

HOW TO PRAY THE GOSPELS

Our best source of prayer will always be the New Testament. The Gospels, in particular, are the best prayed contemplatively. Here are some suggestions for this:

1. Pick a short passage from one of the Gospels (e.g., Luke 7:36-50 Jesus with the woman who wept at His feet) and read it once.
2. Settle into a comfortable posture, conducive to peacefully listening to God.
3. Take a few minutes to relax and quiet yourself down. Relax your limbs and face muscles. Give all your cares and concerns to the Lord and let Him hold them for you, while you spend this time in prayer with Him.
4. Be aware that God fills and soaks you with His presence; that He unconditionally loves you, is always conscious of you, and always with you.
5. Slowly read the Gospel passage. Believe that the words are God's own words and meant for you—here and now.
6. Find one or more resting places in the passage. Linger on them. Savor them. Repeat them. Reflect on them in silence. Stay with the same passage during the whole prayer period and repeat it as often as you like.
7. These five key words summarize the whole contemplative experience with Jesus in the Gospels:

Be There With Him and for Him. Yea, be there. Have you ever talked with someone who was with you bodily, but not present to you with attention and heart?

Want Him. Hunger for Him. Prepare for His coming and His word, as you would want and eagerly prepare for a visit with the dearest person in your life. Invite Him to reveal and communicate Himself to you, to speak to you and teach you how to listen deeply to Him.

Listen to Him. Listen with faith deeply and reverently; listen with trust; listen with hunger to be fed by His word; listen with gratitude and in peace, without searching for hidden meanings. Forget about implications, applications, conclusions, resolutions, etc. Be simple, like a child nestled in its father's lap, peacefully listening to his story.

Let Him. Him what? Just let Him be with you. Let Him be for you what He wants to be. Let Him love you. Let Him speak to you. Let Him hold you, console you, forgive you, and strengthen you. Let Him take you through dryness and darkness, if He prefers—but let Him. What Jesus wants, Jesus deserves. Trust yourself to Him.

Respond to Him--in any way you want to or feel moved to respond. Be genuinely yourself and respond honestly, freely, spontaneously, and reverently. Speak what is in your heart; say what you feel, even when you feel like complaining. Remember that when you don't know what to say, the Holy Spirit prays in you and for you. Just speaking or whispering the name of Jesus rhythmically with your breathing, or repeating words of praise and thanks, are profoundly prayerful responses.

Contemplative prayer is more feeling, listening to and being aware of God our Father and of Jesus and their Spirit, rather than saying or doing anything. It is more something that God does for us than anything we do for Him. It is consciously being with Him and letting Him be for us the loving God that He is. Letting Him fill us with His spirit, and letting Jesus become more and more alive and real to us.

PRAYING WITH YOUR SENSES: A NATURE WALK

Quiet yourself and enjoy the beauty of nature as you walk slowly around the house or outdoors in the woods. As you walk, allow your senses to be **alert, alive** and **active**.

The idea of this nature walk is to become consciously aware of your senses, relish their use and appreciate what a great gift they are to you. Realize that by doing this, you are **praying**.

NOTE: *The walk could last from forty minutes to one hour. Focus your attention on the five senses.*

A Method for a Prayerful Walk

1. Start your walk with a prayer. Use a body-gesture or say a short prayer loudly.
2. Take a few moments to become aware of your breathing. Come in touch with the rhythm of your breathing. Feel the breath cool as you inhale and warm as you exhale.
3. Divide your walking time into five parts giving each sense enough time and importance to be experienced and integrated into your prayer.

SIGHT Look around you. Notice what you see in terms of shapes, colors, textures, shades, etc. As you enjoy and relish what you see, realize how good is th Creator in giving you sight. Thank God for your eyes and for what you see.

TOUCH Become aware of your sense of touch. As you walk along, feel the clothes touching your body. Experience the air and the gentle breeze caressing your skin. Feel the sunshine, the raindrops and humidity. Stop and touch the bark of a tree. Get the feel of a leaf between your fingers. Relish the gift of touch and thank God for this sense.

SMELL Become aware of the aroma in the air, the scent of the wet ground and of the different trees. Attune yourself to whatever is around you and relish its scent. Experience the joy you feel as you reflect on and thank God for this sense.

HEARING Listen to the variety of noises and sounds--natural and mechanical sounds. Listen to the silence around and within you. Express gratitude to the Creator for giving you hearing.

TASTE Here just taste the inner beauty of Creation and the fragrance of the universe present to you. Reflect on the actual taste you experience as you taste different beverages and eat delicious foods. Thank God for this sense.

You can pray with this sense during your next meal as you each slowly and relish every bite of food, experiencing the different tastes that each dish offers.

When you feel you have had a good experience, end your prayer by showing gratitude to God for the gift and use of your senses.

PRAYER STATION: BELOVED

Matthew 1:21-23

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

Reflection:

Reflect on and remember God's holy presence in your life. You are known by God, accepted by God, belong to God.

Action:

Write an honest prayer of response to God, from your life story: what is difficult to accept, the places of brokenness, the places of hope, the gifts of gratitude.

You may fold up your prayer and bury in among the rocks in the "valley of the shadow" or you may take it with you.

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

PRAYER STATION: MIRROR

Isaiah 43:1-2,4a

*But now, says the LORD--
the one who created you, Jacob,
Don't fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
when through the rivers, they won't sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you won't be scorched and flame won't burn you.
You are precious in my eyes,
you are honored, and I love you.*

Isaiah 49:16a

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;

Reflection:

Names. Adam gave them to each animal. Abram's and Jacob's were changed. Joseph gave the name Jesus to Mary's baby boy. Names have meaning and tell a story.

Reflect on the names by which you are called; given name, nickname, names that identify the roles you live.

Action:

Write the name(s) you would wish to be called on the mirror frames. Listen for God's voice. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving using your name(s):

Gracious God, you know everything about me; you chose me; and you call me ...

To you I offer all honor, thanks, and praise.

PRAYER STATION: WATER

Genesis 1:1-2 (CEB)

When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters.

Psalms 51:1a, 2, 10, 12 (CEB)

Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

Wash me completely clean of my guilt; purify me from my sin!

Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!

Return the joy of your salvation to me and sustain me with a willing spirit.

Reflection:

In the beginning, without shape or form was water, the deep dark sea. God’s spirit swept over the water, shaping creation and containing the oceans and rivers, lakes and streams that provide hydration and cleansing for us still today. Are there deep dark seas which hold past resentments and hurts for you? Feel God’s wind sweep over them. Is there a stream clogged with residue of negative behaviors? Clean it out!

Action:

Dip your hands into the water in the bowl on the table, and wipe your hands dry on the cloth provided. As you do so, reflect on what your life could be like thoroughly rinsed and shaped by God’s creating Spirit. You are welcome to take a glass bead as a reminder of God’s creating love.

PRAYER STATION: OIL

Lamentations 3:19-23

The memory of my suffering and homelessness is bitterness and poison. I can’t help but remember and am depressed. I call all this to mind—therefore, I will wait.

Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn’t ended; certainly God’s compassion isn’t through! They are renewed every morning, Great is your faithfulness.

Psalms 23:5 (NRSV)

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

Reflection:

The author of Lamentations spends most of his time complaining, both about the world’s afflictions and his own. One thought gives peace; the steadfast love of God. The knowledge of God’s unshakable love, even in the midst of trouble, is finally the grease which makes the squeaky wheel of lamentation fall silent.

Action:

Dip your finger in the oil in the bowl and smooth it onto the back of your hand. As you do, reflect on the parts of your life which are stiff and squeaky—places where you are stuck, places which give you cause for continual complaint. Consider how the love of God and the mercy of God might lubricate these parts of your life—renewing them, making them usable in a way they have not been before.