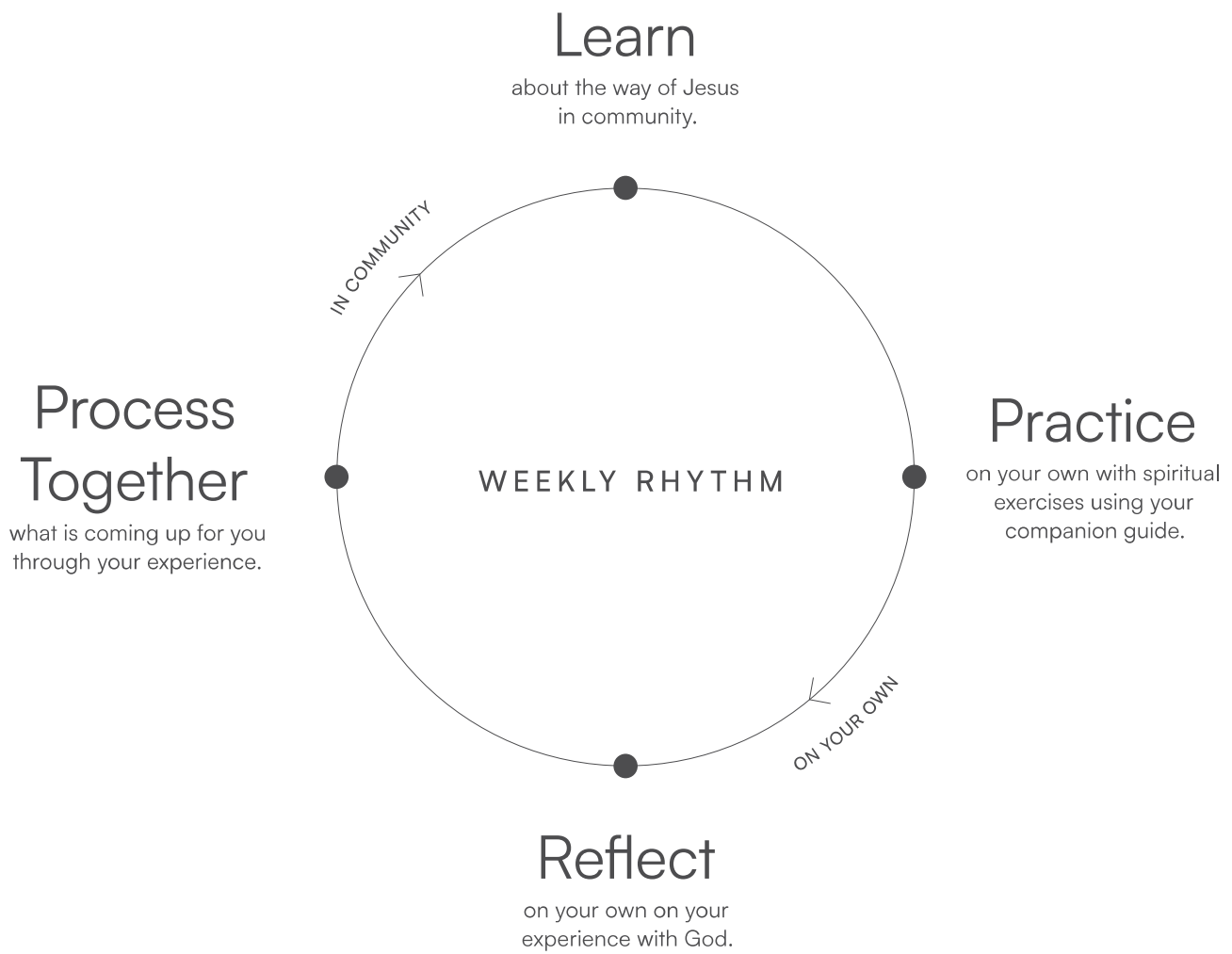
Prayer is simply the medium through which we communicate and commune with God. The practice of prayer is learning to set aside dedicated time to intentionally be with God, in order to become like him and partner with him in the world.

Over the next four sessions, the plan is to explore four stages of prayer.

- 01 Talking to God
- 02 Talking with God
- 03 Listening to God
- 04 Being with God

You can think of these four stages of prayer as *layers* by which we go deeper with God. When you are first learning to pray, there is a bit of a progression from one stage to the next. But the spiritual journey is not a linear progression, and you never mature beyond any dimension of prayer. This means we can revisit and grow within every layer many times.

As you give yourself to Jesus through this Practice, please remember: The ultimate aim is not to “pray more” or “pray better.” It's what ancient Christians called union with God. As Julian of Norwich said long ago, “The whole reason why we pray is to be *united* into the vision and contemplation of him to whom we pray.” It's to live each day more and more aware of and deeply connected to our Father; to be transformed into the likeness of his Son, Jesus; and to be filled with the fullness of his Spirit, to do what he made you to do in the world.



How to use the Companion Guide:

- 01 **Learn:** Gather together as a community for an interactive experience of learning about the Way of Jesus through teaching, storytelling, and discussion. Bring your Guide to the Session and follow along.
- 02 **Practice:** On your own, before the next session, go and “put it into practice,” as Jesus himself said. We will provide weekly spiritual disciplines and spiritual exercises, as well as recommended resources to go deeper.
- 03 **Reflect:** Reflection is key to spiritual formation. After your practice and before the next session, set aside 10-15 minutes to reflect on your experience. Reflection questions are included in this Guide at the end of each session.
- 04 **Process together:** When you come back together, begin by sharing your reflections with your group. This moment is crucial, because we need each other to process our life before God and make sense of our stories. If you are meeting in a larger group, you will need to break into smaller sub-groups for this conversation so everything has a chance to share.

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Tips

This Companion Guide is full of spiritual exercises, best practices, and good advice on how to pray. But it's important to note that prayer is not a technique that, if we learn, can somehow control our life with God. It's a way of setting ourselves before God, not to control our relationship with him, but to surrender to his love.

The goal isn't to "get good" at prayer, but to create new daily rhythms and ways of being that open us to God's goodness in more profound ways.

It's so easy to lose sight of the ultimate aim of a Practice; here are a few tips to keep in mind as you pray.

01 Start small

Start where you *are*, not where you "should be." If 30 minutes a day is too much, start with 10. If daily is too much, start with weekly.

02 Think subtraction, not addition

Please do not add a daily prayer rhythm into your already overbusy, overfull life. Think, "What can I cut out?" A morning glance at the news? A lunch break scroll through social media? An evening TV show habit? Formation is about less, not more.

03 You get out what you put in

The more fully you give yourself to this Practice, the more life-changing it will be. The more you just dabble with it and the more shortcuts you take, the less transformation you will experience.

04 Remember the J-curve

Experts on learning tell us that mastering a new skill tends to follow a J-shaped curve; we tend to get worse before we get better. If you currently enjoy your times of prayer, don't be surprised if some of these new types of prayer feel awkward and difficult. Just stay with the Practice and see what it has to offer you.

05 There is no formation without repetition

Spiritual formation is slow, deep, cumulative work that takes years, not weeks. The goal of this four-session experience is just to get you started on a journey of a lifetime. Upon completion of this Practice, you will have a map for the journey ahead and hopefully some possible companions for the Way. But what you do next is up to you.

A note about the Reach Practice

We recognize that we're all at different places in our stage of discipleship and season of life. If you are at a place where you desire to go deeper in the practice of prayer, see the Reach Practice added at the end of each session. There you'll find an exercise, recommended reading, and a corresponding episode from the Rule of Life podcast to enhance all four sessions. For each Reach Practice, you'll find written instructions and a companion video tutorial (via QR code).

The Prayer Reach Practices were written in collaboration with Strahan Coleman, a musician, writer, retreat leader, and spiritual director from Aotearoa, the Māori name for New Zealand, and a contributor to Practicing the Way. You can find more of his work at commonerscommunion.com.

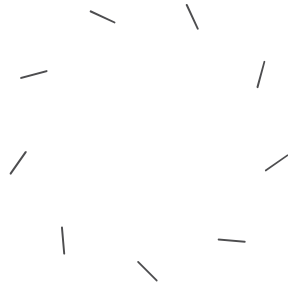
We hope you enjoy!

A note about the recommended reading

Reading a book alongside the Practice can greatly enhance your understanding and enjoyment of prayer. You may love to read, or you may not. For that reason, it's recommended, but certainly not required.

Our companion book for the Prayer Practice is *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton, who is the lead pastor of Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, and the national director of 24-7 Prayer USA.

May Jesus teach you to pray — to commune and communicate with our Father — and lead you into a deeper life of union with the Spirit.



Talking to God

SESSION 01

Overview

In Session 01, we explore the first stage of prayer: talking to God. When the disciples asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray,” in Luke 11, Jesus replied, “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...” He gave them a pre-made prayer, or what some call a liturgy, to pray to God.

Liturgies can look like praying the Lord’s Prayer, singing through the Psalms or using a prayer app on your phone. This way of praying can be incredibly helpful in various seasons of our lives: when we’re learning to pray, when we’re exhausted or sick, when we’re traveling and find it hard to focus, or when we’re living with grief and doubt, searching for the right words to talk to God. “The prayers of the saints,” as some call them, can carry us through.

So we start our four-session journey simply, by praying pre-made prayers to God.

This session’s Practice will focus on the pragmatics of prayer. One of the single most important tasks of discipleship to Jesus is starting, habituating, and fine-tuning a daily prayer rhythm. Your daily prayer can be simple and brief. And as essential as sleeping, eating, and drinking. This is what will keep you praying in the days, months, and years to come.

Ronald Rolheiser writes:

“What clear, simple, and brief rituals provide is precisely prayer that depends upon something beyond our own energy. The rituals carry us, our tiredness, our lack of energy, our inattentiveness, our indifference, and even our occasional distaste. They keep us praying even when we are too tired to muster up our own energy.”

Here are a few questions to hold in your mind as we enter this session's Practice.

When will I pray? First thing in the morning? After my workout? At night? On my lunch break? When the kids are napping? Many people find first thing in the morning to be best, but not always. As a general rule, give God your best time of day, when you are most awake and aware.

Where will I pray? Most of us find it incredibly helpful to choose a dedicated space for prayer — a room in our home, a corner in our bedroom, a park bench near our house, or a literal prayer closet. This place can become a kind of modern-day altar, where you go to open to God. Not because God hears us better at an altar, but because we hear God better!

How should I pray? What posture is best for me? Sitting on a chair, a couch, or the floor? Kneeling? Standing? Walking? Lying down? Out loud or quiet? Does it help to begin with deep breathing first? How do I get my body to work with my heart's desire for God, not against it?

How long should I pray? There's no "right" answer (to this or any of the other questions), but as a general rule: long enough to become present to God. And that may take a bit longer than you expect. If you have a newborn child or some other extenuating circumstances that make 30 minutes too hard, that's fine. Start where you are and take the next step forward in your journey.

In general, if we can't pray for 30 minutes a day, we're simply too busy. And we need to take a serious life audit of what we believe is most important to us. After all, we're not trying to layer on more Christian busyness to our already over-maxed lives; we're trying to slow down and simplify our lives around what we most deeply desire — God.

When instructed, pause the video for a few minutes to discuss in small groups:

- 01 What emotions does the word “prayer” elicit in your heart?
- 02 What challenges do you face in prayer?
- 03 What invitation do you sense from God to go deeper in prayer?

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Notes

As you watch the teaching as a group, feel free to use this page for notes.

What are some key ideas? Or what really resonates with you?

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come. May your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

—Luke 11v2-4

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Discussion Questions

Now it's time for conversation about the teaching. Circle up in triads (groups of three) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 What stuck out to you from that teaching?
- 02 Are pre-made prayers a part of your life with God, or not?
- 03 What support do you need from this community as we go on this journey with God?

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Practice

SESSION 01: TALKING TO GOD

Transformation takes more than knowledge—it takes practice. Take a moment to consider what steps the Spirit might be inviting you to take before the next session in response to what you've learned.

01 Create a daily prayer rhythm

Decide on a time and a place to pray, if possible, every day this week.

Decide on and commit to a time duration. Don't overreach. Start where you are. If you don't pray daily, aim for 10-15 minutes. If you pray for 10-15 minutes, consider upping it to half an hour. Just take the next step.

Create routines or rituals you actually enjoy to make your daily prayer habit something you look forward to all day long — light a candle, make yourself coffee or tea, sit by a window you love, go outside, savor the quiet, or put on worship music.

Those of you who are more kinesthetic may find it helpful to pray while walking, inside or in nature, or with something to keep your hands busy, like knitting or drawing.

Ultimately, work with your personality, not against it.

Write your plan here.

02 Pick out a pre-made prayer and talk to God

Try using one of the sources we mentioned earlier.

- **The Lord's Prayer**
- **The Psalms** — See below for recommendations
- **Scripture** — Find a passage that resonates with your heart and pray it back to God
- **Singing** — Sing acapella, put on a worship album, or play an instrument
- **Liturgy** — *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle, or *Every Moment Holy* by Douglas Kaine McKelvey
- **Apps** — Echo, Lectio 365 from 24-7 Prayer, Pray as You Go from the Jesuits, or Hallow

If you don't have a strong preference, we recommend you start by praying the Psalms or one of the prayers in the Appendix of this Companion Guide.

You can start in Psalm 1 and pray through the book. Or you can pray a psalm based on your emotional or spiritual state that day.

Here are some recommendations.

- **To begin your day with God:** Psalm 5, 19, 20, 23, 25
- **When you are sad:** Psalm 13, 22, 42, 77
- **When you are in distress:** Psalm 57, 60, 86
- **When you are scared:** Psalm 27
- **When you are hurt:** Psalm 10
- **When you ache for more of God:** Psalm 63, 84
- **When you want to repent:** Psalm 51
- **When you are grateful:** Psalm 9, 103
- **When you want to worship:** Psalm 8, 148-150

Whatever you decide, pray at least once a day.

Circle or write what you feel led to try.