

# PRAYER & SPIRITUAL FORMATION WORKSHOP

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Prayer, a deeper connection with God in His Spirit, is at the heart of discipleship. It energizes to our daily walk as His servants and our response to Jesus' commission to "make disciples." The traditions supporting prayer and "spiritual formation" are rooted in Scripture and the church's history. Disciples of Jesus have always practiced "spiritual disciplines," which help us being available to God and aligning our will with His. By learning and growing in these disciplines we are empowered and held accountable to the journey to which we have called. This has powerful implications for the mission and ministry of a congregation, particularly as we reach out to the lost and unreached in our community.

## OUR PURPOSE IN THIS RETREAT IS...

- To help you get in touch with your spiritual journey and how it impacts your personal life, relationships, health and ministry
- To introduce "spiritual disciplines" and prayer resources and thereby enhance your personal spiritual journey.
- Key question: How do we develop a closer walk with the Lord?

## REFLECTION

How did you learn to pray? Who taught you?  
What helps you to pray?  
What is prayer to you?

## JESUS

...withdrew to the wilderness and prayed (**Luke 15:5**) ...went up to the mountain by himself to pray (**Matthew 14:22**) Out of Solitude Henri Nouwen

## PAUL (Romans 8:26-27)

*"...The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (NIV)*

## **SPIRITUAL FORMATION (Seeking the transformation we need and desire)**

- **Preparation**
  1. Relaxation/stretching, focused breathing, & silence
  2. A special place and time - your "holy ground"
  
- **Praying Without Words (i.e. meditation)**
  1. Praying the Bible Stories (e.g., **Luke 5:17-26, Matthew 8:23-27**)
  2. Praying images (e.g., stepping stones, forgiveness, light, hands)
  
- **Ancient Prayer Forms**
  1. Lectio Divina (**Luke 10:38-42**)
  2. Examen
  3. Jesus Prayer
  4. Spiritual Direction
  
- **Prayer Helps**
  1. Prayer lists (e.g., SED Prayer Partners)
  2. Readings (Luther, Nouwen, Merton ...Bibliography)
  3. Accountability group
  4. Prayer Partner
  5. Prayer Triplets (3, 40 days, 40 min...testimonies)
  6. Journaling
  7. Listening to your dreams
  8. Fasting ("letting go," simplifying)
  9. Practicing sabbath (daily, weekly, monthly - retreating, yearly)
  10. Silence
  11. Begin with gratitude (Abundance & Simplicity)
  12. Practice generosity
  
- **Prayer & Forgiveness--Letting go of resentment (e.g., **Matthew 6:14-15**)**
  1. Accept God's forgiveness
  2. Acknowledge the anger and hurt cause by the offense of another
  3. Pray for the person who hurt you (pray for your enemies)
  4. Decide to forgive – let go
  5. Rule out revenge
  6. Consider the other's perspective
  7. Extend good will to the offender
  8. Give yourself time to heal
  
- **Prayer & Healing (**James 5:14-16**)** - for the Hebrew, body, mind and spirit are one.
  1. Anointing with Oil
  2. Laying on of hands (Jesus – **Mark 6:5; 8:22-25**, Paul – **Acts 28:7-10**)
  3. It is always Jesus who does the healing

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Prayerfully set one or two goals for yourself
- Share your goals with someone
- Find an accountability/prayer partner or "spiritual director"
- Resolve to live joyfully and gratefully, especially when you don't feel like it
- Serve others each day - Prayer leads us to action
- Strive for progress, not perfection
- Take one day at a time
- Reflect on these things:
  - 1) Am I allowing listening time in my prayers so that God can speak to me?
  - 2) Am I willing to hear God's answer?
  - 3) How can I structure my day to improve my practice of prayer?
  - 4) Am I pursuing a plan for regular devotional Bible study?
  - 5) Do I have a spiritual friend, guide, or mentor to keep me accountable for my spiritual journey?
  - 6) Am I reading regularly in materials that can strengthen my journey?

**May you now, by the power of Holy Spirit, receive the spirit of prayer. May it become, in the name of Jesus Christ, the most precious occupation of your life. And may the God of all peace strengthen you, bless you, and give you joy. Amen.**

# Lectio Divina

Encountering Scripture through "Sacred Reading"  
St. Benedict (500 A.D.)

## Individual *Lectio Divina*

### 1) *Lectio* (reading/listening)

- Choose a passage from Scripture (Daily Lectionary)
- Read the passage to yourself. Don't be caught by the literal meaning. Rather, listen for the word or phrase that catches your attention.
- Silently focus on that word or phrase. Repeat it a few times. Allow it to sink into your heart and mind.

### 2) *Meditatio* (pondering)

- Pay attention to the thoughts and feelings your word or phrase evokes.
- What images, what thoughts, what memories come to mind?
- Continue to ask God to speak to you through this word, and continue listening for a reply

### 3) *Oratio* (responding)

- What desires has your prayer awakened in you?
- Maybe you have found an area of your life that needs some work.
- Maybe you find you are grateful for something and you wish to express gratitude.
- Maybe you feel called to a new course of action in your life.
- Whatever you sense, do not rush the prayer. Continue to wait and listen as God forms your prayer and desire in your heart.
- Speak your prayer of desire, longing, or action to God. Continue to listen in silence.

### 4) *Contemplatio* (resting)

- The conversation with God comes to a close. Having heard a word from God and responding, you now rest in silence.
- Allow your mind to settle
- When you feel that the prayer has come to an end, express your gratitude to God.

## THE EXAMEN

The ancient Christian practice called "The Examen" can strengthen our connection to God and others. It is a daily process of examining one's daily behavior in the light of God's words of truth. It has two aspects: 1) Examen of the *consciousness* through which we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to his loving presence. 2) Examen of the *conscience* in which we uncover those areas that need healing, forgiveness, cleansing. ***“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)***

The following practices can help us to do this in our daily prayer life.

1. Ask God to help you see His plan in the confusion of your day.
2. Review the day with thanksgiving. At the day's end, take a walk in your mind through the day, hour by hour, thanking God for each task He gave you and each person He allowed you to encounter.
3. Review the feelings that surface as you replay your day. Both positive and negative feelings are signals to you about your own spiritual state.
4. Take one of the feelings that you identify and use it as a guide for your prayers. You may be led to ask, repent, request, offer thanks, or sit silently as your spirit groans out to God with inexpressible words.
5. Finally, look toward tomorrow. What feelings do you have about the upcoming day? Whatever you discover, again, use it as a guide for prayer.
6. Many have found it helpful to keep a spiritual journal as a way to do the examen.

Ask yourself, “When did I notice God during this time? What felt like a time of God's absence?”

You can use one or more of these "examens"; implement them gradually, or all once. Either way, it is a great guide to liven up your conversations with God and build intimacy with Him.

# JESUS PRAYER

## There is Power In His Name

- Used extensively in the 6th century, and revived in the 14th century. It is of eastern origin.
- Often called a “breath prayer” since it can be spoken in one breath. You can make up your own simple breath prayers.
- Decide how long you wish to spend in prayer (e.g., 15 minutes).
- The Jesus Prayer can be done anywhere--as you take a walk, in your in the car, at church, etc.
- Repeat, in your mind, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me". (**Luke 18:13**)
- The repetition should be continuous (i.e., spoken again and again). Note: Jesus caution regarding "vain repetition" had to do with the practice in which the Pharisees would make a public display of their piety by reciting their prayers in the marketplace. Repetition itself is not wrong.
- Allow the words to flow into your entire being.
- Some have found it helpful to match them to your breathing.
- When you have completed your time of prayer, express your thanks to God.

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Particularly at times of crisis we may discover we have a spiritual vacuum deep within and that we don't have the inner strength to carry us through the daily demands and trials of our lives.

Many of God's people are rediscovering the usefulness of meeting monthly with a "Spiritual Director", companion, or guide. Simply stated, Spiritual Directors help us discern the activity of God in our lives. They ask us, 'How is God present and what is God saying to you?' It can be both frightening and exciting to enter into such a relationship. This is an opportunity to explore our inner life, deal with our "issues," be held accountable for our spiritual journey, and learn to be more honest with ourselves, others, and God.

Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy, nor is pastoral counseling. We do not come as patients in need of a psychological cure, but as souls searching for God. While at times it may have the "feel" of a counseling session, the ultimate goal of spiritual direction is to relate more consciously and respond more fully to God who is always calling to newness of life. This is done through theological reflection, coaching in prayer and meditation, and what the ancients called ascesis or the practices of spirituality.

How do you find such a friend and companion to walk with you on your spiritual journey? Begin by praying that God would lead you to the right person. While Spiritual Directors are found in many Christian denominations, the tradition and training has been most carefully preserved in the Roman Catholic (particularly the Jesuit, Benedictine and Franciscan Orders) and Episcopalian Churches. Therefore, the search for a spiritual director may begin at a diocese or retreat center of one of these.

Discipleship deals with the practice of a way of life focusing on answers; spiritual direction deals with reflection on God's way in life and deals with questions. Spiritual direction focuses on who God is and how one can be more present to and with God. Discipleship focuses more on how to know and do God's will.

Questions you may want to ask as you search for your Spiritual Director include:

- Do I prefer a Catholic, Protestant or Lutheran? Does it matter? Is this important to me?

Spiritual Direction in the Catholic traditions call for a mentoring relationship with accountability, while the Protestant approach calls for a partnership of equals in spiritual life. Catholic traditions emphasize a reflective relationship focused on prayer and the practice of God's presence in an interior journey, while Protestants emphasize a discipling relationship with a didactic and intellectual approach and a clear relationship to the world. Finally, Protestants deal with spirituality in group meetings, while the Catholic traditions place it more firmly in intentional religious communities.

- Would a male or female be best at this point in my spiritual journey?
- Do I prefer an ordained or a lay person?
- How important is age?
- What training and experience do those that I am considering have?

Then interview those you are considering, asking them about their own prayer lives. Are they in spiritual direction for themselves? People cannot give to others what they are not doing for themselves. It is important to find someone you can trust and respect, who will keep confidentiality, who will encourage and affirm you and yet be able to ask the hard questions. In short, take your time to find a "good match."

Once you feel comfortable that God has led you to your Spiritual director, then contract with him or her over the following issues:

- How often will you meet? Normally this involves at least an hour meeting each month.
- Is there a fee? Typically, this is in the form of an offering (\$30-50 per session).
- How long will the relationships continue? It is useful to begin with a commitment of two or three months to "test the relationship" and then to make a longer term commitment. Remember that we aren't coming to solve our problems and then leave. Discerning God's call and will and paying attention to our spiritual journey is a life-long process. In other words, the relationship will continue as long as both people want it to. It is helpful to reevaluate the relationship on an annual basis.

Spiritual direction is a covenantal relationship. The director commits to be "present" for the other person during their sessions, to pray regularly for them and to be faithful to their own spiritual journey. The one seeking direction commits to a faithful prayer life, to an awareness of God's presence in their lives and the issues that need to be brought to the sessions, and to trust that God is at work in the process of direction. Direction is best begun in a time of some settledness and stability.

Through the gift of spiritual direction, a pastor can become more centered in God, energized for ministry, and more attentive to God's working in and through his ministry.

At times it is also helpful to consider a directed retreat. A directed retreat is a special time of prayer and solitude. The goal of these days is to focus attention on one's relationship with God. It is a time for "being with God" in quiet reflection, in scripture reading, in nature, and within the mystery of one's life. It calls for an open and generous heart which is receptive and sensitive to God's presence. is helpful for the retreatant to meet daily with a Spiritual Director (Guide) to reflect on prayer experience and discern the movement of the Spirit.

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