

Prayer Practices for Disciples:

Creating a Life with God



#SEE ALL THE PEOPLE

“We cannot disciple people that we are not in relationship with. Discipleship begins with relationship.”

Rev. Junius Dotson

General Secretary, Discipleship Ministries

www.SeeAllThePeople.org

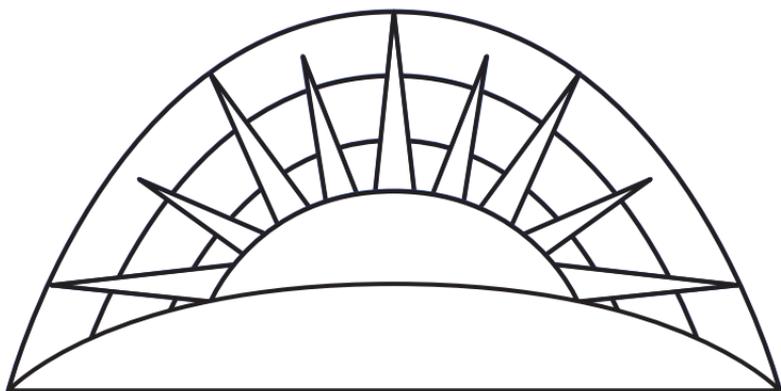
This booklet is a companion piece to:

Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations and Soul Reset: Breakdown, Breakthrough, and the Journey to Wholeness

by Rev. Junius B. Dotson

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A Morning Prayer

New every morning is your love, great God of Light, and all day long you are working for good in the world. Stir up in us desire to serve you, to live peacefully with our neighbors and all your creation, and to devote each day to your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

From *The Upper Room Worshipbook*. Credit: *The Worshipbook: Services and Hymns* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1970, 1972)

The Upper Room encourages you to create a life with God through prayer and spiritual practices that will renew your soul even in the midst of a seemingly unstoppable pace. This booklet offers favorite prayer practices used by Upper Room staff in the workplace, in worship, while leading retreats and training. Many have been published in Upper Room books and magazines throughout the years. We invite you to set aside some time for prayer and soak in God's warm light and love. Some of the prayer exercises will soothe the soul while others may challenge or even unsettle your spirit. But each will draw you closer to a loving God who longs to be in relationship with you. Enjoy.

— Your Friends at The Upper Room

Centering Meditation

When our minds become cluttered with thoughts and ideas, centering meditation—like breath meditation—keeps us focused on an intention: being still and quiet in order to turn inward and connect with God and ourselves. For centering meditation:

1. Assume a posture of stillness and quiet.
2. Ask God for a word or phrase, and listen for it in the stillness.
3. When your word or phrase arrives, sit with it and hold it in your mind's eye.

Freedom Statement

Today, I release my own agenda. I open myself up to the Holy Spirit and God's invitation to me through a sacred word or phrase. When it comes, I'll hold it—even if it's challenging—for Jacob taught me that wrestling always yields a blessing.

Opening

Be still, and know that I am God. / Be still and know. / Be still. / Be.

Practice

Engage in three minutes of centering meditation. Beginning with breath meditation as your foundation, find a deep and smooth breathing pattern. Ask God to send you a word or phrase, then listen. When you receive your centering word or phrase, hold it in your mind's eye. Repeat it over and over to harness your focus and consider its invitation. Rest in your word.

Closing

Be. / Be still. / Be still and know. / Be still, and know that I am God.

Daily Examen

God with Us. How did you feel God's presence during this daily meditation, if at all?

Gratitude. Offer thanks to God for giving you the breath of life. Give thanks for the ways in which you felt God's presence before, during, and after your meditation.

Growth. What challenged you today? What came easily today?

Hope. What do you hope tomorrow's meditation practice will bring?

J. Dana Trent, *One Breath at a Time: A Skeptic's Guide to Christian Meditation*. Used by permission. ©2018. Upper Room Books.

The Practice of Examen

The Prayer of Examen is a spiritual practice introduced by Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556 CE) that invites a deep inward reflection on each day as an exercise in noticing the movement of God, our connectedness to God throughout the day, and learning to discern the will of God. In the practice of *examen*, we seek and find God in all things of daily life. As we examine each day, we look for those moments when we felt close to God, which Ignatius describes as *consolation*. We then look for those moments in which we felt disconnected from God, defined by Ignatius as *desolation*. In both spaces we can seek God and hear from God about God's will for us, the truth about who we are, and be reminded that we are ever held by a good and loving God.

This week, you are invited to close each day with the practice of *examen*. Find a quiet place, and turn off your phone and any other distractions. Light a candle and invite God to be present with you. Take some deep breaths and settle into your body and into the quiet. Begin each practice by reviewing the day in your mind, paying attention to moments of joy, moments of confusion, moments of sadness, or moments of peace. Daily prompts for each day are listed below.

Day 1: *What brought you the most joy today? Give thanks to God. When did you feel most connected to God? Give thanks to God. Did you feel sad today? Share your raw and unabridged feelings with God. Then, sit in silence and listen for God's voice reminding you that you are loved and held in grace.*

Day 2: *If you could relive a moment from today, which would it be? Where was God in this wonderful moment? What did you experience or discover about the love and grace of God today?*

Day 3: *Jesus invites us to live lightly and freely with him each day. Did you feel light and free today? If yes, what was it like to walk unburdened through the day? If no, what is needed to accept Jesus' invitation to a light and free kind of living? Listen to God in the silence of your heart about what is keeping you from freedom.*

Day 4: *Reflect on your ability to give and receive love today. Was love easy or difficult to give away? Was love easy or difficult to receive? Look for God in these moments of giving and receiving love today and ask God to teach you more about God's generous ways of loving.*

Day 5: *Rehearse the day in your mind, pausing at each moment of gratitude to give thanks. Invite God to reset your heart, to clear away the clutter of guilt, harsh words, words left unsaid, actions taken or left undone. Let God's grace wash over the desolation and guide you to a place of consolation where you can always begin again.*

Day 6: *How is it with your soul? Listen to your body, to your feelings, and to your thoughts. Share with God how your soul is doing today. Then, listen for God's voice to speak to your heart.*

Day 7: *Reflect on the idea of wholeness. What images come to your mind? Do you feel whole? If not, what is keeping you from wholeness? If yes, how did you come to be whole, and what does it feel like? Give thanks for where you are right now on the journey and invite God to speak to your heart in the quiet.*

Junius B. Dotson, *Soul Reset: Breakdown, Breakthrough, and the Journey to Wholeness*. Used by permission. ©2019. Upper Room Books. Visit SoulReset.org to learn more about this churchwide worship and study series.

Ignatian Prayer Method

Think of the Ignatian prayer method—named after Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556)—as a virtual experience of the scripture where you read the scripture and then create in your mind a short video about what you read. Ignatius of Loyola’s remarkable imagination was responsible in large part for his conversion to Christianity. While recovering from battle injuries, Ignatius filled a notebook with his thoughts as he read about the life of Christ and the saints. There, he recorded noble ideas of what he might do with his life. These daydreams and imaginings formed the foundation of his future work, *Spiritual Exercises*.

With Ignatius as our guide, our imagination becomes a way to help us know and love God. As we read a scripture passage, we become careful observers of all that takes place. Giving free rein to our imagination, we become both watchers and participants in the story. We feel the heat of the summer sun, smell the dust as we walk along, and sense the desperation of the sick who come to Jesus for healing. And not only do we hear the words recorded in the Gospels, but we also imagine other things Jesus might have said or done. Imaginative prayer—the Ignatian Prayer Method—helps Jesus come alive to us.

In the Ignatian Prayer Method, you enter into the story to learn more about and participate more fully in the mind, the heart, and the work of Christ. As you read the scripture, reflect on questions such as these:

- What do I see and hear? What do I smell, taste, or touch?
- Who are the people in the story? What’s going on with them?
- If I were in this story, what role would I play?
- If I were Jesus in this story, what would I be thinking, feeling, saying?

Try It Out:

Pick one of the following scriptures and see where your imagination takes you:

- Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42)
- On the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-21, 28-32)
- Storm at Sea (Mark 4:35-41)
- Woman with Hemorrhage (Mark 5:24-34)
- The Tax Collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14)
- Jesus and the Awesome Catch of Fish (Luke 5:1-11)

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Lectio Divina—Divine Reading

One ancient practice central to Christian prayer is called *lectio divina*, or “divine reading.” In *lectio divina*, we begin by reading and savoring a short passage of scripture. Our inner posture is one of a listening heart with an unhurried expectation that God has a message to convey especially suited to our circumstance. We read and ruminate with the ears of our heart open, alert to connections the Spirit may reveal between the passage and our life situation. We ask, “What are you saying to me today, Lord? Listening in this way requires an attitude of patient receptivity in which we let go of our own agendas and open ourselves to God’s shaping purpose.

Once we have heard a word that we know is meant for our ears, we feel naturally drawn to prayer. From listening we move to speaking—perhaps in confession or sorrow, perhaps in joy or thanksgiving, perhaps in anger or hurt, perhaps in trust or surrender. Finally, after pouring out our heart to God, we come to rest simply and deeply in the wonderful, loving presence of God.

Reading, reflecting, responding, and resting—this forms the basic rhythm of *lectio divina*. God is present in you through the Spirit who speaks to you now in scripture and who prays in you and for you. Ask for grace to listen to what God says, then choose one of the short biblical passages here and follow the steps: read, reflect, respond, and rest.

1. Read the scripture slowly.

Watch for a key phrase or word that jumps out at you or promises to hold a special meaning for you. It is better to dwell profoundly on one word or phrase than to skim the surface of several chapters. Read with your own life and choices in mind.

2. Reflect on a word or phrase.

Let the special word or phrase that you discovered in the first step sink into your heart. Bring mind, will, and emotions to task. Be like Mary, Jesus’ mother, who heard the angel’s

announcement and “treasured” and “pondered” what she had heard. (Luke 2:19 NRSV)

3. Respond to what you have read.

Form a prayer that expresses your response to the idea, then “pray it back to God.” What you have read is woven through what you tell God.

4. Rest in God’s presence.

Be still and let God’s loving spirit pour out on you.

Try It Out:

- Do Justice, Love Kindness (Micah 6:8)
- God’s New Thing (Isaiah 43:19-21)
- Do Not Fear (Isaiah 43:1-2, 4)
- Let Your Light Shine (Matthew 5:13-16)
- Be Still (Psalm 46:10-11)

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Visio Divina

Another practice in Christian prayer is *visio divina* or “divine seeing.” *Visio divina* shares roots with the ancient practice of *lectio divina*. (*Lectio divina* calls for a slow, careful interaction with scripture through meditation and prayer, allowing a word or phrase to rise in our consciousness, a holy word to savor and examine.) Similarly, *visio divina* invites us to encounter the divine through images. A prayerful consideration of and interaction with a photograph, an icon, a piece of art, or other visual representation allows the viewers to experience the divine in a unique and powerful way.

You may practice *visio divina* individually or in a small group or worship setting by using a piece of art as a focal point for prayer. You can also pair scripture with the image in order to reflect on the scripture through the art.

Try It Out:

1. Pick out an image from a website: a photograph, painting, or icon.
2. Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the first thing you see. Focus your attention on the part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
3. Let your eyes now gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
4. Consider the following questions:
 - What emotions does this image evoke in you?
 - What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
 - Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.

5. Offer your prayers to God now in a final time of silence.

If you enjoyed *visio divina*, try Sight Psalms at **www.UpperRoom.org**.

Sight Psalms is a daily, online photo inspiration intended to help people reflect on God's presence in the world and in their lives through the use of images. Each day, a new photograph is posted to evoke reflection and inspiration within themes connected to the Christian year. A few words usually accompany the photograph.

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Walking Prayer

Every morning millions of people walk their dog or walk for exercise. Walking has played a role in funding many of our national and local charities. Charities sponsor nearly 40,000 fund-raising walk or run events each year. We also walk in protests, parades, or marches to shape public opinion, influence the political process, or to celebrate our heritage or identity. But, walking can also be a spiritual practice that can deepen our awareness of God's Spirit in our lives. The book of Genesis tells us from the very beginning, God wanted us to be faithful walking partners. (Genesis 3:8) The Bible's poets and prophets continually invite us to return to the God who requires us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly alongside our divine companion. (Micah 6:8) We can respond to these invitations by walking prayerfully along the paths of righteousness and by still waters that will restore our soul. (Psalm 23.)

Try It Out:

- Take a walk. Intentionally go somewhere you will likely encounter people: a shopping mall, a commercial street, a supermarket, or a park. Begin your walk by becoming conscious of your body and breathing. Then gently shift your awareness to the people and the objects or stores around you. Be curious about them. What catches your attention? What calls to you? Let the people, objects, or activities you notice become prompts for brief, sentence-like prayers. When you return from the walk, write about it. How did offering a prayer for the people and situations you encountered change your experience?

Thomas R. Hawkins, *Every Step a Prayer: Walking as Spiritual Practice*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.

- "Seeing the people" is a practice that will help you truly see and honor the people in your path. Walking to work or in the halls of your workplace with a verse of scripture will help you see people through the eyes of Christ rather than through your own first impressions. Try this verse as you go about your day: "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, NRSV) from the story of Jesus' baptism. Allowing that verse to

run through your mind can help you see all the people as God saw Jesus and as Jesus would see and relate to the people he met along life's way. The practice will transform your vision and your response; sometimes it will open you to an encounter.

Stephen D. Bryant, *Tending the Soul of the Congregation: Spiritual Exercises for Church Leaders*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.

Personalizing Scripture

As Teresa of Avila said, “Prayer is nothing more than an intimate conversation between friends.” God has begun a conversation with us in scripture. And through prayer, we can participate in that conversation and continue it. Personalizing scripture is an intimate way to bring the scripture message alive and relevant to your situation. The Bible contains prayers and canticles (songs) that give words for prayer and praise. Many, such as the Lord’s Prayer, the Magnificat, and the Cantic of Simeon, have become part of the common prayer of the church liturgy. Yet any of these may also give voice to our own joys, yearnings, and struggles. We truly pray the Lord’s Prayer when we take each phrase and make it our own, finding its truth reflected in our beliefs, needs, fears, and aspirations.

We can personalize a passage of scripture by placing our own name in it.

Try It Out:

1. Select a scripture from the list below or another scripture you have chosen.
2. Read the first line or phrase of the passage prayerfully and insert your own name, as if it were addressed to you.
3. Meditate on the words as they are spoken to you. What is your response to the reading? Write down your honest reply.
4. Return to the scripture text. Take the next line or phrase as if it were spoken to you. Follow the same process in responding to the message there.
5. Be aware that God may lead you on from what has been spoken to you in scripture. Respond to that leading and allow the conversation to flow naturally. For example, read Isaiah 43:1-4 as a basis for conversation with God. Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to guide this time of meditation and prayer. In your journal, start by writing out the verse, and inserting your name. Hear it as spoken to you in a personal way by God.

But now, says the Lord—
the one who created you, _____,
the one who formed you, _____:
Don't fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine. CEB

As these words sink in, what is God saying to you? Listen to that message. Write your response to God as honestly as possible. It may be positive or negative, trusting or doubting. God wants you to speak truth about how you feel.

Return to the next words in verse 2, again writing them personally to you. Continue this process through the end of the passage — God's words, then your honest replies. Allow the conversation to continue if that seems appropriate; depend on God's spirit to guide you.

Choose a Scripture to Personalize

- Joshua 1:9—Be Strong and Courageous!
- Isaiah 43:1-4—Do Not Fear
- Isaiah 43:15-19—A New Thing
- Isaiah 55:1-3—Thirsty for More?
- Jeremiah 1:4-8—God Knows You
- Jeremiah 18:1-6—The Potter and the Clay
- 1 Corinthians 10:13—Endurance in Temptation
- James 1:2-4—Testing Leads to Maturity

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Discover Your Breath Prayer

A breath prayer is a short prayer that you can carry in memory through the day. It is called a “breath prayer” because the Hebrew word for *breath* and *spirit* are the same word and because prayer is to be as natural as breathing. It expresses a deep desire of the heart before God over time. Begin by closing your eyes and quieting yourself. Remember that you are resting in God’s loving presence and that God cares deeply for you.

Imagine God calling you by name and asking, “_____, what do you most want?”

Answer God honestly with whatever word or phrase comes from deep within you.

Then choose your favorite or most natural name for God.

Combine your word or phrase with your favorite name for God to form a brief prayer of six to eight syllables that flow smoothly. For example:

What I Want	My Name for God	Possible Prayer
Peace	God	Let me know your peace, O God.
Love	Jesus	Jesus, let me feel your love.
Rest	Shepherd	My Shepherd, let me rest in you.
Guidance	Eternal Light	Eternal Light, guide me in your way.

Repeat the prayer for a few minutes, allowing the words to settle into a peaceful rhythm.

Try praying it during quiet moments in your day. Carry the prayer into daily activities such as household chores, taking a walk, or waiting in traffic. Pay attention to how God uses your prayer to reshape your perceptions and calm your spirit.

Companions in Christ: Exploring the Way. Used by permission.
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Befriending Silence

“In silence we are present with God who is the very heart of our heart, present with us, loving us from the inside out. We can try to define what we do and what God does in the silence, and how it relates. But I prefer pictures. This morning, my five-year-old daughter gave me a picture. I was praying, practicing my silence, and she awakened earlier than usual. Almost silently, she scooted on her bottom down the stairs and walked over to where I was sitting. I lifted her into my lap, where she curled up, putting her head against my chest. She didn’t ask for anything or say anything. She just lay her head on my chest where, I imagine, she could hear my heartbeat. I thought of the beloved disciple in John’s Gospel at the Last Supper “leaning on Jesus’ bosom” (John 13:23, kjv).

That’s what we do in silence—lean against God’s breast, listening to the heartbeat of love.” —Roger Owens

Try It Out:

As you begin to practice silence, remember these aspects:

- Don’t worry about doing it right. There are several approaches; the key is to try one and stick with it. Be gentle on yourself when you get distracted.
- Don’t judge your thoughts. Instead, simply let go of the thoughts by returning your attention to prayer.
- Don’t neglect a where and when. Practicing silence and resting in God requires a clearly designated time and place.
- If finding time for silence is hard, write a list titled “My Life Conditions That Prevent Silence.” What on the list seems easiest to change?

Roger Owens, *What We Need Is Here: Practicing the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.

Nature's Gift

*You shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

—Isaiah 55:12, NRSV

From the time of Genesis to today, the world around us reveals the sacred. Many of us see God at work in creation and can take a single flower, a stone, or a leaf and use it as a point of meditation. For instance, a single leaf can prompt consideration of life and death, our connection to our Creator, the beauty and complexity of the days, and the significance of our place in the whole of creation.

Take a few minutes to create a special space filled with nature's gifts. Gather small objects from nature such as a rock, flowers in a vase, pinecones, sticks, leaves, nuts, seashells, berries, fruit, or vegetables and arrange them on the table in an attractive way.

Look at the collection of items from nature displayed there until you feel drawn to one of them. Look closely at it, turn it, feel it, and think freely about it. After several minutes, ask yourself:

- How am I like this gift of nature?
- How am I different?
- What does this piece of nature reveal about God?
- What is the Creator saying to me through this piece of creation?

Return the item to its place. If you desire, consider another item.

Gerrie L. Grimsley and Jane J. Young, *Contemplative by Design: Creating Quiet Spaces for Retreats, Workshops, Churches, and Personal Settings*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.

Soaking Prayer

A soaking prayer invites you to simply rest in God's love. Soaking prayer is not a time for intensive intercessory prayer or Bible study. Lay aside all of that for another day. It is a time of prayerful rest and relaxation, so find a comfortable chair, a hammock, a bed, or place a blanket on the ground. Play peaceful worship music to help quieten your soul and bring your heart closer to God. Soaking prayer can last as long as you need, from fifteen minutes to an hour or more. If you feel exhausted, let this be your only form of prayer for a while.

Try It Out:

- Be aware of the warmth of God's love surrounding you. Imagine yourself in a refreshing pool of water or lying on the beach with ocean waves washing over you.
- Visualize a tree gently swaying in the breeze. Allow yourself to slowly rock from side to side, as if you were being cradled.
- Lie still and let God's light seep gently into every part of your body, just as water soaks into a sponge. Recognize that God's presence fills your entire being. Experiencing God's presence helps us love the Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul.

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Hanging Out With Jesus

Read 1 John 1:1-9. The author writes, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (v. 3, NRSV). As the disciples learned, fellowship with Jesus involved fellowship with all kinds of people.

Seek to enter more deeply into fellowship with God by opening yourself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Now suppose that the Holy Spirit asks you to spend time in the fellowship of the Son Jesus Christ.

Prayerfully imagine what it would mean to tag along with Jesus as he enters your situation.

Where would Jesus go? Who would Jesus be in fellowship with? And what would he do?

Now ask, “Jesus, where do you hang out in this church?...in this community?” Pay attention to what comes to mind. What qualities of fellowship stand out for you in those places? Record your thoughts.

Decide today to act on one thing Jesus might do if he were in your situation, as an expression of your desire to be in fellowship with him.

Trevor Hudson and Stephen D. Bryant, *The Way of Transforming Discipleship: Participant's Book*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.

Practicing Compassion

The complexities of the news break our hearts and weary our minds. At times like this, we need space to gain perspective. Catching our breath means taking a break. We need a time-out. We need to settle the turmoil within. We need to practice compassion with ourselves as well as others. Author Frank Rogers offers this advice in his book *Practicing Compassion*:

Change your location. Go for a walk, spend time in nature, find a quiet place to sit, take a drive, or take refuge in a sacred place.

Engage your body. Do yoga, get some exercise or a massage, take a long bath, go for a run, ride a bike, throw clay, make music, dance, or draw.

Connect with a trusted person. Visit your therapist or spiritual director, talk with a friend, confide in a loved one, have coffee with a mentor or spiritual teacher, seek counsel from your pastor.

Perform a spiritual practice. Pray, meditate, journal, repeat a mantra, say a breath prayer, walk a labyrinth, go on retreat.

Such grounding activities give us space. They bring calm to the agitated currents swirling around us. And with calm comes clarity. We may not feel completely restored, but we can at least see what tensions need to be tended. Each act of care—be it simple or radical—bears a gift for us and for others.

Frank Rogers, Jr., *Practicing Compassion*. All rights reserved. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.

Praying for The World

As Martin Luther observed, “Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance, but laying hold of [God’s] willingness.” As Christ-followers we have been instructed to pray and to lay hold of God’s desires for all creation. The practice of praying for the world is one way to do that.

Try It Out:

- Begin by taking a few slow, deep breaths, centering your awareness in the present moment. Ask the Holy Spirit to flow through your heart, mind, and spirit as you pray.
- Envision the earth as astronauts in space see it. In your mind’s eye, see the jewel-like orb: the blues of the bodies of water, the browns and greens of the land masses, and the clouds hovering around it all.
- Imagine the whole planet being surrounded with the light of God’s compassion and love for all creatures. Let this light surround you also as you join in the Spirit’s intercession for the world.
- Notice also individual stars of light within God’s light—those children of God who care, pray, and work for good in the world. See how those stars are so numerous that they also encircle the globe. Acknowledge that your prayers join those of all who also love God.
- Focus on the places on the planet where particular situations of need or trouble exist. Be aware of these specific needs while remembering that God’s light surrounds them all.
- Conclude the prayer with your agreement that “God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

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Body Prayer

Placing both hands on top of the head, pray out loud:

God, be in my head and in my understanding.

Placing both hands over the eyes, pray out loud:

God, be in my eyes and in my seeing.

Placing both hands over the ears, pray out loud:

God, be in my ears and in my hearing.

Placing both hands over the mouth, pray out loud:

God, be in my mouth and in my speaking.

Placing both hands over the heart, pray out loud:

God, be in my heart and in my feeling.

Placing both hands on top of the thighs, pray out loud:

God, be in my legs and in my moving.

Placing open hands one on top of the other in front of the body, pray out loud:

God, be in my hands and in my touching.

Placing both arms at the side of the body, hands open and turning outward, offering our life to God, pray out loud:

God be in my life and in my journeying. Amen.

Ciona Rouse, *The Way of Pilgrimage: An Adventure in Spiritual Formation for the Next Generation*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books

Praying with Children

ACTS Prayer

Adoration: I praise you because...

Confession: I confess that...

Thanksgiving: I'm thankful for...

Supplication: Please help...

Questioning Prayer

I wonder how...

I wonder why...

I wonder when...

I wonder if...

I wonder who...

My Prayer

Dear God, I am thankful that...

Today was...

I felt your presence when...

...Needs your healing and comfort today

I give you all the praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

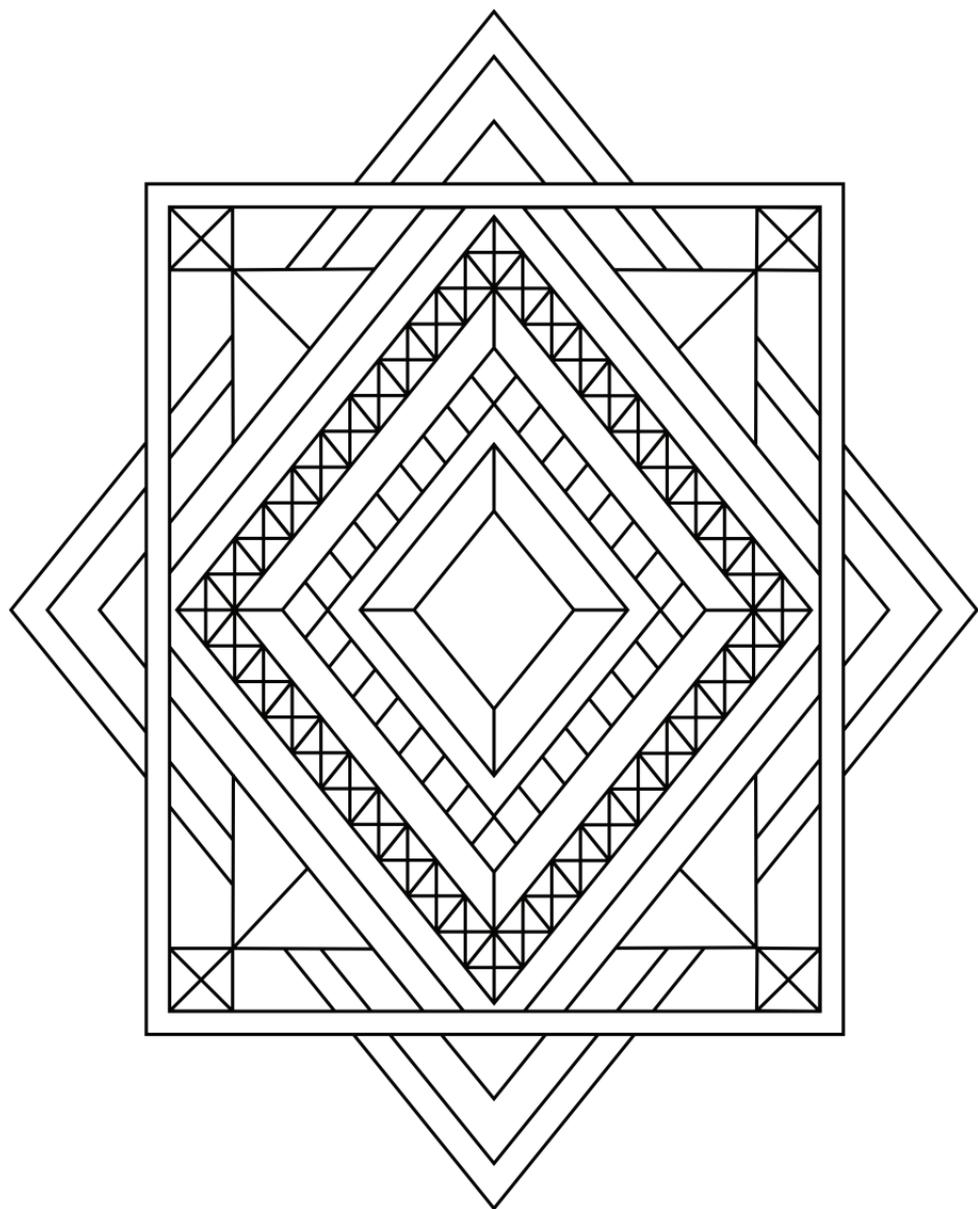
Jenny Youngman, *Scrambled Starts: Family Prayers for Morning, Bedtime, and Everything In-Between*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books

Contemplative Coloring

Did you know that coloring can be a form of prayer? Upper Room Book author Sharon Seyfarth Garner offers this advice for finding rest and renewal in prayerful coloring with mandalas.

1. **Everyone is an artist.** You are wonderfully made in the image of God, your Creator. Therefore, you have creative gifts embedded within you.
2. **Set aside time.** Designate time in your day to be with God on purpose. You may choose to mark your prayer time as an appointment with God on your calendar. Allow yourself to let go of your distractions and sit at the feet of Jesus to color and pray on a regular basis.
3. **Set aside sacred space.** You may find setting aside time for God easier if you set aside a space dedicated solely to prayer. Set aside a special space and gather items you will need for prayer—a Bible, mandalas, colored pencils, a candle, a journal, and so on.
4. **Lines are optional.** In contemplative coloring, the lines are merely suggestions. Color within them, color on them, draw new lines, and draw beyond the lines. Anything goes!
5. **No color is off-limits.** Pick the colors that attract you or hold meaning for you. Don't overthink color selection so that it becomes a distraction of its own.
6. **Leave blank space.** There is no need to "finish" coloring a mandala. You can leave blank space that you return to at a later time. The blank spaces may even become integral parts of your prayerful creation.

Sharon Seyfarth Garner, *Praying with Mandalas: A Colorful, Contemplative Practice*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.



A Night Blessing

Bless this night.

The light gives way to the darkness,
and another day is done.

Bless those I have met this day
and those whose faces come to mind.

Bless the smiles, words, and thoughts
that touched your creatures, large and small.

Forgive, O God, the sins of your servant this day:
The unkind word or thought,
the deed of which I am ashamed.
Forgive me, that I may rest in you.

Bless this house, this pillow, this bed.
May I lie down in your peace and love,
and awake again to be your hands and heart in the world.
I am yours, God of love.
Bless this night.

Beth A. Richardson, *Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me: Celtic Blessings*. Used by permission. © Upper Room Books.

About The Upper Room

The Upper Room is a global ministry dedicated to supporting the spiritual formation of Christians who seek to know and experience God more fully. From its beginnings as a daily devotional guide, The Upper Room has grown to include publications, programs, prayer support, online initiatives, and more to help believers of all ages and denominations move to a deeper level of faith and service.

Since 1935, The Upper Room has been self-sustaining through resource sales, participants' fees, and donor gifts. The Upper Room is missionally aligned with Discipleship Ministries, a general agency of The United Methodist Church.

Upper Room Ministries includes the following resources:

- *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide, available in 34 languages and distributed in 100 countries
- The Upper Room Center for Christian Spiritual Formation
- Upper Room Books
- Companions in Christ series
- Fresh Air Books
- Discipleship Resources
- **devozine**, a devotional lifestyle magazine for teens
- *Pockets*, a devotional magazine for children
- The Academy for Spiritual Formation
- The Walk to Emmaus
- Face to Face
- Chrysalis
- Discovery Weekend
- Journey to the Table
- Upper Room e-Learning Courses
- The Upper Room Living Prayer Center
- UMCPrays.org
- The Upper Room chapel, museum, and bookstore

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Spirituality is the experience of God's presence. Spiritual practices are those attitudes or activities that open a person to the experience of God's presence. The ones that first come to mind are prayers, meditation, reading the Bible, and attending worship. In recent years many Christians have been adding to the list so that we now think of a walk in the woods, sitting in a sunny window with a cup of tea, or even knitting as spiritual practices. Anything that allows us to be still or to focus our attention on the Holy One can be a spiritual practice. Anything we come back to day after day, anything to which we give our attention can be a spiritual practice. Washing dishes, walking the dog, even taking out the trash.

—Jeanette Stokes, *The Upper Room Disciplines 2010*

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