

Patterns for Daily Prayer

Excerpts from Timothy Keller's

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God

Martin Luther's "A Simple Way to Pray"

Cultivate prayer as a habit through regular discipline, praying twice daily. Take the words of the Scripture and ponder them in such a way that your thoughts and feelings converge on God. Meditate on the Word as a kind of bridge into your own prayers

Martin Luther: "I divide each biblical command into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is I think of each commandment as first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer." This turns every biblical text into " a school text, a song book, a penitential book, and a prayer book."

1. Discern the instruction of a text...distill its essential content, what the passage wants us to believe or do.
2. Once we have drawn out the "instruction" - put the teaching of the text in a nutshell - then we ask how this teaching particularly leads us to praise and thank God, how it leads us to repent and confess sin, and how it prompts us to appeal to God in petition and supplication.
3. After mediating on the Scripture, you should pray through each petition of the Lord's Prayer, paraphrasing and personalizing each one using your own words and concerns.

Here then is a summery of Luther's method for prayer: Start with mediating on a text we have previously studied, then after praising and confessing in accordance with or meditation, we should paraphrase the Lord's Prayer to God. Finally, we should just pray from the heart. This full exercise, he adds, should be done twice a day.

A Summery of “the Prayer of Prayers”

Our Father Who Art in Heaven - An address, a way to start by asking God to “implant in our hearts a comforting trust in your fatherly love”

Hallowed Be Thy Name - A request that faith in God would spread throughout the world, that Christians would honour God with the Christlikeness or holiness of their lives, and that more and more people would honour God and call on his name...to have a heart of grateful joy toward God - and even more, a wondrous sense of his beauty.

Thy Kingdom Come - The “Lordship” petition: asking God to extend his royal power over every part of our lives - emotions, desires, thoughts and commitments.

Thy Will Be Done - Trust in God; “grant us the grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will.”

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread - To come with our needs expectant of positive response, but we do so changed by our satisfaction in him and our trust of him. It is also to pray for a prosperous and just social order.

Forgive Us Our Debts as We Forgive Our Debtors - Seek forgiveness, both with God and others; see our sin and withhold any grudges.

Lead Us Not into Temptation - Pray against entertaining and considering the prospects of giving in to sin.

Deliver Us from Evil - Protection from evil outside us, from malignant forces in the world.

For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory Forever - After descending into our needs, troubles, and limitations, we return to the truth of God’s complete sufficiency.

John Owen's Three Basic Movements, or Stages, Within Mediation

1. "Fixing the thoughts", getting a clear view of a text.
 - 1.1. Read the text slowly, answering four questions: What does this teach me about God and his character? About human nature, character, and behaviour? About Christ and his salvation? About the church, or life in the people of God?
 - 1.2. Ask application questions. Look within the passage: for any personal examples to emulate or avoid, for any commands to obey, for any promises to claim, and for any warning to heed.
 - 1.3. Take one crucial verse and think through it by emphasizing each word. Ask what each word uniquely contributes to the meaning of the text, or what meaning would be lost from the statement if that particular word were removed.
 - 1.4. Paraphrase the verse in your own words. Read it and close the Bible and try to restate it. Then look back at the passage and you will see how much you missed.
 - 1.5. Memorize it.
2. Inclining the heart until its hope and joy more fully rests in those things.
 - 2.1. Work the truth into your relationship to God, to yourself, and to the world.
 - 2.2. Ask yourself what wrong thoughts result in you when this truth is forgotten, the excessive and hard-to-control feelings that result when it is not fully believed and embraced, how a loss of orientation to this truth may lead to inordinate hopes, what actual sins and wrongdoings result, or what specifically must we start or stop doing.
 - 2.3. Consider the timing of your insight. Why is God showing this to you today?
3. The third stage depends on where we are. If we sense the presence of God, stop and savour - "gust and relish" it. If we feel bored, hard, or distorted, simply turn to God and make brief, intense appeals for help. Spend time doing this and then come back tomorrow. Trees don't grow overnight.

Tim Keller's Pattern for Daily Prayer

1. Evocation. "To bring to mind. Recap in your mind the Trinitarian theology of prayer. Ponder verses that bring to mind these truths. Read a traditional Psalm used at this time. Use a tested prayer of the church (such as from *The Valley of Vision*, *The Collects of Thomas Cranmer*, or Matthew Henry's *A Method for Prayer*.)
2. Mediation. Meditate upon passages from your daily reading that call out for more reflective reading and mediation.
3. Word prayer. Pray what we have read.
4. Free prayer. Simply pour out your heart in prayer.
5. Contemplation. Taste and see that He is so in our hearts.

Morning Prayer (25 minutes)

Approaching God

Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray. Choose from one of these scriptural invocations: Psalm 16:8; 27:4, 9-10; 40:16-19; 63:1-3; 84:5-7; 103:1-2; 139:7-10; Isaiah 57:15; Matthew 11:28-30; John 4:23; Ephesians 1:17-19; 3:16-20.

Bible Reading and Mediation

(Keep in mind that no one can do all of the following in any one session of meditation and prayer.)

To study the passage: Read it three or four times. Then make a list of everything it says about God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); list anything that it tells you about yourself; and finally, list any examples to be followed, commands to be obeyed (or things that need to be avoided), and promises to claim. When this is all done, choose the verse and truth that is most striking and helpful to you. Paraphrase the thought or verse in your own words.

To meditate on the passage: Write down answers to the following questions:

- What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?
- What does the text show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of? What false attitudes, behaviour, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth?
- What does the text show me about a need that I have? What do I need to do or become in light of this? How shall I petition God for it?
- How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?
- Finally: How would this change my life if I took it seriously; if this truth were fully alive and effective in my inward being? Also, why might God be showing this to me now? What is going on in my life that he would be bringing this to my attention today?

Prayer

Pray each of the meditations—adoration, confession, petition, and thanksgiving for Jesus and his salvation.

- Pray for your needs and pressing concerns.
- Take a final moment just to enjoy him and his presence.

Evening Prayer (15 minutes)

Approaching God

Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Bible Reading and Meditation

Read a Psalm, eventually working through the Psalter twice a year.

Prayer

Turn the Psalm into a prayer and pray it back to God.

- Think over your day and confess where you sinned or failed to respond as you should have.
- Think over your day and pray for people you met or heard about who have needs or are in difficulty.
- Pray for some of the more urgent and important needs on your heart.

A Starter Plan for Daily Prayer (15 minutes)

Approaching

Think of the privilege of prayer. Realize God is present. Ask him to help you pray.

Mediation

Read a Scripture passage. Discern one or two truths you learn there. Choose the one that most impresses you and write it in a sentence. Now ask: How does this truth help me praise God? How does it show me a sin to confess? How does it show me something to ask God for?

Word Prayer

Now turn the answers to the three questions into a prayer - adoration, petition, supplication.

Free Prayer

Pray about whatever needs are on your heart. Also spend time thanking God for the ways you see him working in your life and caring for you.

Contemplation

Take a moment to thank and admire God for what he has showed you today. End with a note of praise.

A Daily Office of Three Set Hours of Prayer

Morning Prayer (35 minutes)

“Prayer upon Rising from Sleep” (see "Daily Prayers" below)

- Read and pray Psalm 95.
- Do Robert Murray M'Cheyne Bible reading—two daily chapters.
- Choose favourite verses and do mediation (Martin Luther's method).
- Pray your meditations to God.
- Free prayer: Adoration, Confession, Supplication

“Prayer upon Beginning One's Work or Study” (see "Daily Prayers" below)

Midday Prayer (5 minutes)

- Read and pray Psalm 103.
- Paraphrase and pray the Lord's Prayer (Luther's method).
- Self-examination: Have you been prickly and proud or gracious and humble? Have you been cold and indifferent or warm and kind? Have you been anxious and stressed or depending on God? Have you been cowardly or truthful?
- Free prayer for the challenges of the day and moment

“Prayer after the Midday Meal” (see "Daily Prayers" below)

Evening Prayer (20 minutes)

- Read and pray two Psalms, working through the Psalter with a commentary.
- Confess and repent for sins of the day.
- Pray for the people with needs you met that day.
- Intercessory prayer for family, friends, opponents, neighbours, people you know with cares, burdens, and afflictions, the church in general, your church in particular, the needs of your city and community, the needs of the world.

“Prayer before Sleep” (see "Daily Prayers" below)

Daily Prayers Based on the Prayers of John Calvin

Prayer upon Rising from Sleep

My God, Father, and Saviour, since you have been pleased to give me the grace to come through the night to the present day, now grant that I may employ it entirely in your service, so that all my works may be to the glory of your name and the edification of my neighbours. As you have been pleased to make your sun shine upon the earth to give us bodily light, grant the light of your Spirit to illumine my understanding and my heart. And because it means nothing to begin well if one does not persevere, I ask that you would continue to increase your grace in me until you have led me into full communion with your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the true Sun of our souls, shining day and night, eternally and without end. *Hear me, merciful Father, by our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Prayer upon Beginning Ones Work or Study

My good God, Father, and Saviour, grant me aid by your Holy Spirit to now work fruitfully in my vocation, which is from you, all in order to love you and the people around me rather than for my own gain and glory. Give me wisdom, judgment and prudence, and freedom from my besetting sins. Bring me under the rule of true humility. Let me accept with patience whatever amount of fruitfulness or difficulty in my work that you give me this day. And in all I do, help me to rest always in my Lord Jesus Christ and in his grace alone for my salvation and life. *Hear me, merciful Father, by our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Prayer after the Midday Meal

O Lord God, I give you thanks for all the benefits and gifts you constantly shower on me. Thank you for sustaining my physical life through food and shelter; for giving me new life through the gospel; and for the certainty of the best and perfect life, which is yet to come. In light of all these blessings, I ask that you would not allow my affections to be tangled in inordinate desires for the things of this world, but let me always set my heart on things above, where Christ, who is my life, is seated at your right hand. *Hear me, merciful Father, by our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Prayer before Sleep

O Lord God, now grant me the grace not only to rest my body this night, but to have my spiritual repose, in soul and conscience, in your grace and love, that I may let go of all earthly cares so I might be comforted and eased in all ways. And because no day passes that I do not sin in so many ways, please bury all my offences in your mercy, that I might not lose your presence. Forgive me, merciful Father, for Christ's sake. And as I lay down in sleep to safely awake again only by your grace, keep me in a joyful, lively remembrance that whatever happens, I will someday know my final rising—the resurrection—because Jesus Christ lay down in death for me, and rose for my justification. *In his name I pray Amen.*

Pages 1-4 are excerpts from Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Timothy Keller, Penguin Group, New York, New York, 2014.

Pages 5-10 are quoted directly from that same book.

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