



Lord, Teach Us to Pray

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The contents of this booklet are intended to provide some basic principles and suggestions about personal prayer which can be put into practise. We look at some general maxims: then look at some methods: and conclude with some points about spiritual direction.

Maxims

1. Michael Ramsey (a former Archbishop of Canterbury) would say: "If you have the desire to pray you have begun to pray – and if you haven't then desire to have the desire".
2. The chief aim of prayer is to seek God – to become more Christ-centred and less self-centred – and to be open to the Holy Spirit working within.
3. Prayer is not so much what we do but what we allow God to do within us and through us.
4. The work of prayer is the lever of the world by which God – creating, redeeming, and giving life, uses us as His fellow-workers to serve a sick world, a disunited church and broken people.
5. Christian prayer is work – the offering of the whole self (body, mind and spirit) to the glory of God, the seeking of His will, and the receiving of His grace for all our thoughts, words and actions and those of others.
6. Whenever we turn to God in faith and prayer His Spirit is within us, however feeble we think our efforts are. Because of our imperfection we cannot be entirely

satisfied with the way we pray. Yet we can enjoy it.

7. Emotions and feelings have their place in prayer but they are not the measure of the effect of our prayer.
8. Prayer is the main way, along with the sacraments, by which we grow into the likeness of Christ and make Him known, followed, loved and adored in the world. Praying people of faith, hope and love are agents of evangelism.
9. Each one of us is unique. We pray differently. Therefore “pray as you can and not as you can’t”. Nevertheless there are strong likenesses in our unique ways of prayer.
10. Although we call praying on one’s own ‘private’ no prayer is really private. Our praying as members of the Body of Christ is in union with the universal church, the whole company of heaven, and God’s creation.
11. Work, recreation and socialising are prayer in so far as they are offered to God who’s Presence can be recognised in every event, person and situation.
12. We can practise the Presence of God by quick acts of prayer and thought through the day and night coming from the heart.

13. Creative activity of various kinds can be an expression of prayer if undertaken primarily for God. Otherwise there is the danger that the activity will become an idol.
14. We can recollect the Presence of God by gazing at the beauty of creation, at icons and works of art and craft. They are windows into God.
15. We can recall verses of Scripture or phrases from hymns and collects as we go about our life and activities especially in the more relaxed moments.
16. Like meal times prayer times are essential. They help us to have a rhythm of life and prayer. This may vary according to circumstances.
17. If we think we haven't got time for prayer it may be that we've got our priorities wrong.
18. Walking, running, cycling or similar activity provide for some a suitable environment for prayer.
19. Certain types of music help some to pray and to be aware of the Presence of God.
20. In times of prayer and meditation unwanted thoughts come rushing in like mosquitoes buzzing around the head. We can overlook them by turning our

attention back to the words or subject of our prayer – or else open the Bible or Prayer Book or Hymn Book and read slowly.

21. When we have a problem to resolve, a decision to make, a difficult person to deal with we should, in prayer, hand the matter over to God. The answer will come in His way, when He chooses, either within prayer times or outside prayer times.
22. Life-style can be either a help or a hindrance to our praying. Illicit behaviour, bad habits, extravagant bodily and mental pursuits, are a hindrance. An ordered yet flexible routine is a help.
23. Discipline is a mark of a disciple, a way of carrying the Cross. A discipline of prayer is not meant to be a 'kill-joy' but a means to living a full contented joyful life for the glory of God and the welfare of humankind.
24. Stillness, silence, and solitude can provide a commendable environment to a life of prayer. Yet growth in good habits of prayer makes it possible to pray in the midst of noise and high activity.

25. Personal (private) prayer and liturgical prayer are complimentary. Liturgical forms of eucharist and daily office, containing penitence, praise, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, affirmation of faith, and oblation, give a rich diet of prayer – the prayer of the Church. They inspire personal (private) prayer which faithfully practised strengthens the liturgical prayer of the eucharistic community.
26. Extempore Prayer is the speaking of prayer in our own words coming from the mind and heart, an intimate conversation between the best of friends. It can become too verbose especially in a prayer group – no need to give God a load of information He already knows.
27. The fruit of prayer is the fruit of the Spirit. We gradually become people of love, joy and peace – calmer, more approachable, less stressful. Perseverance is essential. Prayer is love in action: God loving us and us loving God.
28. All prayer is intercessory on behalf of the world, the church and individuals.

Meditation

Meditation requires us to spend time with God. The material for meditation is generally taken from the Scriptures or the Liturgy or books about the Lord and our relationship with Him. It is best to have a fixed time for this every day if possible. We need to choose the place where we can do this. We need to be comfortable and alert. An upright chair is better than a lounge suite. The back should be straight. Some will find it helpful to kneel with a stool across the lower part of the legs on to which they can lower the body. A few Westerners can be in a lotus position sitting on the floor – Easterners find that easy. Often it is helpful to focus one's attention on a tangible object – a candle, flowers, a cross or crucifix, an icon or picture. When praying many find it best to close the eyes, or even to be in the dark. Some may find quiet music helpful.

Meditation with the Scriptures

- ❖ Choose your time and place
 - ❖ “Bring yourself together” – settle down
 - ❖ Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit
 - ❖ Choose the material for your meditation – a Scripture passage
 - ❖ Read it two or three times
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- If the passage is pictorial (e.g. a gospel story or Acts) you will be using primarily the imagination.
 - What does it say about Jesus Christ?
 - What does it say about the other characters?
 - Imagine the scene – imagine yourself in the scene.
 - In other words – PICTURE, PONDER, PRAY.
 - The picturing and the pondering should lead you to pray – that is; to look, to listen and to love.
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- If the passage is didactic (e.g. Epistles, St John’s gospel) you will be using primarily the intellect.
 - You will reflect on the passage you have chosen.

- What does this mean?
 - What does it say about God?
 - How does it apply to me?
 - This should lead into prayer.
 - In other words: - READ, REFLECT, PRAY.
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- ❖ In the passage there may be a verse, a phrase or a word which speaks to you, which becomes your prayer – you want to hang on to it and repeat it often.
 - ❖ In this way of prayer we are listening to God, opening ourselves to him and receiving strength to live for Him.
 - ❖ Recommended material for meditation is provided by the common lectionary and the Daily Eucharistic Lectionary RCL and DEL in The Lectionary / Te Maramataka.

Meditation with the Prayer Book

A New Zealand Prayer Book / He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa is not only useful for corporate worship but also for personal devotion. Praying the words slowly in our personal (private) prayer helps us to offer them in public services with greater meaning.

Having settled down at the beginning of your Prayer Time, choose the printed prayer for your meditation. Read it through once or twice. Then pray each word or phrase by repeating it slowly, many times.

For example: - a collect on page 619

Everloving God,
your Son Jesus Christ
gave himself as living bread
for the life of the world:
give us such a knowledge of his presence
that we may be strengthened
and sustained by his risen life
to serve you continually;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What you are doing is praying with the lips:
then praying it with the mind, and by
repetition bringing the mind into the heart
where little thought is needed.

All prayer must come from the heart.

Meditative prayer enables you to align your will
with the will of God. It effects your day, your
week, your ministry.

THE JESUS PRAYER

LORD JESUS CHRIST,
SON OF GOD,
HAVE MERCY ON ME,
A SINNER

When I was a theological student in London I read for the first time that little Russian classic called "*The Way of a Pilgrim*" which had been translated into English by an Anglican priest, R.M. French. "*The Pilgrim Continues His Way*" is it's sequel. I was fascinated by it. It is the story of a Russian peasant who discovered the Jesus Prayer which is "LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER'. The prayer became his life and his life became the prayer. It was a vocation.

I read the book in the early fifties, but it was not until 1962 that the Jesus Prayer became my prayer, almost suddenly, and has remained so ever since. When I have tried other ways of prayer in my personal devotion I have been drawn back to The Jesus Prayer. It seems to have become my vocation also,

The use of the Jesus Prayer is not the one and only way of prayer, but it does have a long history. It's roots live in the Gospels. The blind

Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, "Son of David have mercy on me" (Mk 10: 46-52) and in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the latter prays "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk 18: 9-14). The early Christian Fathers, particularly of the Eastern part of the church, developed and taught this prayer so thoroughly that it has become part of the Living Tradition conveyed from one generation to the next. People of the Orthodox churches are taught it from an early age; and for the monks of Mount Athos the saying of the Jesus Prayer is as important as their liturgical prayer.

In the West, devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus has not been unknown – St Anselm and the Cistercians, St Francis and the Franciscans, the English mystics Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle are among those who have encouraged prayer addressed to the Name of Jesus.

With migration of people from countries where the Orthodox tradition has been strong to other parts of the world the Jesus Prayer, as practised by the Orthodox, has with Icons become Universal. Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Roman Catholics and others have (as it were) taken the Jesus Prayer into their systems.

The Jesus Prayer is one which is slowly repeated. It is not a mantra, but a definite

invocation to the Son of God. Being explicitly addressed to the Second Person of the Trinity, the First Person is implicitly included. Moreover, St Paul writes that no-one can call Jesus 'Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor: 1-23). Thus the Jesus Prayer is Trinitarian.

The two emphatic words are Jesus and Mercy. The name 'Jesus' meaning Saviour is the name of grace and power. It is a sacramental word. By praying the Holy Name of Jesus, one is filled with this grace and power. Through Him one is united with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The word 'mercy' is used frequently in both Scripture and Liturgy. By asking for mercy one is praying for cleansing, healing and strengthening, for reconciliation and renewal.

The full form of the prayer, as given above, may be lengthened or shortened according to one's inclination. One might lengthen it by praying 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me'. Or one might shorten it to 'Lord Jesus, have mercy' or 'Jesus Christ' or 'Jesus, mercy'. It could then be used as a mantra. The words may be combined with one's breathing. The first few words 'Lord Jesus Christ, son of God' are said as one breathes in, and the second part, 'have mercy on me a sinner' as one breathes out. However, this combining of the Prayer with breathing is not essential.

Some find it helpful. And unlike the man in "*The Way of a Pilgrim*" there is no need to count the number of times one says the Prayer.

The words of the Prayer are windows into God – they are means of grace prayed first with the lips and then with the mind while the mind is brought into the heart. Fundamentally the Jesus Prayer is the prayer of the heart. It is not a discursive prayer of the intellect or the imagination. It is a prayer which centres one's attention on the Son of God; it aligns the will with the Will of God. Although the words are repeated calmly and slowly with meaning, but not with forced emotion, they are not vain repetition.

There may be moments when one is moved not to use any words but to remain still and quiet in the Presence of God, returning to the words when that is necessary. For the Jesus Prayer is one of adoration, petition and oblation. It expresses human weakness in the presence of the all-holiness of God.

Occasionally one may vary the repetition of the Prayer by putting in the 'Hail Mary' or the 'Trisagion' (Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal have mercy on us). Some think it is a selfish prayer 'have mercy on me'. No genuine prayer is selfish if prayed with humility – it is prayed in and with the Mystical Body of Christ

and related to the whole cosmos. But if one is uncomfortable with the singular form one can pray 'have mercy on us'.

When the Jesus Prayer is prayed persistently and regularly it has the effect of unifying thoughts, emotions and desires which often shoot off in conflicting directions, resulting for some in nervousness and stress. The Prayer harmonises mind, heart and will and is expressed through the body. Through the prayer, the Holy Spirit is at work enabling the person praying to acquire the gifts of the Spirit and to show forth the fruits of the Spirit in daily life. Inner calmness is one of the consequences of the frequent use of the Jesus Prayer. St Seraphim of Sarov said "acquire inner stillness and thousands around you will find salvation".

The Jesus Prayer may be prayed formally or informally. Yet to pray it informally one needs to pray it formally. To do this, time needs to be given to the Prayer. This may vary according to circumstances and the stage one is in on the journey of faith. It may be fifteen minutes, half-an-hour, or more. It is best to close the eyes and pray silently. A prayer rope or rosary may help concentration and the avoidance of fidgeting but is not essential.

All sorts of thoughts may come rushing into mind while one is attempting to pray. Thinking

cannot be prevented any more than breathing can. Yet these are not to be harboured. Attention must be turned back to the words of the Prayer and through the words to the Person of the Prayer – Our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the Jesus Prayer enables those who use it to be centred on God.

As a result of regular formal prayer one is able to use the Jesus Prayer informally in all sorts of surroundings and situations – while walking, while traveling, while waiting, at a meeting or appointment, while going off to sleep and when awakening. No time is wasted when using the Jesus Prayer. For it is our intercessory prayer not only for oneself but also for the world, the church and all whom one sees, meets and contacts.

When one is concentrating on other things, especially in doing one's work, the Prayer is still going on in the sub-conscious and the unconscious. From time to time it may come welling up involuntarily from within. When that happens one is known to be living the Jesus Prayer. The person who prays becomes the prayer. The Prayer and the Christ, the heavenly Intercessor, are one in the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father and Christ are one so "in Christ" those who pray are united with the Father too.

Praying the Jesus Prayer is not a substitute for the reflective reading of Holy Scripture and other writings. Nor is it a substitute for the offering of the Holy Eucharist with the sacrament of communion. They enrich each other; they look to the coming of the Kingdom.

Spiritual Direction

- 1) Why is spiritual direction helpful?
 - i) To share with another the journey of faith.
 - ii) To share doubts and difficulties of vocation.
 - iii) To be aware of the 'promptings' and 'nudgings' of the Holy Spirit through the words of another.
 - iv) To be helped in the ways of prayer.
 - v) To open one's inner being before God in the presence of a trusted friend.
 - vi) To be encouraged in one's life with God and ministry in the world and the church.

- 2) To whom can I go for spiritual direction?
 - i) Another priest or lay person—man or woman—someone whom I believe lives close to God and seems to have a measure of Godly wisdom.
 - ii) Someone whose confidence I can trust and with whom I click—someone whom I understand and who understands me—someone who appears to be a good listener.
 - iii) A fellow Anglican is the more obvious—but a person of another diocese

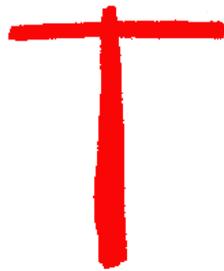
or another denomination may be more appropriate.

- 3) What spiritual direction is not.
 - i) It is not instruction in preaching, pastoral and management skills.
 - ii) It is not counselling—for psychiatric disorders, marriage or personal relationships and group life—but it may be related to any or all of these.

- 4) What should be my approach to spiritual direction?
 - i) See the Holy Spirit as the Supreme Director and the human director as the instrument of the Spirit.
 - ii) See the director as your guide. He/she is not infallible. Direction/Guidance is a shared exercise of discovering the will of God. It should be seen in the context of prayer. It is part of the priestly 'package'. However, one should reflect on the director's words and advice seriously.
 - iii) Do not become over-dependent on the director. We must become mature in Christ—not in Father X or Sister Y.

- iv) The director may be used for the Ministry of Reconciliation (Sacrament of Penance)
- 5) Can the director help me to have a balanced 'diet' of spirituality?
 - i) Yes, he/she may point you along certain paths (eg. to a retreat or a particular kind of spirituality)
 - ii) He/she could help you to keep a 'rule of life' containing three elements in your routine.
 - Liturgical—Eucharist, Daily Office, Services.
 - Intellectual—Bible reading and other reading apart from the liturgy.
 - Mystical—awareness of the presence of God through silently "sitting with the Lord".
 - iii) He/she may help you with discipline of time, taking rest and recreation, time with family, into account.

Notes



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