

## 3.5 INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

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# Ideas for Personal Prayer

God invites us into a personal relationship through prayer. God also invites us to deeper levels of intimacy that will move us beyond communication (i.e., words and concepts) to communion (i.e., beyond words). This movement requires risk, as we bring more of ourselves into God's presence and receive more of God's being into ourselves. We rest in God's presence. Through the years prayer has taken many forms, from the beautiful psalms to the Lord's Prayer to "Now I lay me down to sleep" at the side of our beds as children. The following list identifies many prayer practices that people have found helpful as they enter into deeper communication and communion with God. If there are other resources that you personally find helpful, please send them to ID, and we will add them to the list. Many of these practices will also be helpful in a group context:

**Acronyms** - The following acronyms have been used by Christians to provide structure to their prayer lives. For example, ACTS represents adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication (or intercession.) This order begins with words of adoration as we enter into the presence of the Holy God. This holy presence reminds us of our sin and the need for confession. Now we are free to thank God for his goodness and blessings. Finally we pause to bring our requests for others and ourselves to God through supplication. Some prefer to change the order from ACTS to CATS. For more information on ACTS as a guide for prayer, follow this link: <http://www.prayerguide.org.uk/actsmodel.htm>

Other acronyms that can become guides for prayer:

CHAT - Confess, Honor, Ask, Thank

PRAY - Praise, Reflect, Ask, Yearn

PRAY - Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield

PRAYER - Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield, Expect, Rejoice

SOAP - a simple devotional strategy for small groups but could also guide an individual - Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer (pray about how God will shape your lives according to his Word).

**Adoration** - Adoration invites us to focus on God and identify or list God's characteristics and our response to God as our creator, redeemer, sustainer, and friend. The scripture encourages us to love God with our heart, mind, and soul, which we express in our prayers of adoration.

**Art and prayer** - Viewing and creating art can provide helpful resources for prayer. For many, visual art can stir our souls or connect us to God in new ways that might not be experienced through other forms of prayer. *Viewing* classical artwork and sacred images have been used for hundreds of years to help people interact with God in fresh ways. Others find that creating works of art through painting, drawing, sculpting, crafting, paper tearing, photography, or other forms of visual art provide a unique resource for prayer. Artistic ability does not aid or limit the effectiveness of prayer through art. The intent is to express one's spirit before God in prayer.

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**Breath prayer** - Many find that focusing on the rhythms of breathing can become an aid to prayer. In this form of contemplative prayer the person breathes in, calling on a biblical name or image of God and then breathes out a simple, God-given desire. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner suggests that the sound of breathing is very similar to the sound made when one pronounces the name for God in Hebrew, *YHWH*. In this light, each breath is a spoken prayer calling on the name of God. The following provides additional phrases used in breath prayer. (breathe in) Jesus Christ who takes away the sins of the world, (breathe out) have mercy on us. (breathe in) Jesus Christ who takes away the sins of the world, (breathe out) grant us your peace.

**Centering prayer** - This form of contemplative prayer invites the person praying to seek quiet from scattered thoughts and outside noises and abide in the still center of God's presence. In this form of prayer we don't give God our prayer concerns, but rather simply sit in God's presence and give God our undivided love and attention. Centering prayer usually involves focusing on a sacred word, such as a name or attribute of God, and repeating it over, very slowly until we settle into the quiet peace of God's presence. Whenever thoughts or sounds distract us from prayer, we repeat the sacred word in order to refocus our prayer. End the prayer with a few minutes of additional silence or perhaps say the Lord's Prayer. A Centering prayer group meets on a weekly basis at North Park Covenant Church (Chicago, IL).

**Christian meditation** - Christian meditation is like spiritual daydreaming. Rather than analyzing or thinking about the scripture passage, the person in prayer simply lets the passage soak in. There is no need to do anything with the words you read. Instead let them do something to you. Don't be preoccupied with examining what is happening. Just allow the words to turn over in your mind and wash over your heart.

**Confession** - "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Because of this truth, all also need to consider the good, bad, and ugly of life and bring their shortcomings to God and ask forgiveness. David's prayer of confession in Psalm 52 provides a good model for us to follow. The scripture also says that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

**Contemplative prayer** - This form of prayer provides a way for being with God that does not depend on giving God a list of our concerns and petitions. We sit quietly contemplating God's presence. We rest in God, depending on him to initiate communion and communication. Contemplative prayer is a response to God's invitation to "abide in Christ."

**Daily prayer guide** - Countless prayer guides are available today, both in print and online. These range from the historical (Praying the Hours) to the contemporary. The Covenant Church publishes *The Covenant Home Altar* quarterly to provide a scriptural thought and encouragement for each day, as well as an encouragement for prayer. Follow this link for more information about *The Covenant Home Altar*, <http://www.covchurch.org/publications/home-altar/>.

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**Fasting** - Traditionally, fasting has meant abstaining from eating and drinking; however, fasting can also filter those things taken into our heart, e.g. television, computer, phone, a specific habit, reading. When we experience an urge to eat, for example, we use that urge as a reminder to pray and to spend time with God. The purpose of fasting, then, is to take our eyes off the things of this world and instead focus them on God. Fasting should be limited in time, especially when fasting from food. Fasting is not intended to punish our flesh, but to focus on God.

**Fixed-Hour Prayer or Divine Hours** - Fixed-hour prayer is the oldest form of Christian spiritual discipline and has its roots in the Judaism out of which Christianity came. When the Psalmist says, "Seven times a day do I praise You," he is referring to fixed-hour prayer as it existed in ancient Judaism. This resource for prayer was developed as an aid for the layperson, but until recently it has been more the practice of the clergy. The breviary or printed guide for the Divine Hours includes references for prayers, hymns, responses, and readings used in every office. One current version used by many in the Covenant Church is *Divine Hours*, by Phyllis Tickle. This internet link will bring you to Phyllis Tickle's information about the *Divine Hours*, <http://www.phyllistickle.com/fixedhourprayer.html>. The Covenant church in Decorah, Iowa, has developed the following resource for their congregational use: <https://sites.google.com/site/mattkronberg/GuidetoPrayer.pub?attredirects=0>. Resurrection Covenant Church in Chicago invites members of the congregation to write short devotionals based on the *Divine Hours* texts to be used by the congregation during Advent.

**Imaginative prayer** - Another way to pray Scripture is to use your imagination to place yourself within the text. This is easiest to do when reading a story or narrative text. Ignatius of Loyola invited people to use a similar resource in his Exercises when he encouraged people to imagine the scene as it unfolded and pay attention to the stimuli that would be experienced in the story, <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/2-Praying-Scripture.pdf>.

**Intercessory prayer** - Intercessory prayer is praying on behalf of others and is similar to supplication.

**The Jesus Prayer** - The prayer itself goes like this: "Lord, Jesus Christ" (while breathing in), "have [mercy](#) on me, a sinner" (while breathing out). This is done repeatedly until all is stilled within. As it is repeated, it often unconsciously reduces down to "Jesus" in and "mercy" out. If other things come to mind, resist them and return to the prayer. The Jesus Prayer grew out of [Luke 18:13](#).

**Journaling prayer** - Through the practice of journaling or reflective writing, we record and process what we learn through God's Word. It is also a useful tool for reflecting on the movement of God in our lives. The acronym SOAR has been helpful in guiding journaling: S - Scripture reading, O - observe God's message, A - Apply the passage to your life, and R - Respond in prayer. The following resources will help you get started in journaling as a prayer discipline: Growing Deeper Tool #8 - *Keeping a Spiritual Journal* (Department of Christian Formation, ECC) <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/8-Keeping-a-Spiritual-Journal.pdf>, and *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God Through Attentive Writing*, by [Helen Cepero](#) (InterVarsity, 2008).

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**Lament and struggle prayer** - At their heart, the laments in Scripture are cries to be heard and acknowledged by God. The image of waiting on God, also, weaves its way throughout this literature. Lament offers us another language to use as we wait to hear from God in the midst of our personal and shared community pain. This is a magnificent gift, as it enables and empowers us to speak our pain with honest emotion in the context of conversation with the Almighty. The language of lament “gives dignity to our suffering” and does so in God’s presence because “God is taken seriously as a personal and concerned being.” “Suffering is real, God is real.” (All quotes from Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.) The following presentation from the Ministry Idea Exchange (Mix) will guide participants into the psalms, offering instruction on how to pray using words of lament and struggle: <http://www.covchurch.org/idea-exchange/the-lament-prayer-being-honest-and-raw-before-god/>

**Lectio divina- individual (praying Scripture)** – Praying Scripture is a conversational, devotional approach to God’s Word. When approaching Scripture in this way, we do not merely read the words to grasp the content, but we allow God’s Word to guide a prayerful conversation. Lectio divina often includes four parts: Reading God’s Word, Reflecting on God’s Word, Responding to God’s Word, and Resting in God’s Word. The following resource provides a more complete guide to Lectio divina (Praying Scripture): <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/2-Praying-Scripture.pdf> .

**Listening prayer** – Often when we pray, we do all the talking. In listening prayer, we silence our voice to hear and discern God’s voice through prayer and scripture, followed by obeying the Lord’s direction. This prayer form is similar to contemplation. It is based on Jesus’ words in John 10:27, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

**The Lord’s Prayer** - This is the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, Matthew 6:10-14; Luke 11:2-4. The Christian Formation resource, *The Prayer That Focuses Life*, was written to help individuals and groups explore and pray the Lord’s Prayer. This resource is available at: <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/prayer-that-focuses-life/>.

**Prayer Calendar** – Some Christians find it helpful to create a weekly calendar and pray for different things on different days. This expands the focus of their prayer life to encompass their personal needs, and also the needs of the world. In the Covenant Church the Departments of World Mission and Church Growth and Evangelism both produce prayer calendars. The following provides one example of a personal prayer calendar.

- Monday – Parents, brothers, sisters, and other family
- Tuesday – Personal growth in your relationship with Christ (including confession, repentance, thanksgiving, etc.)
- Wednesday – Non-believer friends who need to know Jesus (by name)
- Thursday – Future decisions (school, relationships, marriage, etc.)
- Friday – Christian friends to keep walking with Christ (by name)
- Saturday – Opportunities to serve the Lord

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- Sunday – Prayers of thanksgiving for all that God has done for you – get specific and thank God for even small blessings.

**Parable Walk (Walking with God)** - Walking with God is a spiritual practice which involves focusing specifically on what God has to teach us through our surroundings. Especially in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), we notice that Jesus spent a lot of time teaching as he walked from village to village, from event to event. As Jesus went, people often joined him. They gathered to hear him speak. Jesus used those times to teach his friends about the kingdom of God, about his Father, about themselves. Often this teaching used objects in the surroundings to illustrate the truth he wanted to share. This prayer discipline invites us to take a walk and look for God's teaching in the things we encounter. The following resource introduces Walking with God, or the Parable Walk, as a resource for prayer: <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/6-Walking-with-God.pdf>.

**Practicing the Presence of God** – The book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence, provides a thoughtful invitation to living in the presence of God every moment of every day. Brother Lawrence worked in the kitchen of the monastery, and in this menial labor he experienced God's very real presence. He said, "In the beginning we must work at forming the habit of continually conversing with God, attributing to him everything we do; but after a little effort we will feel ourselves awakened by love with no more difficulty."

**Prayer of Examen (Reviewing Your Day)** – The Daily Examen is a form of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God's hand at work in our whole experience. This practice invites us to reflect on the events of the day and become more aware of God's presence in and throughout it. With this prayer you choose a segment of time to consider and review the events as if watching a movie. During this time you invite the Holy Spirit to give you insight and the courage to look honestly at your life to see times when God seemed especially close and also times when God seemed distant. The following Growing Deeper Tool, *Reviewing Your Day*, will help you as you begin to practice the Prayer of Examen: <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/5-Reviewing-Your-Day.pdf>.

**Praying your community** – This prayer practice encourages you to bring your community (the people, organizations, businesses, and government) before the Lord in prayer and intercession. By praying for our community, we affirm our solidarity with our neighbors, and ask God to bring about transformation and change. When praying your community, ask yourself the following questions: What specific needs am I aware of in the lives of my neighbors and in the community at large? How does my community need to experience the transforming power of God? What social injustices are present in my community? What social problems are facing my community? How can I engage my community and become an agent of change? Follow this reflection with a time of intercession for your neighbors and community. Praying as you walk around your neighborhood can also be insightful. The following Growing Deeper Tool, *Praying Your Community*, can help you experience this form of prayer, <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/05/4-Praying-Your-Community.pdf>.

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**Silence/Solitude** – Entering into silence before God is a way to practice attending to and listening to God without interruption or distraction. The desire is to free ourselves from the disruption of noise so we can be totally present to God, placing ourselves in the presence of God without the interference of words, music, reading, or anything else audible. In this way, it is a particular kind of fasting as we leave the distractions of the world behind. Simply come before God in quietness and allow God’s presence to flow over you.

**Silent prayer** - This form invites people to pray without speaking audibly or to pray in silence while someone else is praying audibly.

**Supplication or Intercession** - Throughout the New Testament the Apostle Paul tells his readers that he is praying for them, and he asks them to pray for him. This is an example of supplication. In this form of prayer we seek God’s provision for a need that we or others are experiencing. Luke 11:19 invites us to “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

**Thanksgiving** - Psalm 100 invites us to “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” We believe that God fills each day with blessing and provision, and as God’s children it is only right to pause regularly to remember all of God’s blessings and say thank you.

### Covenant Prayer Resources:

**Missionary Prayer Calendar** (ECC) - <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/missionary-prayer-calendar/> - a convenient daily prayer guide to pray for Covenant missionaries and the countries in which they serve. Each day includes a picture of Covenant missionaries and their families, where and how they serve, their birthdays, as well as additional information.

**Church Planting and Vitality Prayer Calendar** (ECC) - <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/church-planting-and-vitality-prayer-calendar/> - The calendar contains specific prayer requests from each of the individuals involved in church planting, vitality, and other ministries related to church growth. This prayer calendar can be used to pray for each person on his or her date.

**Monthly Prayer Calendar** (ECC) - <http://www.covchurch.org/adults/files/2010/09/9-September-2011-PC.pdf> - This calendar highlights Covenant events for which to pray on specific days, prayer requests from the *Covenant Missionary Prayer Calendar*, and prayer-focusing ideas from the *Covenant Home Altar*. You can print out the entire month of prayer requests and keep it wherever it is most helpful to you in your daily prayers.