



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich

Living Faith in Suffolk



Living Prayer 2

Images

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Living Prayer 2 is one of the Living Faith in Suffolk resources produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and available on www.cofesuffolk.org

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Introduction

Living Prayer 2 is a Living Faith in Suffolk course for people who want to explore some different approaches to prayer. Maybe you simply want to extend your own skills in prayer, or be able to share with others in developing prayer, as individuals and together.

This is a six week course for groups. The first session introduces the reality that because human beings are not all the same, our preferred styles of prayer may be different from one another. The next four sessions give attention to and experience of four different approaches to prayer. These sessions can be done in any order. The final session gives opportunity for reflection on what has been valuable and an experience of praying together as the diverse people we are.

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The material has a rhythm that encourages the basic habits of living faith, through attending to God, to each other and to the world beyond the group.

For facilitators

- Each session should last around 90 minutes overall including the settling down and welcome. The Receiving, Reflecting and Responding sections are the core of each session, except in Session 6 where the Responding and Returning will take the most time.
- If sessions 2 – 5 are done in a different order, the 'Where are we?' section of Relating needs to fit with the previous session.
- The room used for the sessions needs to be comfortable enough for people to be able to give attention to what you are doing together. It is also important that people can hear one another.
- To help people listen to one another and to make the timings work, a recommended group size is 8 – 10 people.
- In each session there are things to see, hear and do. A list of resources to prepare is given in the left-hand column for each session. Think about how to display photos or paintings so that they can be seen.
- It is helpful to both see (read) the Bible story and to hear it. It is possible to find the words and hear it read on Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com) where NIVUK gives an audio version in UK English.

Session 1: Human beings are not all the same

Each session is shaped around an opening **Ritual**, **Relating** to each other, **Receiving** from God, **Reflecting** on what has been received, **Responding** to God in the light of this as we look at the content of the session, and **Returning** as we close in prayer.

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Text of John 15:1-8 for reading aloud
- Seeds of different plants/vegetables, for handing out
- Pictures of seeds growing and plants (examples on page 16) so that everyone can see
- Optional: a copy of *Growing Roots 5* for people to look at before or afterwards (www.cofesuffolk.org/go/spirituality)

This session aims to make us aware that there is always more to discover in prayer and that, at any time, we will not all come closer to God in the same way.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: An opportunity to introduce ourselves to each other, the building and the whole course. Where are we? In the whole group share one thing about yourself. What have we found that is different and what is similar?

Introduction to today's session: Hand out seeds. Look at pictures of seeds growing and of plants. Consider:

- What is your seed like?
- What is a seed for?
- What does a seed need to grow?
- How long does it take for a seed to grow?
- What are the similarities between our seeds?
- What are the differences?

Seeds will sprout with a minimum of warmth, water and earth; however, they only flourish in slightly different mixtures of warmth, water and nourishment – tomatoes do not flourish in the conditions that suit carrots, for example.

Praying is normal. 'Wow!' 'O God, help me!' and 'Thanks!' are all valid prayers but for prayer to flourish it needs to be given some time and attention in order to draw closer to God and know God's life more deeply (for examples, see *Growing Roots 5*). As we do this by beginning to explore prayer more – and as we continue this exploration throughout our lives – we find that, like the seeds, we are different from each other. What one person finds helpful for coming closer to God's presence is not always so helpful for someone else.

Receiving: Jesus uses the analogy of a vine to talk about the fruitful life that comes from a deeper relationship with him.

Someone read aloud **John 15:1-8**

Reflecting: In silence, spend some time with this passage. Read it through two or three times more. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you. Take around 10-15 minutes for this. At the end of this time, the leader reads

Silent reflection can be very difficult for some people; depending on the make-up of the group it may be that the suggested 10-15 minutes needs to be reduced.

There are other passages which also demonstrate a range of prayer positions; see, for example, Exodus 9:29-33; 1 Samuel 1:9-10; 1 Kings 8:54; Genesis 17:3.

Silence is something with which many people are unfamiliar. Sit (or stand, kneel, lie) so that you can breathe easily. Breathe evenly at your own pace. A cross, candle or flower can help focus. A phrase - 'Lord Jesus' for example - can be repeated on each breath. Do not worry if sadness arises or your thoughts scatter, simply come back to your phrase.

aloud the passage one more time.

Discuss: what did you notice during this? What was God saying to you (if you feel able to share) / to us?

Responding: A key discipline to develop, in order to draw closer to God, is prayer. We often have particular ideas about how, when and where to pray. But because we are all different, we may pray most effectively in different ways.

One difference could be the position of our bodies to pray. We may think of people praying when sitting still and this is one way to pray. But as diverse people, some of us may prefer a different posture, such as hands out, hands in air, head down, kneeling, standing, lying, walking, moving (hands, arms, and/or body)...

Look at each of these Bible passages (share them out and each look at one or two) and for each passage consider:

- How might it feel to pray like this? Perhaps experiment by being in the position now.
- With this posture, would you want to name God or pray in a particular way? If so, what would it be?
- What does the posture suggest that God is like?

Passages to use:

John 17:1a; Luke 18:10-13; Luke 22:41-44; Matthew 26:38-39; 2 Samuel 7:18.

Feed back your reflections to the rest of the group.

Exercise for the week: Notice the times when you are drawn to pray:

- With other people or alone
- In stillness or in movement
- With preparation or spontaneously
- In quietness or with music
- With a particular posture/ use of your body

Try to be in that place more often.

Returning: Sit (or any other posture that helped you to be nearer God's presence) for 2 minutes in silence.

End by saying to one another:

Half of the group: *The Lord be with you*

Other half of group: *And also with you*

Session 2: Life-giving words

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Excerpts from two different daily papers, a novel, a poem and a reference book for reading aloud
- Three versions of Matthew 6.7-13 (e.g. search Bible Gateway) for reading aloud
- St Francis's paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer
- A large sheet with the Lord's Prayer written phrase by phrase with gaps between for sticky notes and drawings; sticky notes and pens/ pencils for writing and drawing

The Bible was first written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) and then translated into Latin when this was the common academic language. Now there are many different translations of the Bible into English, and also paraphrases such as *The Message* which aim to convey the gist of the text in contemporary English.

This session aims to develop a sense of the ways we use words and to explore the use of words to express our prayer.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we? In the whole group share the experience of where and how we found it easiest to draw near to God. This is a time to welcome, rather than discuss, what each person says.

Introduction to today's session: Today is one of four sessions looking at different styles in prayer. Many people like to pray in a mixture of different styles but, because everyone is different, some people will find one session comfortable, while others may find the same session more difficult.

Today's session focuses on words, especially words from the Bible and, perhaps, on the thought-through words of written prayers.

Words can be used in many ways. Read words from several different sources, for example from two different daily papers, a novel, a poem, a reference book. How are the words used? What are the authors trying to convey by the different ways in which they use their words?

Receiving: Jesus taught his followers to pray what we now call the Lord's Prayer.

Three people to read aloud **Matthew 6.7-13** in three versions, for example the New Revised Standard Version Anglicised, the King James Version and *The Message*.

Reflecting:

- What do you notice in this prayer? What are the similarities and differences in each version?
- How does this comparison draw your attention to different aspects of the prayer?
- Which phrase[s] do you find easiest to pray? Why? Write down your thoughts on sticky notes.
- What are the needs, desires, beliefs and hopes expressed in this prayer? What does it teach you about how to pray?

Which Bible translation to use is a personal choice. The New Revised Standard Version Anglicised (NRSV) is a modern translation, as literal as possible but in good English for reading. The King James Version is the first agreed and widely-used translation in English, 1611.

St Francis was an Italian, born early in the twelfth century. Best known for his love of nature, after his experiences as a prisoner of war he abandoned his wealthy and frivolous lifestyle and lived a life of poverty and service, aiming to demonstrate God's love to all he met.

Responding: Expansions of the Lord's Prayer have a long history – read St Francis's paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer.

As a group, put together your thoughts as an expansion of the Lord's Prayer – or re-write St Francis's paraphrase in your own words. If finding words is too difficult, draw responses to each phrase. Put your expansion onto one big sheet.

Exercise for the week: Write a prayer of your own OR put a prayer into your own words using Psalm 42 (or another psalm) as a start.

Returning: Pray the expansion of the Lord's Prayer you have formed – one voice to say the traditional phrase and others to say the other words you have put together.

Then pray together (from St Patrick's Breastplate):

**Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. Amen.**

Session 3: Praying from the heart

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Six pictures of people, expressing different feelings, and three short pieces of music that each have a different mood.
- Text of Luke 5.17-26 for reading aloud
- Words/ music to sing together (to a CD if necessary) for the Returning

Some people are more auditory or visual than word-based in the way they understand and express things. Pictures and music can communicate things in a different way from words.

Other possible stories to use here are found in Mark 7:24-30 (the Syrophenician woman) and Mark 5:21-43 (Jairus's daughter and the woman with the haemorrhage).

This session aims to give value to the emotions we know as human beings and to explore how our feelings, and our response to others' feelings, can enrich our prayer.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we? In the whole group we share the experience of writing your prayer and, if you are willing, pray the prayer itself. This is a time to welcome, rather than discuss, what each person says.

Introduction to today's session: Today is one of four sessions looking at different styles in prayer. Many people like to pray in a mixture of different styles but, because everyone is different, some people will find one session comfortable, while others may find the same session more difficult.

Words are important in communication but so are what we see and what we hear.

- Look at the six pictures of people – in each, what is being communicated? How do you feel about what you see?
- Listen to three short extracts of music – in each, what is being communicated? How do you feel about what you hear?

Receiving: This is a story of someone in need being brought to Jesus by his friends.

Someone read aloud **Luke 5.17-26**.

In silence, spend some time with this passage. Read it through two or three times more. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you. Take around 10-15 minutes for this. At the end of this time, the leader reads aloud the passage one more time.

Reflecting: Discuss: what did you notice during this? How did it feel to hear the story? What was God saying to you (if you feel able to share) / to us?

Responding:

- How would you tell a friend this story if you had been

The healing of the paralysed man

involves more than simply restoring his body. As a disabled man at that time he would have been unable to make any positive contribution to society. His healing would restore his place in the wider world. One consequence of this would be that he could earn a living.

there watching it? Try it out...

- How would you tell a friend this story if you were the paralytic? Try it out...
- How did it feel to tell the story?

Exercise for the week: Each day tell God what you care about. If it helps, sing or use music to express how you feel.

Returning:

Sing together a hymn or song – if possible, one that is chosen in response to the story.

Session 4: Discovering mystery

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Images on page 17 and/ or search for 'images of clouds' and 'images of religious icons'; have some way of making them visible to everyone
- Text of Luke 4.42-43 and Mark 6.45-46 for reading aloud
- Materials to draw, make or write for Responding section

In each of these

passages Jesus is coming from a situation of great busy-ness; he has been involved in a very draining public ministry, and needs time away with his Father. In other stories, too, he takes himself away from the crowds, with or without his disciples, to spend time alone with God. See, for example, Mark 3:7, Mark 6:32, Mark 9:2-4, Mark 14:32-42.

This session starts with the reality that we can never fully know God, and aims to explore how to make this part of our prayer through symbols and silence.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we? In the whole group share the experience of telling God what you care about, and about using music in your prayer this week. This is a time to welcome, rather than discuss, what each person says.

Introduction to today's session: Today is one of four sessions looking at different styles in prayer. Many people like to pray in a mixture of different styles but, because everyone is different, some people will find one session comfortable, while others may find the same session more difficult.

Although scientists are discovering amazing things about the world and everything in it, much is still unknown and not understood. Also, even with people we know well, there are often aspects that are unknown or not understood. In the same way, the Christian message is that God has revealed God's self in Jesus but there is still much about God that is a mystery to us.

Look at pictures of sea, desert, weather and/or religious icons:

- What opens up for you the mystery of God, the world, people?
- How to you respond to what is mysterious?

Receiving and Reflecting: Jesus sometimes went in the desert to pray and he also took his disciples away to pray.

Someone read aloud **Luke 4.42-43**. Spend some time in silence reflecting on the passage, taking note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you. Consider:

- How might Jesus have seen himself?
- How might Jesus have been feeling?
- How might the disciples have felt when Jesus was not there?

Someone else read aloud **Mark 6.45-46**. Spend some time in silence reflecting on the passage, taking note of any words,

The Jesus Prayer is an ancient prayer from Orthodox Christianity, originating probably with the Desert Fathers. It is often used repetitively as part of meditation.

phrases or images which stand out for you. Consider:

- How might the disciples have seen themselves?
- How might Jesus have seen them?
- How might the disciples have felt when Jesus took them away?
- Where might I go to find God?
- Where might Jesus take me?

Responding: Draw, make or write from your wondering. For example, in colour or shapes or map or diagram, try one of:

- Expressing the words and images that stood out for you.
- Representing your sense of God from these Scriptures.
- Representing your response to today's Scriptures.

At the end of the time, share what you feel able to.

Exercise for the week: Sit in silence listening to your steady breathing or pray the Jesus prayer for five minutes a day.

Returning:

Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
Have mercy on me a sinner.

Breathe in during the first part of the prayer, and then gently breathe out for the second part.

At the end of five minutes, one person to finish, saying, 'Thanks be to God'.

Breathing exercises can help calmness and prayerful receptiveness in body, mind and heart. Breathe at your own pace.

Session 5: Spirituality seeking justice

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Text of John 6.1-14 for reading aloud
- Local paper and, if possible, some information on projects with which individuals in the group or the church are involved
- Picture for display from one current news story

While some people learn and express themselves best through what they say and hear, or through what they see and create, some people are more kinaesthetic in their style – that is, they understand and express themselves best through activity and action.

This session aims to develop our sense of God at work everywhere and explore ways of responding to this active God.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we? In the whole group share the experience of praying the Jesus Prayer or sitting in silence this week. This is a time to welcome, rather than discuss, what each person says.

Introduction to today's session: Today is one of four sessions looking at different styles in prayer. Many people like to pray in a mixture of different styles but, because everyone is different, some people will find one session comfortable, while others may find the same session more difficult.

We often think of prayer as being still and of being in church or at home. In fact some of us find ourselves nearer to God, and to fullness of life (see John 10.10) when we are actively seeking to make a difference to other people's lives. Here are two examples:

- 'Professor Oliver Davies (Professor of Christian Doctrine in the Department of Theology & Religious Studies at King's College London) described the commitment and sacrifice of taking two years off his work to support his adopted son who was going off the rails as the most spiritual period of his life. He said it was much more intensely spiritual than other experiences relating to 'bliss', or thrill seeking at other stages of life.' (RSA report, *Spiritualise*, 2014).
- Kathleen ben Rabha (Diocesan Community Affairs Advisor) wrote that 'when a church or a deanery undertakes a project that brings them in touch with the unloved and the marginalised, that is when I sense a resonance with God's will and joy at how the Holy Spirit works with ordinary people.' (*Growing Roots* 1, 2013).

What experiences do you have of coming nearer to God by seeking to make life better for others?

Receiving: More than once, Jesus saw that people were hungry and did something about it. In this story Jesus makes sure 5,000 people are fed.

There are many organisations which work to address need, many of which have grown out of the actions of individuals who were inspired to make a difference. See, for example, the work of Transforming Lives for Good (www.tlg.org.uk), Mary's Meals (www.marysmeals.org.uk), or Christian Aid (www.christianaid.org.uk).

For next session ask each person to bring one prayer or practice that has been helpful from these sessions to share with everyone; bring/ arrange any 'props' needed for these.

Someone read aloud **John 6.1-14**. Spend some time in silence reflecting on the passage, taking note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you.

Reflecting: Consider:

- If 5,000 people were hungry today, what would you do – individually? Together?
- What would you ask/ expect God to do?

Responding: From the local paper, identify issues that could be met in practical action: what could be done? From activities you already do locally, nationally or internationally, what is the next step?

Exercise for the week: In the next week do one thing locally and one thing (inter)nationally that helps make a difference and bring greater justice.

Also, for the final session, bring one prayer or practice that has been helpful from these sessions to share with everyone.

Returning: Look at the picture of a current news story. In silence, consider:

- What is happening?
- Who is involved?
- How would you feel if you were involved?
- What would you want to pray?

When you are ready, each person prays in one phrase, in one sentence, in your own words, or in a prayer that you know.

Session 6: Praying together

Resources needed:

- Resource for opening ritual (e.g. candle + matches or song)
- Text of 1 Corinthians 12.12-26 for reading aloud
- Each person to bring one prayer or practice that has been helpful from these sessions to share with everyone; bring/arrange any 'props' needed for these

This session aims to help us recognise the wealth of prayer practice among us and to benefit from one another as we pray together.

Ritual: Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating: Welcome. Where are we? In the whole group share the experience of the one thing you have done locally, and the one thing you have done (inter)nationally. This is a time to welcome, rather than discuss, what each person says.

Introduction to today's session: We began with the recognition that everyone is different; yet in practice we need one another. For example, God is more than any one of us perceives so we need one another's insights and wisdom. Also we each have a particular view of the world so we will leave a lot out of our prayers if we never hear one another's passions and concerns.

From the previous sessions:

- Which approach to prayer did you find most helpful? In what ways was it helpful?
- Which approach to prayer did you find least helpful and why?

Receiving: After Jesus had died, been resurrected and had ascended, St Paul described Christian people as the body of Christ.

Someone read aloud **1 Corinthians 12.12-26**. In silence, spend some time with this passage. Read it through two or three times more. Take note of any words, phrases or images which stand out for you. Take around 10-15 minutes for this. At the end of this time, the leader reads aloud the passage one more time.

Reflecting: What does it mean for us to treat with honour one another's different strengths in prayer? How might we do this?

Responding: Share the prayers and practices brought. Try to ensure that there is at least one from each approach to prayer. We are going to pray using each of these resources, as an extended period of prayer for our 'Returning'. Together, choose

In 1 Corinthians 12

Paul teaches that it is the Holy Spirit which forms us into a body, equipping and sustaining us to live as part of that body. The gifts we each have are given to the whole Church; the different gifts work together to build up and grow the Church.

You may not be used to such an extended period of prayer but, as with the previous sessions, it can be a valuable experience to try. Afterwards it may be useful to evaluate the experience and to consider how to do this again in the future.

one resource with which to begin this period of prayer and one to end. Put the other pieces in an order which makes sense so that they flow from one to another.

Returning: Pray the prayers and practices as you have put them together.



