



Tools for Developing your Prayer Life

30 day prayer challenge

Relationships take intentionality, time, patience and effort. Our relationship with God is no different. Perhaps you already have a regular prayer pattern in your life. Maybe you do one or more of the following:

- Attend daily Mass
- Pray the rosary
- Turn off the radio while driving and sit with God in silence
- Go through your prayer list each day
- Say your prayers every morning and/or evening

These are all wonderful tools that help us to worship God and experience God's grace in our lives. You may already be living this challenge and experiencing the fruit of a living relationship with Jesus.

The 30-day prayer challenge is about growing in a personal and intimate relationship with God, by making space to encounter the Trinity. The challenge is to take 15 minutes every day for 30 days.

The structure is very simple.

Each morning set aside 15 minutes to be alone, in a quiet place, free from distractions. Follow these simple steps:

1. Light a candle
2. Make the sign of the cross
3. Relax and be fully present to this moment
4. Open your heart to God and invite the Holy Spirit to lead you
5. Choose one of the following prayer suggestions each day and try to use each of them at least once in the next 30 days. You may also add some of your own prayer methods into these 15 minutes.

PAL Method

Here is a simple way to insure you have a balance to your daily prayer.

Praise – Take 3 minutes to praise God for the beauty of creation and your life. This can take the shape of reflecting on the sunrise or you could simply write down all the things you are grateful for in this space:

Ask – Now take 3 minutes to ask God for whatever you might need today. God always answers our prayer, in one way or another and we trust that God knows what we need and will work in all the areas of our lives. You can make a list in your head or write them down here.

Listen – You done the talking so far, it is now time to let God speak. We can hear God's voice through scripture, in our imagination and in the circumstances of our lives. Silence is the language of God. Take the remaining 9 minutes to read a scripture verse and/or listen to your heart. Write down any words or message that stirs you.

The Steps of Lectio Divina

- Choose a few lines of Scripture that you wish to pray.
 - Place yourself in a quiet environment.
 - Calm your anxieties and thoughts, and acknowledge God's presence.
 - Offer a prayer to the Holy Spirit for inspiration and guidance: Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten my heart and mind to listen to your Word.
1. **Lectio:** Read the text slowly and prayerfully listening for that word that God has prepared for you. You may read the text a few times while quieting yourself interiorly to focus on God's voice. Listen and receive the Word that God speaks to you.
 2. **Meditatio:** When a word or phrase strikes you, stop and rest with it. Repeat the word or phrase to yourself. Allow it to speak to you in a personal way by pondering the

word in your heart, reflecting on what it means to you. Memorize it and repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your thoughts, hopes, memories, and desires.

3. **Oratio:** Prayer is your response to God's word. It begins your dialogue with God that comes from your heart. Formulate a prayer, as a response to God. What do you want to say to the Lord in response to the Word spoken to you? Enter into this loving conversation with God.
4. **Contemplatio:** Rest in God's presence and receive His transforming embrace. Sit still with God, realizing that in this deep and profound relationship, words are not necessary. Be content and at peace with a wordless, quiet rest in God, which brings joy to the heart. Remember that contemplation is not your action or doing, rather it is allowing God to act in you.

The Steps of the Examen

1. Place yourself in God's presence. Give thanks for God's great love for you.
2. Pray for the grace to understand how God is acting in your life.
3. Review your day — recall specific moments and your feelings at the time. This is a major part of the prayer as you go back over the day or the past 24 hours. For instance, if done in the evening, think back as you woke up this morning. What was your first thought? As you left the house, did you interact with anyone? In the morning did you meet with people or talk on the phone? What did you do for lunch, etc.? Think through the whole day and take your time, all the while considering the question of step 4.
4. Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those instances. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away? For the times of consolation and blessing, thank the Lord. For the times of desolation, poor choices or sin, ask for forgiveness. Do not be too hard on yourself and look for patterns of blessing and areas you can improve on. Over time this exercise helps you to grow in self-knowledge and maturity.
5. Look toward tomorrow — think of how you might collaborate more effectively with God's plan in the coming day. Be specific, and even practice actions you might take when similar situations happen tomorrow. Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's love and mercy and end with the "Our Father."

You may like to see further explanation in this 2 minute video clip: <https://www.jesuits.org/spirituality/the-ignatian-examen/>

Journaling

This is a wonderful way to pray and to watch how God is working in your life. You may want to purchase a small journal and spend five minutes each morning writing a word that you receive in prayer or any dialogue you are having with God. Here are few lines to get you started.

[illegible]

VISIO DIVINA – How to Pray with the “Eyes of Your Heart”

Praying through art is a multi-sensory way to connect to God through prayer. Visio Divina is one form of prayer using images – works of art, stained glass windows, icons, even images in nature. What Is Visio Divina?

Visio Divina is translated as “divine seeing.” It is related to the prayer form Lectio Divina (divine reading), but instead of Scripture, this form of prayer uses visual elements to help set your mind on prayer. It allows God to speak into your heart through the image. This form of prayer has been used throughout the centuries, more popular in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communities where icons are often used in prayer.

How to Pray Visio Divina

1. Find an Image for prayer. You might use images found in your church – a religious painting, a stained glass window, or an icon. You can look in art books or museum websites for works of art. Historical religious paintings are great choices and you can use the related Scripture passage to open your time in prayer. Also try praying with religious images from other cultures, or even more contemporary or abstract art. You don’t even need artwork for Visio Divina. Walk outside and use an image from nature.
2. Prepare Your Heart for Prayer Before you begin. Choose your image and have it visible – either be near it in person or have the image pulled up on your phone or computer. You may want to begin your time in prayer with a scripture reading. If you’re using a religious image, use the scripture related to that image. Or, use a Scripture from the day’s lectionary reading or just a favorite one you want to pray. Close your eyes, breathe, clear your mind, and ask God to enter into this time of prayer with you. Ask God to speak to you through this image.
3. Allow the Image to speak to your heart. Open your eyes and look at the image you’ve selected. Let your eyes pause and focus on the part of the image they’re first drawn to. Gaze upon just that part of the image for a minute or two. Then close your eyes, still seeing that part of the image in your mind.
4. Reflect on the entire image. Open your eyes and now look upon the whole image. Gaze upon the entire image, allowing it to draw forth a word, an emotion, or an image in your heart. What do you hear God whispering into your heart? What thoughts or questions is this image raising? What emotions do you feel? Continue to gaze and reflect as long as you need to, then briefly close and rest your eyes.
5. Pray through the image. Open your eyes. While looking upon the image, respond to God. Pray through the words, images, emotions, questions, and thoughts that are now on your heart. Continue to look upon the image as you pray. Then, close and

your eyes and rest.

6. Rest and reflect in God. As you close out your time in prayer, open your eyes and gaze again upon the image. Rest in God's presence as you reflect upon this prayer experience. Consider how you'll take this into your life. You may choose to journal about your experience.

You can find wonderful images at The Vatican Museum, artandtheology.org, and in many other places online. You may want to begin with the images below.

Giant Redwoods (Below)

Trinity (Far right)

Prodigal Son (Bottom)



Guided Meditation

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit Order, advocated that we use our imagination in prayer. He often talks about visualizing yourself in the scripture scene and experiencing the scene as if actually present. What feelings, emotions or sensations do you have and what is going on inside of you in the midst of these experiences. This is a wonderful method of prayer and guided meditation is another form of creative and imaginative prayer. We can trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us as we turn our imagination and heart over to God's loving presence. If you have never sat face to face with Jesus, you will enjoy this new prayer form.

Movements:

1. Begin prayer by closing your eyes and taking a deep breath. Breathe in the peace of God and breathe out any anxiety or frustration from your day. Take another deep breath and breathe in the presence of love and exhale any negativity that is resting in your soul. Close your eyes again and sit still. Concentrate on your breathing and be fully at rest in this space and time.
2. As you sit in this quiet space, in your mind's eye visualize a favorite peaceful place. It might be a back yard deck, a favorite prayer chair or under a shade tree on the edge of lake. See yourself sitting in this space and take in all the beauty, sounds and smells of this place. Feel the warmth of the sun and the peace of this present moment.
3. Picture an empty chair next to you and then a person coming up to join you. You recognize that it is Jesus and you smile and he hugs you. Take your time and look into his eyes and feel the love and compassion of his embrace and hear him say, "Thank you for inviting me to join you."
4. As you both sit down, see the way he looks at you and hear him say, "How are you, how are you really today?" Pour out your thoughts, feelings and needs to Jesus. Take your time and refocus on his loving gaze if you lose your train of thought. Finally, see him look at you and say, "I know what you are going through and I am with you. I love you."
5. Finish your conversation with Jesus and then tell him you would like to meet him every day. Hear him respond, "I am always with you." As he leaves, embrace him again and thank him for being with you.
6. Close your prayer by coming back to your breathing and rest in God's loving presence. If you journal, consider writing down your thoughts, or simply close with a spontaneous prayer of thanks to God and make the sign of the cross.

Contemplate Nature

This can be done in a variety of ways, but the essence is to encounter the Creator of the natural world through God's creation. You may take a walk, pick up a leaf or a rock or sit on the edge of a body of water. God is present in the beauty of creation and longs to meet you in silence and wonder.

Music

A wonderful addition to prayer is spending time worshiping God in song. Find the lyrics to a beautiful worship song in the back of this booklet and look it up on youtube. Allow your singing to be a form of prayer and worship.

Resources for Prayer:

- Lead Me Lord, Into the Deep, by Dr. Michael Fonseca (3 month daily prayer guide for personal use from Godsembrace.org), \$10 today
- The Cup of our Life, by Sr. Joyce Rupp (Excellent for daily personal use and for a six-week small group discussion for women.)
- Scripture
- Liturgy of the Hours