



Being with God

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.

Notes

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

What stands out or resonates with you?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Discussion Questions

Now it's time to pause the video to reflect on the teaching in your small groups.

Take a few minutes to open up to one another about the following questions:

- 01 In what ways have you experienced glimpses of this kind of prayer with God?
- 02 How do you normally handle distraction when you pray?
- 03 How and where do you most sense God's with-ness in your life?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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 the Trinity. 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).
 - The Eastern church uses the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ” (on the inhale), “have mercy on me” (on the exhale).
 - You can also use your own phrase, like, “In you I live” (on the inhale), and “In you I delight” (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.
- 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 section before your next session as a group.

Reading

Read chapters 9-10 of *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton (pp. 163-216)

Podcast

Listen to episode 4 of the Prayer series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: Beholding Prayer (The Window of the Soul)

This exercise — The Window of the Soul — is one way to practice beholding (or contemplative prayer). What's important is that we bring all of ourselves to God and allow him to be present to us with compassion, kindness, and love. Setting our eyes on the God that is, and not the one we may assume or fear. It can take practice to become comfortable with this kind of prayer, so don't worry if you don't fully connect the first time. The most important part is our being lovingly available to God.

You can follow this QR code to a video tutorial from Strahan Coleman that will guide you step by step, using prayer prompts.

Or you can follow the written tutorial on the following pages.



Note: For each step, take a minute or two to sit and abide in the process.

- 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

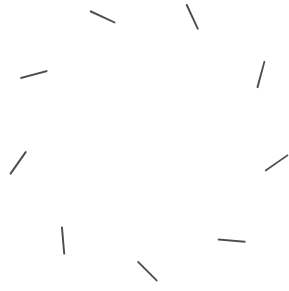
As you come to the end of this Practice, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

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.



Keep Going

Continue the Journey

You are *not* going to explore the vast territory of prayer in four sessions. This Practice is *only* designed to get you moving on a lifelong journey. The daily prayer rhythm you've been practicing is meant to be integrated into your Rule of Life and become the baseline for your life with God. But prayer is a journey in which we never "arrive," and there is always more.

Where you go from here is entirely up to you, but if you decide to integrate a daily prayer rhythm into your life, here's a list of next steps to continue your Practice.

Recommend Reading

- 01 ***Beholding*** by Strahan Coleman
- 02 ***Armchair Mystic*** by Mark E. Thibodeaux
- 03 ***A Praying Life*** by Paul E. Miller
- 04 ***God on Mute*** by Pete Greig
- 05 ***Hearing God*** by Dallas Willard
- 06 ***Domestic Monastery*** by Ronald Rolheiser

Recommended exercises

01 Practice Sabbath

Most of us are simply too busy to pray. Sabbath is one of the most important disciplines for the spiritual life in our day, because it opens up time and space in our overcrowded lives to find our life in God. The practice of Sabbath is like a container for so many other practices.

The Sabbath Practice is available at practicingtheway.org/sabbath, but here are a few small steps to get started.

- Choose a day to Sabbath (or if a full 24 hours is too much, start with a half day or a few hours after church).
- Begin your Sabbath with some kind of small ritual to transition into Sabbath time — like lighting a candle, reading a psalm, or eating a meal with family or friends.
- Spend your Sabbath ceasing from all work, chores, buying, selling, and entertainment. In their place, give yourself to rest, delight, and worship.
- Run the Sabbath Practice, listen to the Rule of Life podcast Series One: Sabbath, and/or read a book about the Sabbath to continue to learn more about this ancient discipline for emotional health and spiritual life.

02 Go on retreat

Find a monastery, retreat center, rural hotel, or vacation home and go away for an extended time of quiet, rest, Sabbath, and prayer. If going away isn't feasible in this season, eight hours is a great start and can expand over time. Two to three days would be harder, but deeply impactful and worth working your way up to over the course of a few retreats.

The longer we give ourselves to solitude, silence, and stillness, the more space it opens up in us for healing and renewal in God.

03 Continue to develop a daily prayer rhythm

We need to develop a rich life with God in our ordinary life, not just on retreat or special occasions. Our daily rhythms of prayer are absolutely essential to our discipleship. The best place to start is by developing and fine-tuning your daily prayer rhythm, or what ancient Christians called the “Daily Office”.

Once you’ve firmly established a daily prayer habit each morning (or whenever you decide is best for you to pray), begin to slowly expand.

Choose a second time and place to pause for another moment of daily prayer. If you pray in the morning, try stopping again after work and before dinner (when you’re not too tired) or just before bed (if you’re more of a night person). Or try praying on your lunch break or during a break in your daily routine of work, school, or caregiving. You may want to use your body differently: If you sit for morning prayer, try going on a walk or standing or kneeling.

Experiment with different types of prayer that meet different needs, like petition and intercession midday and the Examen at night (or whatever you discern is best).

When you get busy and fall out of your rhythm, don’t judge yourself or feel bad; it’s very normal. Just begin again.

Remember: The end goal is not to pray X number of times a day. It’s to rearrange your daily life so you are experiencing deep joy, peace, and gratitude in your everyday life with God.

Appendix: Prayers

St. Francis of Assisi's "Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace"

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

"The Serenity Prayer"*

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever and ever in the next.
Amen.

*Likely composed by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, but popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous

St. Teresa of Ávila's "Guidance Prayer"

Lord,
grant that I may always allow myself to be guided by You,
always follow Your plans,
and perfectly accomplish Your Holy Will.
Grant that in all things, great and small,
today and all the days of my life,
I may do whatever You require of me.
Help me respond to the slightest prompting of Your Grace,
so that I may be Your trustworthy instrument for Your honor.
May Your Will be done in time and in eternity by me,
in me, and through me.
Amen.

St. Teresa of Ávila's "Bookmark Prayer"*

Let nothing disturb you;
Let nothing frighten you.
All things are passing.
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Nothing is wanting to him who possesses God.
God alone suffices.

*Named "Bookmark Prayer" because it was found on a handwritten bookmark upon her death.

St. Patrick's "Breastplate Prayer"

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.

I arise today
Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In the predictions of prophets,
In the preaching of apostles,
In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.

I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me

From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near.

I summon today
All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

James K. Baxter's "Song to the Lord God"

Lord God, you are above and beyond all things,
Your nature is to love,
You put us in the furnace of the world
To learn to love you and love one another.

Father, we sing to you in the furnace
Like the three Jewish children.
The hope and the doom of the love of friends
Is eating up the marrow of our bones.

Lord Christ, you are the house in whom we live,
The house in which we share the cup of peace,
The house of your body that was broken on the cross,
The house you have built for us beyond the stars.

Lord, Holy Spirit, beyond, within, above,
Beneath all things, you give us life.
Blaze in our hearts, you who are Love himself,
Till we shine like the noonday sun.

Lord God, we are the little children,
The feeble ones of the world.
Carry us for ever in your breast, Lord God,
Give us the power by love to be your holy ones.

MORNING PRAYER

By Strahan Coleman, from *Prayer Vol. 02*

As the dawning light ascends, God,
so do I to you,
so do I in you,
to the melody of your love.
Today is yours, Father,
and as with every day,
You have made it ours.
So may my steps be as Your steps,
my words be as Your words,
and my heart be as Your heart,
until the dusk arrives
to beckon me to rest once more.

MIDDAY PRAYER

From *The New Zealand Prayer Book*

Let us be at peace within ourselves.

Silence

Let us accept that we are profoundly loved
and need never be afraid.

Silence

Let us be aware of the source of being
that is common to us all
and to all living creatures.

Silence

Let us be filled with the presence of the great compassion
towards ourselves and towards all living beings.

Silence

Realizing that we are all nourished
from the same source of life,
may we so live that others be not deprived
of air, food, water, shelter, or the chance to live.

Silence

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be
a cause of suffering to one another.

Silence

With humility let us pray for the establishment
of peace in our hearts and on earth.

Silence

EVENING PRAYERS

“Compline Prayer”

From The Book of Common Prayer

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep
this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend
the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe
the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your
love's sake. Amen.

“Night Prayer”

From He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa/A New Zealand Prayer Book

Lord,
it is night.

The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.
It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
rest in you.

The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys,
new possibilities.

In your name we pray.
Amen.

By Strahan Coleman, from *Prayer Vol. 02*

We are with ourselves here in the dark, Father,
aware of our vulnerabilities,
our needs and mortal limitations.
All we have done today is now left to rest in You,
or grow in You,
depending on Your will.
We have done all we could,
yet perhaps not all we should,
we trust You now as always, God,
with both.

Meet us as we sleep, so our souls —
our hearts — will wake with new
energy for greater love.
You will never leave us,
not in the day,
and now not in the night.
We trust in You with all our
greatest love and hope.

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.