



# A Guide for Prayer

*from your friends at Wesley Memorial UMC*



## **WESLEY MEMORIAL**

A UNITED METHODIST CONGREGATION

1225 Chestnut Drive ♥ P.O. Box 5289  
High Point, North Carolina 27262  
336-884-2204

[www.wesleymemorial.org](http://www.wesleymemorial.org)

# Why Prayer for Me?

When was the last time you stopped your busy schedule and just *breathed* for a moment?

When did you last take a moment to *focus* your life, your day, or your vision for your future—beyond making a schedule or checking the calendar?

Have you ever let your racing mind, your broken heart, or your weary soul *rest* in something, or Someone, bigger than you?

This, and more, is why prayer is for you. When we take a moment to quiet ourselves, to ask for the presence of God and then linger there, to breathe deeply and calm ourselves, to trust and hope, *everything can change*.



---

When we pray,  
*everything can change.*

---



What you hold in your hands, either on paper or on a screen, is the fruit of a labor of love by Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church. We believe so strongly in prayer—its power, its benefits, its centrality to the Christian life—that we wanted to come up with a guidebook that will aid anyone who...

- 1. Feels a deficit in their prayer life**
- 2. Wants to deepen their prayer life**
- 3. Has lost the passion for prayer they once felt**
- 4. Wants to reconnect with the true meaning of prayer**
- 5. Wants to learn some new strategies or ways of praying**

At WMUMC, we believe that the purpose of prayer is to “open ourselves to a relationship with God and the mission of Christ.” We hope that, through reading and trying some of the techniques within these pages, you will be encouraged, inspired, and opened in just this way. We do not expect this guidebook to be exhaustive by any stretch of the imagination. Rather, we hope that it will be a jumping-off point. We hope that, through this little guide, you will be (re)connected to prayer and the rich inner life it offers. From here, the prayer possibilities are endless! As the Jesus character, Aslan the Lion, is fond of saying in C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, **we have only to go “further up and further in” to the deep and beautiful life of prayer to and with our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** Amen!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

An Invitation to Prayer.....	Page 4
General Guidelines for Prayer.....	Page 5
Ancient Prayers.....	Page 6
Prayers to Be Read.....	Page 10
Writing Prayers.....	Page 12
Spontaneous Prayers.....	Page 13
Creative Prayers.....	Page 15
Centering Prayer.....	Page 17
The Labyrinth.....	Page 18
Prayer Resources.....	Page 20
A Closing Word.....	Page 23



---

*Never forget that God is always already  
reaching out to you before you have even begun  
to reach out to God.*

---



# An Invitation to Prayer from The Reverend Doctor Jeff Patterson, Senior Pastor at Wesley Memorial UMC

You have opened a booklet about prayer. If you choose, before you is a journey into the arena of the Holy Spirit's work in the world. **Before you is an opportunity to do original exploration and have a personal experience of blazing new spiritual paths.** Prayer takes us to the dramatic intersection of this world and the world to come.

Methodist spiritual writer, E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973), once wrote that "Prayer is surrender, surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will." **Prayer is God's primary way of working in the world, and prayer changes us and makes us useable and fruitful as instruments of God's work.** The purpose of prayer is to make us a prayerful person that God can use. Prayer saturates our lives with the Spirit of Christ so that we can live as icons of Christ.

**Prayer changes both the one who prays and circumstances.** New Testament scholar Walter Wink (1935-2012) once wrote that "history belongs to the intercessors." Prayer places an awesome power in our hands. Prayer has accomplished more in history than we imagine.

**The Bible is filled with examples of the efficacy of prayer.** Here are just a few: Abraham interceded for Sodom and Sodom found grace, Isaac prayed for a child and he was granted, God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt in response to prayer, Moses interceded for the Israelites and God spared them, Solomon asked for wisdom and it was granted, Solomon asked God to fill the Temple with his presence and it happened, Elijah raised the dead and brought rain through prayer, Hezekiah prayed for Judah to be delivered from the Assyrians and they were delivered, Hezekiah prayed for healing and God granted him fifteen additional years, and Peter was freed from prison by the prayers of the church. Our faith is never in the fervency of our prayers, but in the God to whom we pray, a God who is able and willing to do more than we imagine.

**There are many different ways to pray.** Some people need structure to help them pray. Some people need freedom and spontaneity. Every person has to discover ways to pray that suits his or her personality. This publication can offer you an experience of prayer that can lead you into a rich, varied experience of God's marvelous gift.



---

Prayer  
changes both  
the one who  
prays and  
circumstances.

---



# GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PRAYER

## *1. Be Fearless*

There is nothing like kneeling before the God of the universe (and expecting to be listened to!) to give you anxiety. And anyway, what if you mess up? Say the wrong thing? Make God angry?

Take heart: God did not give us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). We have been invited into God's presence and assured that it will not kill us (see Exodus 33!), although it should certainly humble us (see Isaiah 6).

Here's the crazy truth: *God is even more fully in our corner than we are!* God longs to be in communication with us. The Bible encourages us to think of God as the truest love, the most protective mother, the kindest father. From these examples, we can be sure that God would never turn us away for praying incorrectly, or poorly. There is no such thing. God's main concern is to open the lines of communication!

## *2. Be Bold*

Some of us grew up with the message that we are by nature so sinful, so dirty, so broken, that God wants nothing to do with us, and only begrudgingly cares for us because Jesus asks God to. Nothing could be further from the truth! John 3:16 makes it clear to us that God's *love* drives God's relationship with us—not a begrudging sense of duty, much less anger or disgust.

Remember that the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus makes it possible for us to “approach the throne of grace with boldness” (Hebrews 4:16). So, whatever your past or present sins, whatever doubt or fear you may hold, whatever your history of praying (or not)—be bold.

God loves you and cannot wait to hear from you. God has always been reaching out to us, even before we ever thought to reach out to God.

## *3. Be Yourself*

Resist the temptation to put on stilted language or a veneer of perfection when you pray. God does not need your Sunday best; God only wants you—pure, essential, undiluted you! Talk to God like you talk to your golf or dog-walking buddies. Imagine yourself sitting down to coffee with God. Write God an email.

No matter what, be yourself: honest, authentic, and real.

# ANCIENT PRAYERS

## *The Psalms*

Perhaps the most ancient example of prayer could be found in the wondering gaze of Adam as he looked up into the face of his Creator after God breathed *ruach* — breath or Spirit— into his lungs. Believers have long wanted, however, something a bit more tangible, something we could memorize, write down, pass on.

The Psalms therefore became **the first prayerbook of the Jewish people**, and later, the Christians, as well.

In the Psalms you can find prayers of lament:

“Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord!  
Awake, do not cast us off forever!...  
Rise up, come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.”  
(Psalm 44:23, 26)

You can find prayers of rejoicing:

“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.”  
(Psalm 9:1)

You can find in the Psalms the very prayers Jesus turned to in his darkest hours:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”  
(Psalm 22:1)

The Psalms are our most valued resource in learning how to pray as our ancient fathers and mothers did, and as our Lord Jesus did.

There are 150 Psalms. If you read five Psalms per day, you can read through all of them in a month! Many devout pray-ers read through them every month, and find that the rhythm of the Psalms helps guide and deepen their lives.

### HELPFUL HINT FOR PRAYING THE PSALMS:

Sometimes you will find the Psalmist saying things you do not agree with. For example, the vengeance asked for in 137:9 is hard to stomach, and the “enemies all around me” that David refers to constantly may not be your present reality. When you come upon these hard or foreign Psalms, use them as an opportunity to pray for your enemies, past, present, or future. Alternatively, pray for all those in the world who *are* experiencing such anger, bitterness, or fear.

## *The Jesus Prayer*

Imagine you are an ancient monk, new to your order. You sit alone in your cell and begin to feel the joy of the newness of your calling ebb... Suddenly the, well, *forever-ness*, of your calling is sinking in. You look around at the walls of your cell, your home for the rest of your life, and the walls begin to close in, and your robe is becoming oppressively hot. You're finding it difficult to breathe!

The Jesus Prayer was composed by your forefathers and mothers for just such a time as this.

With a deep breath in, you appeal to your Higher Power:  
*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God ...*

And with a deep exhale, you confess your situation and ask for help:  
*... have mercy on me, a sinner.*

With a few moments of this repetition—the deep breaths in and out, the reminder that God is in control and will have mercy on you—you find your blood pressure dropping and your pulse normalizing.

This one-sentence prayer is a great relief to anyone in moments of stress, anxiety, despair, or panic. It comes to us from our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters, who have revered it for many centuries as the height of simple, deep prayer. Desert fathers and mothers as early as the fifth century used it, and it has been lauded by Catholics and Protestants alike as a helpful reminder, through its emphasis on breath, to “pray without ceasing”(I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

### HELPFUL HINT FOR PRAYING THE JESUS PRAYER:

If you get confused about the inhaling and exhaling, recall:

We breathe *in* the healing presence of God with the first phrase,  
and we breathe *out* our human frailty, fears, and sin with the second phrase.

(This is also a good prayer to pray during particularly strenuous exercise!)

## *Fasting*

In nearly every religious tradition, fasting is revered as the best companion to prayer. When you feel like you've become disconnected from God, or your spiritual life is off-kilter, fasting is a good way to...

- 1. Empty yourself of distraction,**
- 2. Remind you of your physical and spiritual needs, and**
- 3. Re-center your mind on God.**

1. By not focusing on our next “fix” of that which we are going without (i.e., planning our next meal), we free our minds up to think of God, instead. We also create a Pavlovian reminder for ourselves: Every time the tummy rumbles, instead of reaching for a snack, pray!

2. By going without something that is needed, we remind ourselves that we are not God—we are mortal, we have needs, we are not in total control of everything.



3. Resources are freed up through abstinence: Time and money, in particular, are freed up when not spent on food or alcohol. This time can be devoted to prayer or service. This money can be donated, perhaps to hunger ministries or addiction treatment programs. Through service and renewed spiritual disciplines, fasting helps us enrich and deepen our prayer lives.



---

*Through service and renewed  
spiritual disciplines, fasting helps us  
enrich and deepen our prayer lives.*

---



Traditionally, of course, fasting has meant abstaining from food. For a prescribed period of time, the individual refrains from some level of consumption— perhaps all intake is restricted, or perhaps water is allowed. Some people allow themselves only fruit juices; others only abstain from meat.

Your calling is personal and should be personally discerned; however, it is crucial to note that **the Church DOES NOT teach that God would EVER require a fast that would be detrimental to one's health.** For example, a diabetic should not attempt a fast that would put his or her blood sugar in jeopardy. Similarly, someone who has struggled with an eating disorder may not be advised to fast, lest it cause an unhealthy emotional or mental state to resurface.

That being said, **there are many ways to fast beyond food.** As mentioned above, you may be called to abstain from alcohol. In the twenty-first century, it would be beneficial for all of us to fast from screen time, media consumption, or carrying your cell phone. Pray and consider: What in your life do you spend time, energy, and money on? Might God be calling you to put it aside, “even for one hour”(see Matthew 26:36-46) to focus on your spiritual life?





## *Lectio Divina and Visio Divina*

Lectio Divina means “divine reading” and Visio Divina means “divine seeing.” So how is this related to prayer?

Reading or seeing “divinely” entails deep thoughtfulness and attention to detail. It means sitting with a Scripture passage or an image for a while—reading and rereading, looking and looking again—seeking out hidden complexities, asking ourselves questions about *content* and *intent*, and simply enjoying a carefully crafted text or piece of artwork. Both may be practiced either in private or communally.

The steps for Lectio Divina are as follows:

1. Select a sacred or meaningful spiritual text (for your first few times, we suggest you stick with the Bible, and choose a *story* as opposed to a section of law or prophecy. Perhaps the story of the bleeding woman in Mark 5:25-34, or the story of Isaiah at God’s throne in Isaiah 6).
2. Read the text through once.
3. Ask yourself/your group, or write down, **one word** *from or about* the text that stands out to you.
4. Read the text through a second time.
5. Ask or write down **one phrase** from or about the text that stands out to you.
6. Read the text through a third time.
7. Ask or write down **one sentence (or more;** this could become a prompt for more journaling or group discussion) from or about the text that stands out to you.
8. Pray about what you read and what bubbled to the surface for you. How does it relate to you and your life? What is God saying to you through this text?

The steps for Visio Divina are:

1. Select an image that is particularly beautiful, meaningful, or spiritual. This could be virtually anything—from an icon (we suggest Andrei Rublev’s Trinity icon to begin with—just google it!), to a piece of art, even to a photo of a sunset or your grandmother’s face!
2. Gaze upon the image. Hone in on the first detail that catches your attention. Stay with this zoomed-in detail for a minute or so. Let yourself wonder about this detail: What did the artist mean by including this? What *is* that? Why did it catch my attention?
3. Let your eyes relax to view the rest of the image.
4. Repeat steps 2-3 until you’ve exhausted all the details that catch your interest.
5. Pray or journal about the experience: What drew you into this image? How does the image make you feel? What does the image tell you about God? What is God trying to tell you through the image?

Lectio and Visio Divina are particularly simple and productive ways of connecting with God. They are especially good for those who like direction when they pray; both have clear steps and a goal. Dear Reader, if you are Type A, please consider these options!

### VISIO DIVINA RESOURCE:

Jan Richardson is a prolific spiritual artist. Check out her website (see the Resources section at the end of this booklet!)

# PRAYERS TO BE READ

## *The Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*

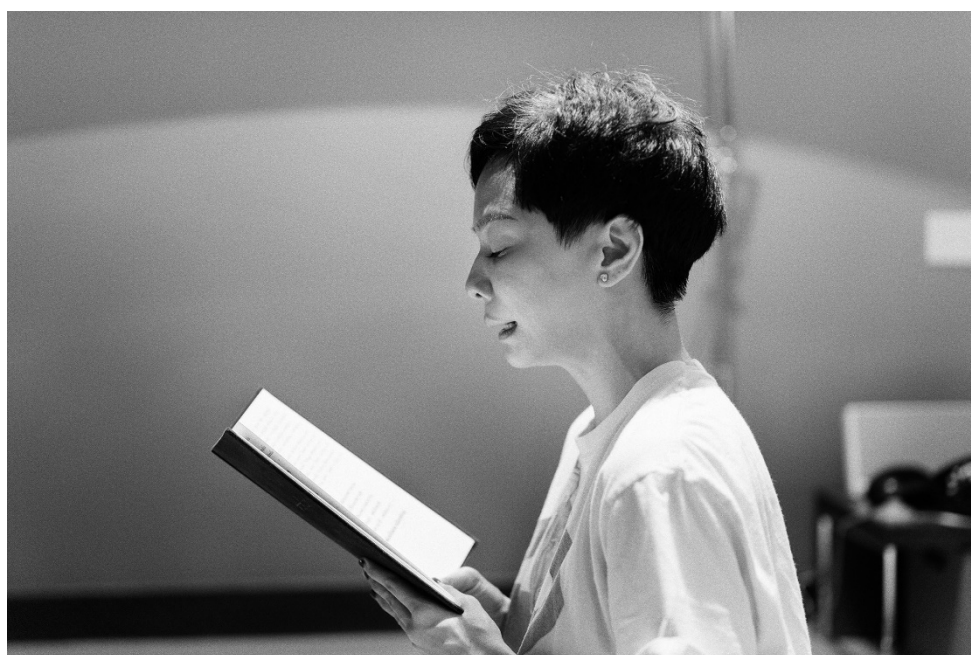
Few and far between are the Methodists who still use *The Book of Common Prayer* — to our great detriment! John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism, were brought up on this prayer book. Their mother, Susanna, likely read it to them and their many siblings as children, and later, as Anglican priests, they read from it constantly at gravesides, in church liturgy, and almost certainly in their own spiritual lives.

The BCP is made up of a number of different sections, some for individual use, others for corporate use. Pick it up sometime and flip through— you will find prayers for many occasions! Some of the language is so beautiful, even the “modernizers” who worked hard in recent years to faithfully update antiquated language could not bear to change them.

Consider this “Prayer for the Human Family”:

“ O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*”

Within the BCP, there are Morning and Evening Prayers, prayers for special days like Ash Wednesday, the entire table of the Lectionary, the Psalms, a whole list of prayers (called “collects”) for just about any occasion. There are prayers for the country, for conflict, for agriculture, for “the Good Use of Leisure,” for birthdays, and for guidance. Peruse these prayers and you’re almost certain to find something of use for any situation you’re in!

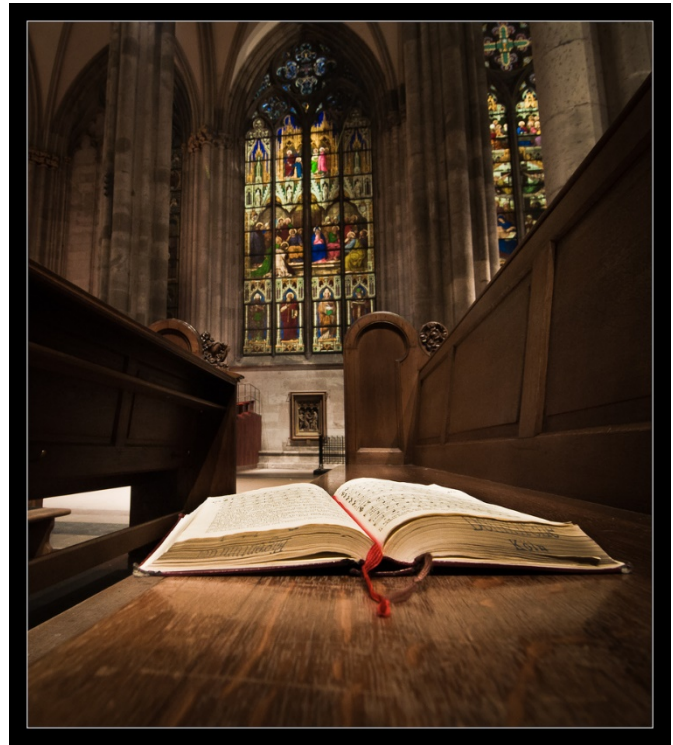


## *The United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)*

Have you ever opened to a hymn during worship, only to find that above, below, or beside it is a written prayer? These are not meant to be put to a tune; they are simply meant to be prayed—they are a resource for church bodies and for individuals.

Check out this prayer by Dimitri of Rostov, on page 466:

“Come, my Light, and illumine my darkness. Come, my Life, and revive me from death. Come, my Physician, and heal my wounds. Come, Flame of divine love, and burn up the horns of my sins, kindling my heart with the flame of thy love. Come, my King, sit upon the throne of my heart and reign there. For thou alone art my King and my Lord. Amen.”



And this one, a traditional Kenyan prayer “For the Spirit of Truth,” on page 597:

“From the cowardice that dares not face new truth,  
From the laziness that is contented with half-truth,  
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,  
Good Lord, deliver me. Amen.”

These prayers, sprinkled like delicious surprises throughout the hymns, are wonderful resources for anyone with access to a hymnal. Also, don’t shy away from using the hymns themselves as prayers. Look for the ones with second person language—“You,” “Thou”—and pray the words of the hymn to God.

### HELPFUL HINT FOR PRAYING THE PRAYERS IN THE UMH:

Next time you’re early to church or find your mind wandering in service, flip through the Hymnal in search of these prayers. They’re sure to center your mind back on the business of worship!

# WRITING PRAYERS

Some of us find it helpful to write our prayers.

Whether it's *Journaling Prayers* like Flannery O'Connor did (see Resources section for her *A Prayer Journal*), using the old-fashioned *P.R.A.Y. Model*, or simply making a list of things you're thankful for, writing down your prayers can be very helpful in a number of ways.

First, it allows you to organize your thoughts instead of silently or verbally rambling, as some of us tend to do! Second, it allows you to read back over your prayer, either immediately or in the years to come. Immediate re-reading provides clarity on your true feelings and needs in the moment. Re-reading in later weeks, months, or years allows you to revisit old concerns or joys and reflect on how God answered your prayers.

## THE P.R.A.Y. MODEL:

P-Praise God  
R- Repent of your sins  
A- Ask for help  
Y-Yield to God's will.

One method for writing prayers that can help you be organized, have good flow, and experience

theological richness, is to write in a *Trinitarian* formula. In this method, you would write your prayer in three sections (a section can be a sentence, a paragraph— whatever you feel!).

- The first section is addressed to the First Person of the Trinity— God the Parent. Remember and name God as a Father, the good Creator and Sustainer of all things. Tell God the things you're thankful for in your life and in creation, and how nice it is to remember that you are held in God's great power. Rest in the peace of "leaning on the everlasting arms" of God our Parent.
- The second section is addressed to the Second Person of the Trinity— Jesus the Son, our Savior, Brother, and Lord. Confess that you have not always allowed Jesus to be the Lord of your life. Remembering his great love for us, tell Jesus all that is worrying you. Ask for his help, his healing— he is the Great Physician, after all! Name all that is weighing heavily on your heart and ask Jesus to wrap all these concerns into his loving embrace.
- The final section is addressed to the Third Person of the Trinity— the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, our Advocate, our Ever-Present Help. Ask the Spirit for continued guidance and strength. Reflect gratefully on its presence. Plead for renewed faith, for ever-deepening love, and for divine mercy.

Following this formula can deepen our faith in the doctrine of the Trinity and remind us that there is more to prayer than just asking for what we need or want—there is also thanksgiving and confession, guidance and freedom.

# SPONTANEOUS PRAYERS



We've all met that person who can pray the most beautiful, meaningful prayers at the drop of a hat. Whether it's the blessing over Thanksgiving dinner or the closing prayer at a committee meeting, who among us hasn't listened jealously, thinking, "Why is it so easy for them and so hard for me?!"

Just like public speaking, knitting, or swimming, some of us are more naturally gifted at spontaneous prayer than others. But, take heart, it is a skill that can be developed! Even if you do not consider yourself among the gifted, there are techniques that can aid you in upping your spontaneous (also known as *extemporaneous*) prayer game.

Don't forget: *there is really no wrong way to pray*. As long as you are addressing God, and speaking out of the true and earnest love in your heart, you can't go too far afield.

## *The Basics*

- Address God in whatever way feels most natural to you. Some of us gravitate toward the traditional "Father God," or "O Lord." Others will prefer a more familiar "Jesus" or "Abba." Some have even been known to greet God-- "Good morning, God!"-- or address God with the tone that fits the moment-- "Listen, Lord," was a familiar greeting at the beginning of the prayers of the spiritual poet named Said (pronounced *saiy-EED*).
- Tell God what's going on. Certainly God knows even better than we do the complexities of the moment, but it is helpful for *us* if we name the situation. Never forget that prayer is not only directed at God, but also to ourselves and the people listening to us-- it can have impacts on many levels!
- Ask God for what you need. Whether it's immediate help or healing, a blessing or traveling mercies, a new direction or guidance, or simply to go from this meeting in peace, give it to God straight. Don't be ashamed to ask God for help-- not ever.
- Amen. Some folks will tell you that there's a magic formula-- "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"-- or that you at least need to name Jesus before you sign off. While these things are advisable, we don't believe they are required for your prayer to reach the ears of God. Consider the prayers in *The Book of Common Prayer* or the *United Methodist Hymnal*. Many of those end with simply "Amen." Take care not to get caught up in legalism that says God won't listen to you if your words aren't perfect-- God delights in listening, and who are we to say that any word or lack thereof will stop God's mercies from reaching us?



## *Breath Prayers*

Breath prayers are good ways to get used to praying aloud, or spontaneously. The basic concept is that your prayer will be the length of a breath.

Some people choose a breath prayer that accompanies them their whole lives long. The Jesus Prayer is a time-honored version of a breath prayer, which you may choose to pray all your life (for more information on the Jesus Prayer, see the chapter “Ancient Prayers”).

Others create one for use throughout a specific season of their life.

For example, someone living with cancer may choose to repeat consistently:

“Great Physician, heal me, body and soul. Amen.”

An expecting mother might breathe a prayer like this one:

“Mothering God, remember my baby and me.”

A quick online search will reveal many breath prayers to choose from, or on which to base yours. Getting into the habit of praying breath prayers will help you to apply quick, easy prayers to the moment—making it easier for you to pray richly and deeply when called upon by God or by a sister or brother in need.

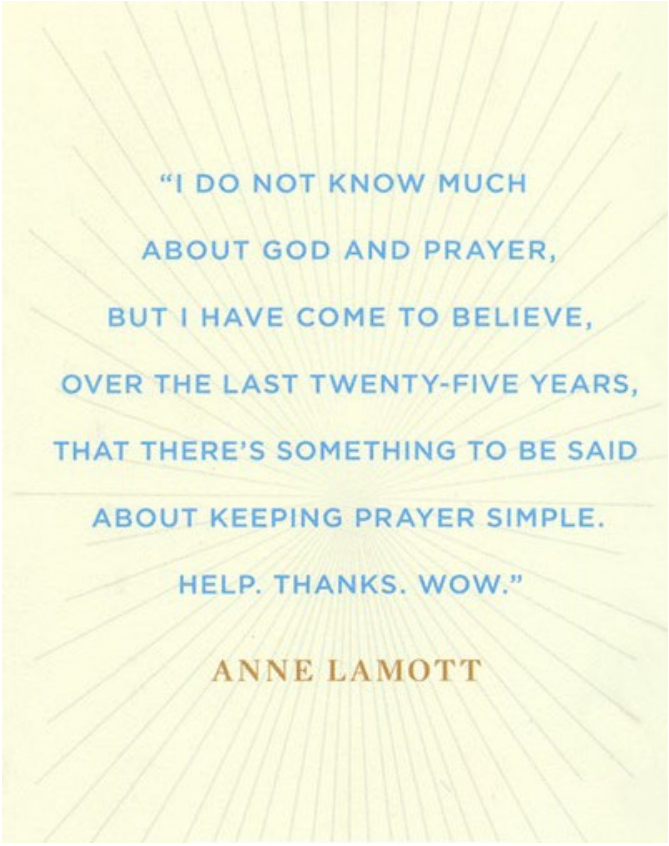
## *Help, Thanks, Wow*

Some of us are familiar with the works of Anne Lamott. Author, sober woman, mother, grandmother, and slightly-irreverent, Anne is a deep and beautiful voice in the world’s spiritual literature. In 2012, she published a New York Times best-selling book entitled *Help, Thanks, Wow*, in which she declares that, for her, there are three essential prayers. You guessed it:

“Help,” “Thanks,” and “Wow.”

If ever you are called upon to pray a spontaneous prayer—for a friend in need, in a public setting, over your child at bedtime—consider this three-fold formula. **Ask for help** in what is needed; **offer thanks** for the present blessings; and remember to **be amazed** at God’s great love for us, at a sunset, at the simple joy of hands held in faithful prayer.

You can’t go wrong with help, thanks, or wow!



“I DO NOT KNOW MUCH  
ABOUT GOD AND PRAYER,  
BUT I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE,  
OVER THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS,  
THAT THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID  
ABOUT KEEPING PRAYER SIMPLE.  
HELP. THANKS. WOW.”

ANNE LAMOTT

# CREATIVE PRAYERS

As many grains of sand on the beach and stars in the sky-- so too are the number of ways to pray. Endlessly, folks are coming up with new and creative ways to *connect deeply and intimately with God* (which is essentially what prayer amounts to!).

## *Prayer Beads*

### POPE FRANCIS'S FIVE FINGER/BEAD PRAYER:

Use each finger on one hand, or bead on a string, to pray for:

1. Loved Ones
2. Teachers, Healers, and Mentors
3. Leaders and those in Authority over us
4. The Sick and the Weak
5. Ourselves

Ancient as they are, prayer beads are a very creative method for praying. Monks and nuns who prayed prescribed numbers of prayers began using them as a way to keep count, many centuries ago. Rosaries are used by Catholics to pray certain numbers of "Hail Mary" prayers, interspersed (as signaled by differing beads) with repetitions of the Lord's Prayer.

We Protestants are not in the habit of praying for intercession from Mother Mary (although there is no prohibition against speaking with the saints!), but we can still use prayer beads to our benefit. Some people compose strings of beads to remind them of people for whom they wish to pray-- one bead for each person. Some people wear elastic

strings of five or so beads to remind them to pray for certain people or groups of people (see Pope Francis's suggestion).

There are many online tutorials for making prayer beads, and from time to time Wesley Memorial UMC offers workshops.

***Bible Journaling*** is an artistic means of prayer by which you center on a passage or line of Scripture and either journal or draw based on what this Scripture is saying to you. A number of "Bible Journaling" Bibles are available to purchase. They have wide margins for your written or drawn artistic reflections on each page of Scripture.



---

*Art is a means of connecting, not only with our audience (in this case, God), but also with ourselves. Artistic prayer is a great way to accomplish this.*

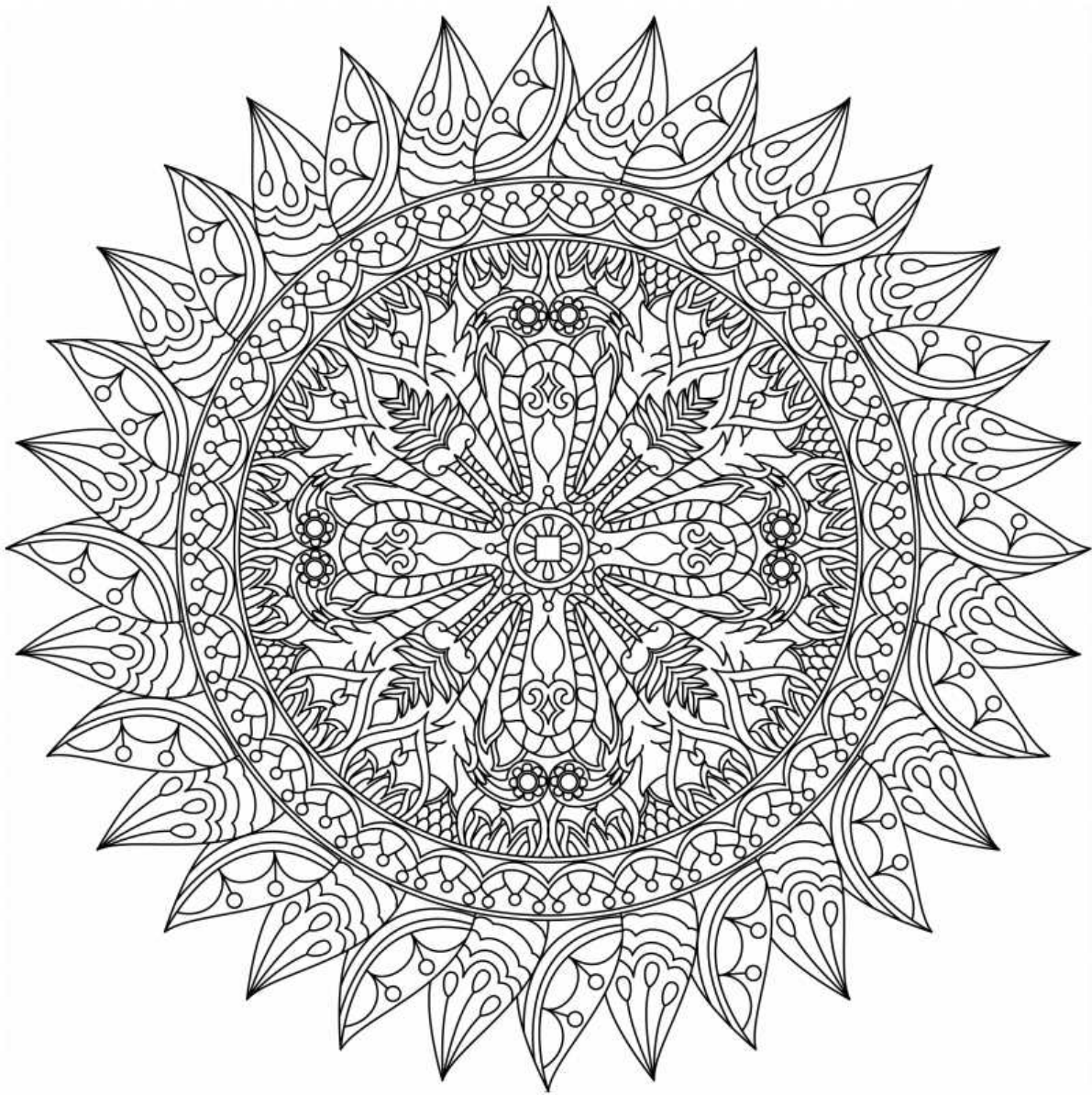
---





**Coloring** and **Doodling** for adults and children is coming back into fashion. Many devotional coloring books are available that offer meditations from Scripture or popular devotionals. While you splash the pages with color or swirl your pen in angry zig-zags or peaceful swirls, talk to God. Pour out your emotions, your concerns, your thanks, and your hopes and dreams. You may step back from a page and realize you have cathartically released a great deal of anxiety into the hands of God. Or you may step back and realize you're still hurting or angry— that's okay, too!

Color the following mandala as a calming practice. Talk to God about the things that are in the center of your life, and the things that are approaching the edges. Consider: How would you like to reorder your priorities?



# CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer is a very ancient and ecumenical practice best described by Father Thomas Keating. Centering Prayer, very simply, is

*a posture of listening to the Spirit and resting in the Spirit.*

In Centering Prayer, silence is worth more than gold. The goal is surrendering our racing minds to the restful peace of God, deepening our relationship with God, and listening for God's voice—and being okay with not hearing it!

Here are the basics:

1. Find a place of silence and peace, and sit down with your eyes closed.
2. Quiet your mind and open your heart. It may help to quite literally imagine soothing your mind to a place of quietness, and to imagine your heart opening like a flower in spring, petal by petal, as it turns toward the warm sun.
3. Choose a “sacred word” to focus on. Perhaps this word is “grace,” or “holy,” or even simply, “Jesus.” Repeat this word silently to yourself again and again. Let it become the center of your mind.
4. When you become aware of a thought other than your sacred word, let it go. Try not to be frustrated. Think of it like a cloud passing in the sky; you may notice it, but you need not chase it. Always return to your sacred word.
5. Allow yourself to be drawn, by the silence and the sacredness of your increasingly centered mind, to a deeper connection to God.

And... that's it! Most folks practice this for 20 minutes at a time. This may be a handy way to spend a portion of your lunch hour (if you choose to practice in the early morning or late evening, beware: you may find yourself drifting off!).

One of the most freeing and illuminating things about Centering Prayer is that *it is asking nothing of God except presence, and it asks nothing of us except presence*. It forces us to see our prayer life, and our relationship with God, not as a way of getting something we want, but as a true relationship—comfortably sitting in silence with the One you love and who loves you.

## USE TECHNOLOGY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE!

A group called Contemplative Outreach has developed a FREE Contemplative Prayer App for your smartphone. In your Appstore, search “Contemplative Outreach Contemplative Prayer”—you'll find it!

Centering prayer helps us see God's love more purely than many other types of prayer.

# THE LABYRINTH

The Labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool, used by people of many religions. In Christianity, the labyrinth is seen as an allegory for the spiritual life— that long and circuitous journey toward the center, the heart, the soul, or God.



The Labyrinth pictured here is a drawing of the labyrinth on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France. Every year, pilgrims come to the labyrinth to walk its stone path and sit in solemn contemplation in its heart, which is designed to look like a flower— specifically a rose, representing Jesus in ancient symbology.

Whether you print out a labyrinth to trace with your finger or find one nearby to walk, **traveling through a labyrinth can have a calming effect on the mind and body.**

Some thoughts for reflection upon the use of a labyrinth:

1. Unlike a maze, the labyrinth has no dead ends. It will never fool you. Stay on the path and it is *impossible* to get lost. How is this like and unlike life with God?
2. Also unlike a maze, there is no end to the labyrinth. There is no exit, only the entrance, the center, and then returning by the way you came. What does this say to you about the spiritual life? What comfort can you find in knowing that there is no finish line, only deeper and deeper movement?
3. Often the labyrinth's switchbacks cause you to think you are nearly at the center, only to find yourself carried back into the outer rings. Looking back on your spiritual life, can you recall a time you thought you'd "made it," only to find yourself knocked off your metaphorical high horse (see the life of Paul, especially Acts 9)? How do humility, trust, and patience play similar roles in the labyrinth and the spiritual life?
4. When walking the labyrinth with others, you may be irritated by someone going far faster than you, or blocking your progress with their slow pace. What can we learn from this about comparing our spiritual "progress" with that of other pilgrims? Practice patience and calmness when you are sharing the labyrinth with others.
5. Many labyrinths, like those made of canvas, require bare or stockinged feet. Where are feet mentioned in Scripture (Exodus 3:1-17; John 13:1-17)? How can we be more aware of the holy ground on which we are walking?

#### LOCAL LABYRINTHS:

- High Point University, outside the Chapel
- High Point Regional Hospital, 5<sup>th</sup> floor
- The Western NC Annual Conference has portable canvas labyrinths you may rent to use with your Unity Group, Journey Group, or Sunday School class. WMUMC rents these for church use from time to time.

# PRAYER RESOURCES

This guide is meant only as a refresher or beginner's look into the wide (and ever-widening!) world of prayer. We hope that you continue to delve deeply into this life-changing spiritual discipline and find the means of prayer that fits your personality and your life. The following resources may be helpful as you continue your study and practice.

- *This Day: A Wesleyan Way of Prayer*, published by Abingdon Press
- *The Book of Common Prayer*, published by the Episcopal Church
- *The Book of Common Prayer for Ordinary Radicals* by Shane Claiborne, Enuma Okoro, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

\*A particularly good choice for youth, college students, and young adults.

- *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle
- *Celtic Daily Prayer*, published by the Northumbria Community
- *Prayers Plainly Spoken* by Stanley Hauerwas
- *Guerrillas of Grace* by Ted Loder
- *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth* by Walter Brueggemann
- *A Prayer Journal* by Flannery O'Connor
- *Help, Thanks, Wow* by Anne Lamott
- The Painted Prayerbook at [www.janrichardsonimages.com](http://www.janrichardsonimages.com) (yearly subscription)
- *Jesus Calling* and *God Calling* by Sarah Young
- *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers
- *A Guide to Prayer for All Who Walk with God* by Job, et al.
- *The Upper Room*, published monthly
- *Every Moment Holy* by Douglas Kaine McKelvey
- (Add your own below!)
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-

# NOTES

---

# NOTES

---



# A CLOSING WORD

Dear Reader,

It is our most sincere hope that this Prayer Guide has been, and will continue to be, a resource for you to engage more deeply and intimately with the God who is always reaching out to you even before you have begun to reach out to Him. We also hope that this book, precisely because it is not exhaustive, will draw you to have more curiosity, questions, and interest in the many, many ways to pray.

We also hope that this booklet will draw you into a community of prayer. Whether it is with us at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, or with any of our sister churches or religious institutions, prayer is at its best when it is done in a group. *Not* because it works better that way, but because it works *on us* better that way. There is perhaps nothing more powerful than hearing a great chorus of voices reciting the Lord's Prayer alongside your own voice, or sitting in small group with someone as they pray for you. There are also elements of deep worship and prayer accessible to us in communal worship that we do not have access to when we are alone: the sacraments, communion and baptism, are two of the greatest of these gifts, found only in communal worship. Thus we encourage you, reach out, or reach deeper, into a faith community to find ways you can plug into prayer ministries, small groups, or simply worship.

If you would like help navigating the wide world of prayer, or if you have questions about prayer you'd like answered by a pastor, or if, by the end of this booklet, you find yourself asking some hard questions about faith, please reach out to us here at Wesley Memorial UMC. 24/7, 365 days a year, you can reach someone by calling **336-884-2204**. Please also consider emailing our Senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. Jeff Patterson, at [jpatterson@wesleymemorial.org](mailto:jpatterson@wesleymemorial.org).

Every blessing from,  
The WMUMC Adult Spiritual Formation Team





## **WESLEY MEMORIAL**

A UNITED METHODIST CONGREGATION

1225 Chestnut Drive ♥ P.O. Box 5289  
High Point, North Carolina 27262  
336-884-2204

[www.wesleymemorial.org](http://www.wesleymemorial.org)