
JOURNEYS

Spiritual Formation Quarterly

Spring 2024



Teach Us to Pray

“I am always impressed by the fact that it is recorded that the only thing that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to do was to pray.”

Howard Thurman



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FORT WORTH
Spiritual Formation



JOURNEYS

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MEDITATION

Teach Us to Pray

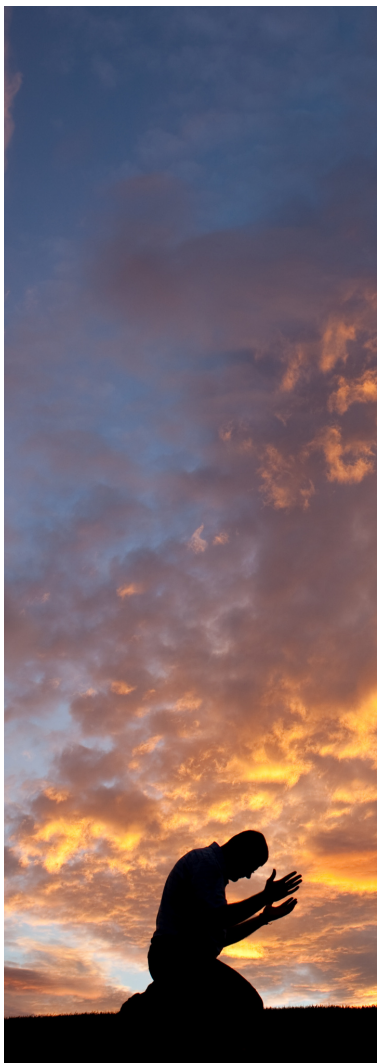
by Carol Toombs

“Teach us how to pray,” the disciples begged Jesus. And that question has resounded down through the centuries. Somehow, something that was intended to be the most natural of things has been made complicated, leaving would-be practitioners often feeling insecure in their praying. “I don’t know how to pray,” some say. “Am I doing it right?” others question. A 16th century Carmelite, Teresa of Avila, attempted to lead her sisters into a more natural state of prayer when she advised, “The important thing is not to think much, but to love much; and so, to do that which best stirs you to love” - wisdom we can still apply today, both to our intentional times of prayer and to a life that is lived prayerfully.

How do we express our love to God? That is the question and there are as many answers as there are numbers of us. Some will find spontaneous prayers of gratitude spring to their lips when they encounter beauty, grace, or truth in the everyday. Some will intentionally carve out time and space for being with God, nurturing that relationship through studying scripture, doing spiritual reading, or practicing silence and receptive listening. Some will enter into difficult, honest, heart-felt conversations with God, wrestling with self-will and learning to trust the intimacy God offers. And some will build Habitat houses, mentor at-risk children, distribute food and clothing, do justice, and visit the old, the sick, and the frail. All this, Teresa would say, is prayer when it is done in love - love for God and for all that God calls us to love. “All things are prayer if they are intended to be,” she declared, “for prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.”

Teach Us to Pray

(continued)



That said, throughout the ages there have been classical spiritual disciplines and methods of prayer that have aided many to live into loving intimacy with God. Lectio Divina (or devotional reading,) for example, opens one to receive a personal word from God in scripture, while Breath Prayer enables us to more nearly live out Paul’s instruction “to pray without ceasing.” There are many such practices which the cloud of witnesses has passed down to us and, as long as they remain, in Marjorie Thompson’s words, “windows transparent to God,” (rather than ends unto themselves,) they have been a great gift to the Church.

To learn more, check out the **PRACTICES** described in the pages that follow, and keep an eye on the *Penn Street Letter* or *Penn Street Online* for related Church School and School of Spiritual Formation course offerings.

PRACTICES

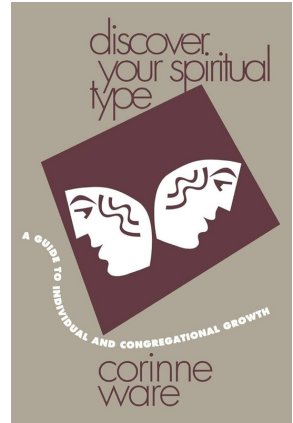
A BOOK TO READ

Discover Your Spiritual Type

Corrine Ware

Rowman and Littlefield, 1995

Ware provides a framework for people to name and understand their spiritual experience in much the same way that the Myers-Briggs typology provides a framework for understanding personality types. Readers explore four spiritual types - head, heart, mystic, and Kingdom - to help determine their type. By identifying your Spiritual Type, you can better understand how you learn, worship, and celebrate God, and what that means for the ways you pray.



WAYS TO PRAY...

One could say that there are almost as many ways to pray as there are people praying. The following are provided to help you in your journey of discovering your own unique prayerful relationship with God:

PRAYER JOURNAL

You can keep a prayer journal to write down not only requests, but also questions, struggles, and praises, too. Be creative. Put your prayers into poems. Draw pictures or doodles. Write a letter to God. Then go back later and read your journal entries. You'll likely see how God has answered your prayers. Reviewing your past praises will also remind you of God's goodness and love for you.

PRACTICES

BREATH PRAYER

Breath Prayer is based on the repetition of a word or short phrase that can be spoken on one breath- one inhalation-exhalation cycle.

To practice *Breath Prayer*:

1. Close your eyes and “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46.10). Be calm and open to the presence of God.
2. With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name, and asking, “what do you want?”
3. Give God a simple, honest, direct answer that comes from your heart. Write down the answer. Your answer may be one word, such as joy, healing, forgiveness or a phrase such as “help me,” or “Create in me a clean heart”.
4. Select the name you are most comfortable using for God and combine it with your answer to the question God asked you. This is your prayer.
5. Breathe in the first word/phrase (generally God’s name) and breathe out the second word/phrase (request or need). Examples include:
 - *Jesus, hold me fast.*
 - *O Lord, show me your way.*
 - *Abba, have mercy.*
 - *Father, let me feel your presence.*

PRAY THE NEWS

Read a news article, and then pray for the people involved. Pray for politicians and other national and community leaders who made the news; pray for situations; pray for discernment. Pray as you feel led while you read.

PARTNER UP

Find someone to pray with regularly. Plan to meet at a restaurant or other location once or twice a week. Get together before school or work, etc. Praying with a friend is great for personal accountability. It’s also a great way to take friendship to a deeper level.

PRACTICES

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is devotional reading of Scripture in which one reads, discerns, contemplates and prays scripture. To practice *Lectio Divina*:

1. Find a comfortable place to read and pray.
2. Invite the Lord to be present, and then read a Scripture passage.
3. Read the passage slowly several times, pausing on words or phrases that seem to “shimmer” or capture your attention. Ask the Lord to guide your thoughts as you consider what God might be saying to you through this Scripture.
4. Stay with a phrase that speaks to you for a while. Savor it and wait. Your subconscious mind may grasp something that will take your conscious mind a few moments to “hear” and receive.
5. When your engagement with the text has settled, respond to the Lord in prayer.

PRAY YOUR DAY (ACTION PRAYER)

With *Action Prayer*, you offer your actions to God as your prayer. As you pass through your day, give to God the tasks that you do and the reactions that you feel. Give God your annoyance, your happiness, or whatever emotion you feel because that is what you have to give. Do not waste energy pretending to feel the way you “should.” Instead, ask Christ to receive your disgruntled feelings and to reshape them. Some actions allow for multitasking, so it may be possible to think prayer words as well, but do not lose the language of action just because words are available. For example, if you play the piano tentatively, then offer God the tentative music that you are able to make. Let it be your worship. Similarly, if you are tasked with making photocopies, then pray that task.

PRAYER ON THE MOVE

You can pray while driving to work or school or while chauffeuring your kids by using familiar landmarks along the path to remind you to thank God, ask God, seek God, and listen to God.

PRACTICES

BODY PRAYER

The purpose of *Body Prayer* is to still yourself so that you can listen for God's voice. It is sometimes accompanied by verbal communication but is often simply experienced as spending time moving together with God. To practice Body Prayer:

1. Choose an activity that you will dedicate to body prayer. An example might be walking a labyrinth, or doing yoga, or weeding a garden.
2. Turn off your phone, pager, social networking site, email, etc. Quiet yourself and invite the Lord into your prayer time.
3. Whatever activity you choose, the goal is to free your mind from immediate concerns by using a single, repetitive motion to focus your attention.
4. Begin the activity, and then make note of any specific patterns or directions your thoughts take.
5. Offer your wanderings, your wonderings, your ideas, your feelings to God. Thank God for guidance, safe-keeping, and peace. If nothing happened, offer that nothingness to God as well, thankful for the chance to be still in God's presence.

It may take some time for you to release yourself from expectations of productivity. Allow yourself to share activities with God that assert no more agenda than spending time together.




PRACTICES

IMAGINATION PRAYER

Imagination Prayer involves reading a passage from Scripture, meditating on it, and then entering the scene through your imagination. To experience *Imagination Prayer*:

1. Choose a narrative passage from scripture and read it several times so that you know the story line well. (Gospel stories work very well with this prayer form.)
2. Quiet yourself before God and let your imagination work on the Gospel scene. Imagine the location. Who is there? What are they doing? What do you see, hear, taste, smell, touch? What is being said by Jesus and others? What actions are they involved in?
3. Ask Spirit to show you how you are to enter the scene: are you one of the main characters, a bystander, Jesus?
4. Take the place of that character and see the scene through the eyes of that person. What is he or she feeling, thinking, and/or doing?
5. Now let the movie roll. Don't worry if it takes off in a direction not recorded in scripture. Your unconscious may bring details, or plot twists, to light that can enlighten or instruct you.
6. Thank God for whatever transpired in your prayer time and ask God for clarity as to what he would have you take away from this experience.



*It is God's passionate
pursuit of us that
calls us to prayer.
Henri Nouwen*

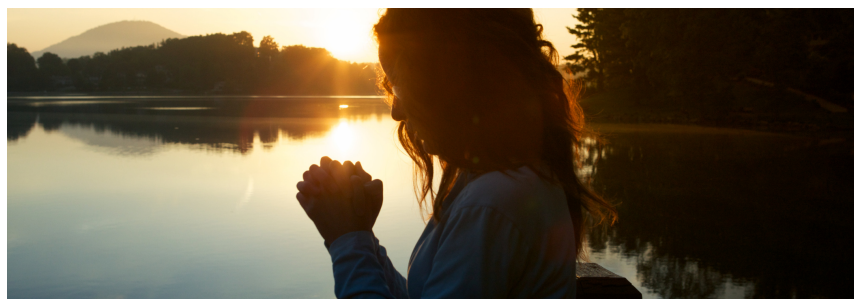
RETREATS

THE 2024 PRAY MORE LENTEN RETREAT

Available beginning February 14, 2024 – self-paced

Online: <https://praymoreretreat.org/2024-lent-retreat/>

Brought to us by the Catholic church, this online, self-paced retreat is designed to help you spend more time in prayer this Lent. Four presenters will lead you through 16 audio/visual presentations on subjects such as “Hearing God’s Voice in Prayer,” “Praying with Scripture,” and “Following Jesus this Lent.” Reflective study guides are provided for each presentation. You can register for this journey into the heart of God at <https://praymoreretreat.org>



MONTSERRAT JESUIT RETREAT HOUSE: SATURDAYS OF REFLECTION

Monthly (visit website for details)

600 N. Shady Shores Drive, Lake Dallas, TX 75065

Montserrat’s Saturdays of Reflection provide opportunities for prayer and reflection. The morning’s activity often consists of two talks on Ignatian Spirituality. In between the talks is time for silent reflection. The morning is also concluded with Mass. Saturday of Reflection sessions are offered monthly with exception of the months of January and July. The event always starts at 9 a.m. and ends by noon. Checking-in starts at 8:30 a.m.

Learn more at: <https://montserratretreat.org/days-of-reflection>

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPLORATION: SPIRITUAL FORMATION COURSE OFFERINGS

HOWARD THURMAN: WHAT MAKES YOU COME ALIVE?

Sundays, March 3-April 14 at 10 a.m.

Do you recognize the name Howard Thurman? Would you be surprised that in the early 1950's *Time* magazine named him one of the ten most significant religious leaders in America (a list that also included Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham)?

When the Civil Rights Movement took shape in the United States, Thurman was a nationally recognized human rights advocate, though he did not take to marching and mobilizing in the streets. He preferred to serve as a caretaker and spiritual advisor to those who did, among them Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, Marian Wright Edelman, and John Lewis. Dr. King was known to carry his Bible and a copy of Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* with him at all times.

Kay Love and Karen Hosch will facilitate this six-week study using video and several of Howard Thurman's books. Register at fpcfw.org/spiritualformation or by calling the church office (817.335.1231).

WRESTLING WITH FAITH, RACIAL EQUITY, POWER AND PRIVILEGE:


Sundays, March 24, April 7-May 26, 4-6 p.m.

How can we live into our responsibility as Christians to strive toward a caring, just society? In this course we will share our own experiences and explore those related by author Heather McGhee in her book, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (2021). In our weekly reflections we will seek to recognize the need for constructive change in our society that benefits not only a privileged few, but rather all of us in ways consistent with Jesus' message for the world, and with God's vision of Shalom that calls for justice. We hope that such sharing might lead participants to deeper spiritual and cultural connections and an opportunity for individual growth in faith.

Please join this nine-week course beginning with an "opening retreat" on March 24, and (skipping Easter Sunday) continuing through May 26. Mark Beasley and Martha Newman will facilitate this study using videos, dialogs that allow God to teach, as well as McGhee's book, *The Sum of Us*. Register at fpcfw.org/spiritualformation or by calling the church office at 817.335.1231.

A GIFT FOR YOU...

In each issue of Journeys, the back cover will include a visual of a scriptural verse or an encouraging quote for reflection as our gift to you. Cut it out and post it somewhere you'll see it often.



Then when you
call upon me
and come and
pray to me,
I will hear you.
Jeremiah 29.12