

PRAYER PRACTICES FOR GROUPS, KIDS, & INDIVIDUALS

A City of Light Resource

More info at cityoflightaurora.org

WHAT PRACTICES YOU'LL FIND IN THIS RESOURCE:

- DAILY GRATITUDE EXAMEN
- SILENT PRAYER
- LECTIO DIVINA
- VISIO DIVINA
- DISCIPLE-MAKING PRAYER
- PRAYER INVITATION
OPPORTUNITIES



DAILY EXAMEN

DESCRIPTION:

It's easy to go through our daily rhythms in a kind of blur, with each moment seeming mundane and forgettable. We are often not attentive to the details of our day or the presence of God at work in our lives. When we are in a period of discernment, it can be hard to know what the Lord is doing. The Daily Examen is a practice introduced by St. Ignatius. It consists of looking back over our day in the presence of the Holy Spirit, to see where and how the Lord was present to you, and to discern how he is leading you.

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is a great prayer for the end of your day. Try praying it in a quiet place before bed. If leading group, let your group know approximately how long you will spend on each of the prayers and then gently read the prompt for the next session aloud to guide through the prayer. If you are new to this or if you are leading children, you can focus on just one of the questions to enter into. Or simply ask God, "Father, what can I give thanks for today?" Then pray, "God, thank you for ____."

PRACTICE:

- Become aware of God's presence. Ask God to bring clarity to the events of the day
- Review the day with gratitude. Think back on the events of your day, big and small. What brought you joy, brought comfort, or made you feel grateful.
- Pay attention to your emotions. We often feel God's presence through the changes in our emotions. What emotions did you experience at different times? What is God saying through these feelings?
- Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. What moment, feeling or event is the Holy Spirit focusing on? Pray about that. Try to allow the prayer to come freely from your heart.
- Look toward tomorrow. How are you feeling about tomorrow? As you name your hopes, fears, and other feelings, offer them as prayers, trusting that God holds the future in his hands.

AFTER:

- Allow group members to process out loud or silently how they experienced the practice.
- Journal what you experienced or any Scriptures, prayers, or images that came to your mind.



SILENT PRAYER

DESCRIPTION:

Practicing silence helps free ourselves from the noise and distractions of this world so that we can be present with God and learn to hear his voice. Silence rarely produces fruit in the moments of practicing silence. Benefits are usually noticed at other times of your day such as being more present and patient with yourself and others.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Practice silence yourself first before leading your group. Decide how long the silence will be for and set a timer with a gentle alarm. Let your group know how long the silence will be and that you will be setting a timer. Around 2 minutes for young children, 5 for a group, and 10 alone could be good starting points, but try different amounts of time. By yourself, you could keep silence during your commute or while going for a walk. Or you can spend a half day or more in a silent retreat.

PRACTICE:

- Settle into a comfortable position in a quiet place. Be still and quiet. Take deep breaths.
- Remember that you are with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Rest in God's love.
- As your mind wanders, simply bring it back to focusing on God's presence and love for you.

AFTER:

- Allow group members to process out loud or silently how they experienced the practice.
- Journal what you experienced or any Scriptures, prayers, or images that came to your mind.



LECTIO DIVINA

DESCRIPTION:

A lectio divina prayer is allowing God to speak to you through a passage of scripture by using your imagination. This is a great prayer practice to do with children since they do it without being told. Let the children in your life lead you through this exercise with their “I wonder” questions. Our imaginations are a gift from God and allow us to enter into prayer not only in our minds, but in our bodies and spirits. Don’t worry if you don’t feel like you’ve got a great imagination, God is always more ready to listen than we are to pray and to give us more than we desire or deserve (collect from BCP).

INSTRUCTIONS:

Some time before you plan to pray imaginatively, read the passage of scripture you are going to pray with (some suggestions below). Read the scripture aloud and let it simmer awhile. When you’re ready, go to a quiet place alone, or do your best to calm any distractions. For groups, read the description together and then gently guide through each question by reading them aloud and then leaving silence. For children, use wondering questions (I wonder what it felt like when...) to help kids enter into the imaginative details.

PRACTICE:

- Read the scripture passage.
- Close your eyes and step into the story by asking yourself questions like this: What do you know about time and place this event happened in history? What does it sound like there? What does it smell like?
- Imagine you are a character in the story. Where are you standing? Who do you see/hear? Who else is with you?
- Where is Jesus or God? What is he doing? What does his face look like? Is he saying anything? Does he say anything to you?
- End with a moment of silence to listen to anything the Holy Spirit might be whispering to you.

AFTER:

- Take as long as you need in the story. When you’re ready, it might be helpful to write down a few things you felt or heard. How do you feel afterwards? (There is no right answer!) Tell the Lord what just happened and how you feel after this experience.
- In a group, share your experience with others. Begin the discussion with one of the questions from the practice.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES:

Matthew 3, Matthew 4:1-11, Exodus 3:1-15, Luke 15:11-31, John 12:1-8.



VISIO DIVINA

Visio divina, similar to lectio divina, is a contemplative prayer practice. Visio divina, which means “sacred seeing”, is a way of praying slowly as we prayerfully observe a piece of artwork. Art can speak to us on a nonverbal level, and thus can open our minds and hearts to hear and speak to God in a fresh way. Art that is rooted in and submitted to the Word of God can shape our imagination toward God as revealed in Scripture.

Visio divina doesn't have to take hours. If you have 20-30 minutes to set aside that is plenty of time. Find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably and set the artwork where you can easily observe it.

ASK:

As you begin your prayer time, ask that God will open your mind & heart.

OBSERVE:

Take time to observe the image in its entirety. What stands out? What do you like (or not like) about the art? What do you notice? This could be colors, shapes, images, anything that connects to you or evokes a response.

Acknowledge your initial reaction to the image without judgment and then continue to sit with it a while longer. Notice if any specific part of the image stands out to you. If so, take a few minutes to meditate on the part of the image that has drawn your attention. What thoughts and/or feelings come to you?

LISTEN:

Why do you think God drew your attention to this particular part? Is there a message for you or is a memory aroused? What might God be saying to you?

RESPOND:

Pray a prayer of response to the Lord, either aloud, silently, or in your prayer journal.



DISCIPLE-MAKING PRAYER

DESCRIPTION:

Part of following Jesus is inviting others to following Jesus—to come and see and come and follow. On our own, we often don't desire to make disciples. That's why we need to regularly ask the Lord to give us a new heart—his heart—for those who are far from him. One of the ways we partner together in planting seeds of gospel invitation is by praying one of these disciple-making prayers together.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Read the description together as a group. Then guide through group through the practice and the prayer.

PRACTICE:

1. Read one of the following or another scripture passages out loud (Matthew 28:19-20; Ezekiel 36:26; Matthew 9:35-38). You can take time to discuss it (What does it say? How do we obey?).
2. Spend several minutes in silence and ask the Lord: Lord, give me your heart for those who are far from you. Lord, show me someone in my life that I can pray for to come and see and come and follow. Lord, lead me into opportunities to plant seeds of Gospel invitation in _____'s life.

AFTER:

- Share your prayer with others in your group. If the Lord brings the name of a person to mind, write their name in your Bible or journal.
- Take turns laying hands on one another and praying for each other and the people in our lives that God is sending us to love.



PRAYER INVITATION OPPORTUNITIES

As we build friendships, here are a few ways we can partner together to invite others to come and see, come and follow, and come and die. What is a next step that the Lord is leading you to take?

- Invite to coffee or a meal
- Ask if you can pray for them (Is it alright if I pray for you right now?)
- Ask a spiritual question (Where are you on your spiritual journey? What does being a Christian mean to you? What is your impression of church? etc.)
- Invite to pray regularly (weekly or every other week at least)
- Invite to study the Bible regularly (weekly or every other week at least)
- Invite to Gathering/Elbow Event where they can meet other Christians (watching a sporting event, going to a concert or movie, attending a community festival, getting together for coffee, a game night, book discussion, etc.)
- Invite to a group (go with them)
- Invite to follow Jesus (sharing the gospel)
- Invite to church (have coffee first or lunch after)
- Invite to prepare for baptism or baptism renewal
- Invite to serve on a team and invite to give
- Invite to meet regularly to partner together to make disciples (weekly or every other week at least).
- Invite to pray about who in their life God is calling them to invite.