



TEN

WAYS

To

PRAY

TEN WAYS TO PRAY



Forward Movement is an official, non-profit agency of the Episcopal Church guided by a mission to create compelling content for Christian living. Since 1935 we have published the quarterly devotional *Forward Day by Day*, as well as pamphlets, booklets, and books that encourage and nourish people in their lives of prayer and faith.

This is a complimentary ebook of Ten Ways to Pray. Please feel free to share this with friends, family, or anyone you feel could benefit by its content.

“TEACH US TO PRAY,” the disciples asked Jesus (Luke 11:1). Jesus replied by giving the disciples the bare outline of prayer topics which we know as the Lord’s Prayer.

Christians flesh out this outline in various ways. Some find a way to pray that works for them and then recommend it for everyone. But people pray in different ways.

There is no one right way to pray. Most people gravitate to a prayer form that suits their temperament. Moreover, as we grow older, a prayer form that was useful in the past may need to be modified or changed. As we grow and change, so does our praying.

The purpose of prayer is to open ourselves to God so that God may bring us and the world into harmony with his purposes. The first step is simply to begin. Begin small, with a modest commitment of time, but make it a regular time, preferably every day, and stick to it. You can add to your commitment later. And explore different ways of praying until you find one that fits for you.

Here are ten ways to pray that have proved useful to many people.

1. Praying with Scripture

There are many ways to pray with scripture. Here are three:

- *Lectio divina*. This classical prayer form focuses for a half hour or more on one passage of scripture. Read the passage four times. First, read in a leisurely way, listening for a particular word or phrase that captures your attention. Then read the passage again, listening for something specifically for you. The third time, read prayerfully and allow the passage to challenge you. Finally, read it a fourth time, holding your word or phrase in mind and resting in the Spirit. See Forward Movement's tract "[Lectio Divina: Reading the Bible with Your Heart](#)."
- *Ignatian prayer*. Ignatius Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, tells how to enter into a biblical story and make it your own. Imagine the scene with all your senses—what are the sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes of this place? Who is there and what is happening? Where are you in the scene? Who is speaking to you and what do you say in response? Let your imagination flow through and around the scene.
- *The Book of Psalms* is a particularly fruitful prayer resource. The psalms contain every human emotion, even negative and hurtful ones. Praying the psalms can confront us with things in ourselves we hadn't known were there. Let the phrases of the psalm filter slowly through your mind. What is God saying to you through this psalm?

2. The Daily Office

Structured daily prayer sustains millions of Christians the world over. The Daily Office (also called Morning and Evening Prayer) has been a characteristic feature of Anglican worship since the sixteenth century.

The Daily Office is found in [*The Book of Common Prayer*](#). It includes scripture readings, canticles, and seasonal prayers and is read every day in many seminaries, monasteries, and parish churches. Prayers repeated over time lodge in our memories and sink into our souls, becoming part of our conscious and unconscious thinking through the day and night.

Individuals also find the regularity of the Daily Office appealing. I once rode a train for 35 minutes to work every day. This was an ideal time to sit quietly, Bible and Prayer Book in hand, and read Morning Prayer.

The Daily Office has been further condensed on pages 137-140 of *The Book of Common Prayer* for people with limited time. Forward Movement's [*Hour by Hour*](#) offers simplified forms of the Daily Office designed for individuals.

3. The Rosary

Praying with a [rosary](#), like praying the Daily Office, is a structured form of prayer, but it requires no reading or the flipping of pages. Persons without a book before them or who cannot read find the rosary a helpful way to pray.

A rosary is a string of beads or knots, each representing a simple prayer that can be said from memory. Holding the rosary in your hand, move your fingers from bead to bead, praying the prayer each bead calls for. There are many ways to pray the rosary. Most include multiple repetitions of familiar texts such as the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and others. Gestures such as bowing and making the sign of the cross can also be included.

Praying the rosary can allay anxieties and calm troubled nerves. The recitation of familiar prayers in a structured manner frees your mind from concern about how you feel and what to say. Those concerns are surrendered to God in the simple act of obedient recitation. Many people pray their rosaries while watching the news or sitting in a hospital room.

Forward Movement's tract, "[Praying the Anglican Rosary](#)" offers guidance.

4. Journaling

A diary typically records all the important events of the day, but a prayer journal contains thoughts arising from prayer. Passages of scripture, dreams, events in the news, and personal concerns and relationships may suggest things to write about. Your thoughts may be of thanksgiving, penitence, humor, confusion, fear, or anger at God. Hold nothing back, for God knows it all before you write it down. Be completely honest in what you write and let your words flow without boundaries.

You might write a letter to God or to someone in your life, a reflection on a scripture passage, a prayer, or just a string of words or questions. Sometimes a dialogue with God or between two parts of yourself ensues. You don't know where you're headed when you first open your journal and begin to write. Expect some surprises.

Keeping a prayer journal gets things out from within you and onto the page. This often enhances the power of positive thoughts and diminishes the power of negative thoughts over you. Your prayer journal is for your eyes only. Pay no attention to grammar and style. If you think someone else will read what you write, it could compromise your spontaneity and honesty.

Forward Movement offers a tract, "[Writing for Spiritual Growth](#)," that discusses journaling and other ways to deepen your spiritual life through writing.

5. Centering Prayer

Peace, stillness, quiet strength—many people seek these things through prayer but fail to find them because they fill their minds with words, their own as well as those of the Bible and devotional literature.

Centering prayer consists of silence, usually twenty minutes of it. It takes twenty minutes to put aside the chattering voices and nagging demands that usually fill our minds. Sitting quietly and comfortably, choose a sacred word or phrase (such as “Jesus,” “Thank you,” or “Praise to you”) or a symbol (like an icon or a lit candle). Clear your mind of everything else and focus on your sacred word or symbol. When your mind wanders, gently recall your attention to the sacred word or symbol. Do not berate yourself for your wandering mind—simply return to your sacred word or symbol when you become aware that you’re thinking about something else. Set an alarm to sound after twenty minutes so that you need not watch the clock.

To busy people, this may feel awkward at first, but for many people, twenty minutes of centering prayer once or twice a day brings serenity. Some find centering prayer with a partner or a small group helpful.

Additional suggestions may be found in Forward Movement’s tract entitled “[Centering Prayer](#).”

6. Body prayer

Kneeling, standing, and sitting in the lotus position are traditional postures for prayer. Gestures such as making the sign of the cross, genuflecting, and raising your arms in praise are also ways to pray with your body. We pray with our whole selves, not merely with our minds.

Our bodies are usually in some state of tension, even when we are unaware of it. To be completely still requires a conscious effort. It does not come naturally to us. Lying or sitting completely still prepares the entire self to receive the Holy Spirit. When I begin my daily prayer time, I do simple stretching exercises and take a moment to tense each part of my body and then completely relax it, finally sitting completely still while listening to the sound of my breathing. Only then am I ready to speak the first word of prayer.

David's dancing before the ark of the Lord was a form of prayer (2 Samuel 6:14). Try praying while walking, jogging, or bicycling. Walking slowly and prayerfully to the center of a labyrinth is an ancient way to focus the body and mind in prayer. How can you express your adoration, thanksgiving, penitence, and petition without words? Take a psalm or a familiar prayer and pray it with your body.

For additional suggestions, see Forward Movement's tracts "[Body Prayer](#)" and "[Walking the Labyrinth](#)."

7. Singing

“He who sings prays twice,” said Saint Augustine. Words set to music are far easier to remember than words merely spoken, and an appropriate tune can bring out nuances in a text that we would miss in the words alone. This is true of all kinds of song, perhaps especially of hymns. Frequent church-goers soon learn some hymns by heart and find themselves humming or singing them at home throughout the week. When walking or jogging, I sometimes pray by singing hymns from memory.

Most hymnals are full of appropriate hymns for praying. Consider, for example, “Take my life and let it be” as a prayer of personal dedication, or “Praise, my soul, the King of heaven” as a prayer of praise. When fearful or doubtful, sing “How firm a foundation” or “Jesus, Lover of my soul.” Try “Dear Lord and Father of mankind” when you need to repent and amend your ways. Or pray by singing a secular song that expresses your joy in the Lord or your gratitude for blessings received.

What songs speak to your soul and move you closer to God and to faithful living? Once a song is lodged in your memory, it is yours forever and you can pray it anywhere, at any time.

8. Praying with icons

An icon is a type of painting of a biblical scene or a saint, but you don't look at an icon—you "read" it, meditate on it, allow yourself to be drawn into it.

Unlike a work of art, an icon is not meant to be an original composition, but a faithful reproduction of a classic image. The painter—or "writer"—of an icon does not sign his work; icons are made solely for the glory of God. Paints and glues used in an icon differ from those used in other paintings, resulting in a porcelain-like finish that can give the impression of looking not at, but *through* the image. The figures are not naturalistic or realistic, but stylized, abstract, and symbolic, inviting the viewer to glimpse a reality from beyond this world.

An icon provides a focal point for prayer, a kind of window into heaven. By gazing meditatively on it, in silence or perhaps repeating a simple word or phrase, you open your soul to enter into the heart and mind of the figure portrayed. Icons are not prayed to or worshiped, but are a means of drawing us out of ourselves into union with God.

Praying with icons is central in Orthodox spirituality. It is based on the theology of the Incarnation: God comes to his people in and through material things.

9. The Jesus Prayer

“Pray without ceasing,” wrote Saint Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Many a Christian has found that a daunting prospect. But an anonymous nineteenth-century Russian pilgrim, taking Paul’s injunction literally, walked from Siberia to Jerusalem reciting a single one-sentence prayer 12,000 times a day: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Eventually the pilgrim stopped counting, for the prayer had become as much a part of him as his breathing. The pilgrim’s story is told in the devotional classic *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

Thousands of Christians have used this prayer (though most do not repeat it 12,000 times a day for months on end). The Jesus Prayer, or “prayer of the heart,” as this prayer is called, can be prayed with a rosary or as the sacred phrase in centering prayer. Many people adapt it to the rhythm of their breathing, saying the first half of the prayer while inhaling and the second half while exhaling.

Quietly repeating the Jesus Prayer focuses the heart and mind on the name of Jesus, which can make even a noisy subway ride or waiting in an airport terminal a holy time. The Jesus Prayer has been especially helpful to persons in great pain whose distracted minds cannot compose more elaborate prayers.

For more suggestions, see Forward Movement’s tract “[Using the Jesus Prayer](#).”

10. Prayer groups and prayer partners

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,” Jesus said (Matthew 18:20). There is strength in numbers. A prayer group consists of usually not more than twelve people who gather regularly to pray. Some groups have a formal structure; others pray in silence or extemporaneously. Confidentiality is essential, lest the group slide into the spreading of gossip or rumor.

The most natural prayer group is the family. Children easily learn the practice of prayer when they experience it with parents or other relatives. Many prayer groups begin with a small group of friends or colleagues.

A prayer partner is one person, usually a close friend or confidant, whom you trust and with whom you feel free to share your deepest concerns. Prayer partners pray with and for each other on a regular basis.

Most prayer groups and partners are in physical proximity to one another, usually in the same room. But in the age of cyberspace, prayer groups and partners are possible across wide geographical distances. The important thing is that the relationships be intentional, confidential, and faithful.



The Forward Movement staff gathers each workday at 10:00 am to pray for one another, the ministry of Forward Movement, the church, the world, and those who have requested prayer. The following prayer from [Prayers New and Old](#), slightly modified over the years, has been in use for seven decades. Forward Movement invites its readers and supporters to remember Forward Movement in their prayers:

A Prayer for Forward Movement

O God, we ask your guidance and blessing for the Forward Movement of your church. Use it, we pray, to open our eyes to your glory and to the opportunities that lie before the church to reach people everywhere with the good news of Christ. Grant that the leaders of Forward Movement may be both wise and daring disciples, and stir up in us the will to share joyfully in this work with our prayers and gifts. Let not our purpose grow slack, that the nations of this world may become one holy people under the kingship of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. This we ask in his name. Amen.

We welcome suggestions from parishes and readers on how we can be of more use and offer better service. Contact us with comments, questions, or concerns at **1-800-543-1813** or daybyday@forwarddaybyday.com

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