

PRAYER

Be still and know that I am God



O GOD, YOU ARE MY GOD, AND I LONG FOR YOU. MY WHOLE BEING DESIRES YOU; LIKE A DRY, WORN-OUT, AND WATERLESS LAND, MY SOUL IS THIRSTY FOR YOU. Psalm 63:1

Who hasn't echoed the request of Jesus' disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray?" Who of us is not plagued with a sense of missing the mark when it comes to prayer and time spent in God's presence? Why is it that prayer often gets short shrift? C. S. Lewis had the courage to call prayer "irk-some", something we avoid because we're so full of ourselves, too distracted and fragmented by the pace and demands of our lives.

And yet we long to know God as life and breath, to see God in the ordinary events of each day. But truth be told, a compelling sense of Christ's presence eludes us much of the time. God often seems distant, disconnected. We tend to think of ourselves as the hub of the revolving wheel rather than the spokes. Then when we are "dry, worn-out, and waterless", painfully aware of our own emptiness, we too call out "Lord, teach us to pray".

Perhaps the words of Jewish mystic, Abraham Joshua Heschel, say it best:

We do not refuse to pray; we abstain from it. We ring the hollow bell of selfishness rather than absorb the stillness that surrounds the world, hovering over all the restlessness and fear of life--the secret stillness that precedes our birth and succeeds our death. . . . Is not listening to the pulse of wonder worth silence and abstinence from self-asserting? Why do we not set apart an hour of living for devotion to God by surrendering to stillness? WE DWELL ON THE EDGE OF MYSTERY AND IGNORE IT, WASTING OUR SOULS, RISKING OUR STAKE IN GOD. (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Quest for God*)

The following resources represent a small sample of the wealth of material related to prayer and spirituality. They are described here because they represent some of the most helpful resources we know. In reading, in listening, in prayer, may there be something among them that nourishes you with the promise of the Psalmist, "Be still, and know that I am God."

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Augsburg Fortress recently published a small group training guide for congregational prayer called **GROUNDING IN PRAYER** by Brent Dahlseng. This six week study includes a Leader Guide. (B2816)

The Resource Center has a number of resources using the labyrinth as a way of praying. These include a kit called **THE PRAYER PATH**, a Christ-centered experience focusing on the use of the ancient labyrinth. It includes a leader's guide, participant's guides, a Prayer Path CD, two videos, "Noise: the Prayer Path" and "Planet: the Prayer Path." The Prayer Path experience is organized into eleven stations. It's a helpful way to introduce the use of the labyrinth in prayer and devotional life. (K111) A book on the same topic may also be of interest, *Labyrinths from the Outside In: Walking to Spiritual Insight* (B2724) by Donna Schaper and Carole Ann Camp.

Two books and a monthly single-page publication by Joan Chittister stand at the top of the list for the ways in which they draw readers into a deeper knowledge of prayer and God's presence. The first is Chittister's *Psalm Journal II* (B1528). It comes out of the prayer life of a Benedictine community and invites readers to memorize a psalm (day one), to consider personal reflections about the psalm (days two and three), to write from one's own experience of the psalm (day four), and finally to write and live the psalm in one's daily life (day five). It's one of the best ways I've found of living more contemplatively. It can be used alone, with a friend or spouse, or in a small group.

A second book by Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily* (B1093), is a classic description of and invitation to Christ-centered daily life. Clear and simple, it offers an authentic and practical framework for living. A six-session leader's guide makes the book ideal for small group study.

**THE ISSUE OF PRAYER IS NOT PRAYER;
THE ISSUE OF PRAYER IS GOD.**

-Heschel

"The Monastic Way", monthly reflections on spiritual life originally based on the psalms, is a first rate, single-page resource ideal for individual or group use. Joan Chittister introduces a text followed by daily reflections and observations that encourage the reader to make it one's own, finding in it "the comfort of the ages." Order from Benetvision, 355 East Ninth St., Erie, Pennsylvania 16503-1107 (814-459-5994) for \$17 subscription. Copies available.

A beautiful collection of prayers and music can be found in *Turn My Heart: A Sacred Journey from Brokenness to Healing* by Marty Haugen and Susan Briehl. Written/composed in part in response to September 11, these resources are great examples of liturgical prayer. (B2850, CD6)

PRAYER, from The Living Pulpit contains a good collection of articles, quotations, books, and ideas about prayer. Topics include: "Without Contemplation, the People Perish," "So You're Preaching on Prayer? God Help You," and "The Mercy of Unanswered Prayer." (PR files)

"How can I know God's will for my life?" "How do I answer my children's questions about prayer?" "Why do I seem to pray only in a crisis?" "Where can I find the time?" These words reflect the age-old yearning for a deeper relationship with God. A video series, **PRAYING IN THE MIDST OF LIFE** responds to that yearning and offers practical suggestions for deepening one's spiritual life. Six 21-minute sessions cover these topics for youth and adults: 1. Our Questions About Prayer, 2. Finding God, 3. Knowing God's Will, 4. Praying the Scripture, 5. Learning the Breath Prayer, 6. Retreating at Anytime. An excellent study guide is included. (VT1193=)

PRAYER IS THE PLACE WE FIND THE GOD WHO IS FINDING US.

-Eugene Peterson

A video series on the Lord's Prayer for group study, **WHEN YOU PRAY . . . The Lord's Prayer** by James Nestingen offers nine sessions using the Lord's Prayer as our best model. (VT2235) Roberta Bondi's video series, **A PLACE TO PRAY: Conversations on the Lord's Prayer** is another fine resource for groups. (VT1963=)

FACE TO FACE WITH GOD: A Guide for Prayer Ministry is an Augsburg Fortress resource to help parishioners grow in their understanding and practice of prayer. Leader resources include a video, "Coming Face to Face with God: Conversations on Prayer", introducing a congregation to prayer ministry, and two readers: *Face to Face with God in Your Church: Establishing a Prayer Ministry* and *Face to Face with God in Your Home: Guiding Children and Youth in Prayer*. Three readers and a prayer journal are for use by individuals or groups: *Prayer: Beginning Conversations with God*, *Praying for Friends and Enemies: Intercessory Prayer*, *Praying for Wholeness and Healing* and *Seeking God's Face: A Prayer Journal*. (K43)

**PRAY AS YOU CAN AND DO NOT TRY TO PRAY AS YOU CAN'T.
TAKE YOURSELF AS YOU FIND YOURSELF; START FROM THAT.**

-Dom Chapman

The gist of Walt Wangerin's Lutheran Vesper's eight-part audio series, **SPEAKING AND LISTENING TO GOD**, is that the power of prayer is not in our action, our faith, our righteousness, but in God's listening. (C276)

Edward Hays highlights the spirit of being prayerful in an audiocassette, **The Spirit of Prayer**. (C175)

Henri Nouwen shows how prayer reveals the true nature of life and the world in the audio, **Prayer: the Way to a Transparent Life**. (C210)

ADDITIONAL BOOKS for RECOMMENDING:

A New Set of Eyes: Encountering the Hidden God

(B2855) by Paula D'Arcy

Finding God: Praying the Psalms in Times of Depression (B2884) by Thomas Lewis

The Way Back Home: An Introduction to Centering Prayer (B1584) by Basil Pennington

Meditations with Meister Eckhart (B2484) collected by Matthew Fox

Working the Angles (B1575) by Eugene Peterson

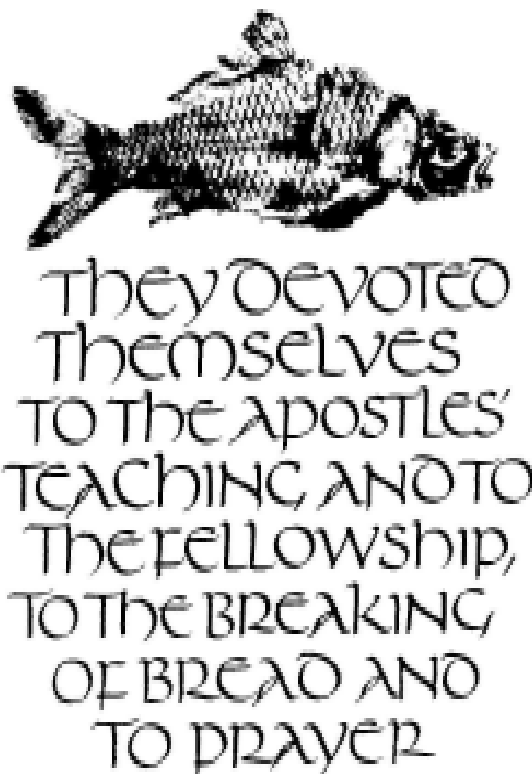
Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer (B1560) by Ann and Barry Ulanov

The Breath of Life: A Simple Way to Pray (B1558) by Ron Del Bene

Who We Are Is How We Pray: Matching Personality and Spirituality (B1559) by Charles Keating

A number of pastors meet regularly with a spiritual director.

Presentation Prayer Center in Fargo has been called, "the best resource for prayer around." The Sisters of Presentation (located just east of the synod office) offer retreats, mentoring and spiritual direction, or a quiet place for prayer and meditation. Meeting regularly with a spiritual director or others interested in deepening faith can enrich prayer life.



ACTS 2:42 NIV

GRANTING THAT WE ARE ALWAYS IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, YET IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THOSE WHO PRAY ARE IN GOD'S PRESENCE IN A VERY DIFFERENT SENSE; FOR THEY, AS IT WERE, SEE THAT GOD IS LOOKING UPON THEM. -Teresa of Avila

The following videos offer wisdom and insight on the topics of prayer and spirituality. They all are described in the Resource Center catalog online. Go to www.eandsynod.org

What Can We Really Expect from Prayer? - Joan Chittister (VT1879)
 Prayer-the Ultimate Conversation - Joseph Sittler (VT73)
 What Good is Prayer? from Questions of Faith (VT430)
 Living the Praying Life-the Practice and Meaning of Prayer (VT606)
 Praying the Psalms - Joan Chittister (VT1262)
 Miracles-Jesus Teaching the Lord's Prayer (VT21)
 Psalms as Models of Prayer (VT93)
 Prayer in Your Home (VT672)
 Praying in the Midst of Life (VT1193-1198)
 Questions of Faith for Youth-Why Pray? (VT1201)
 Seven Circles of Prayer (VT412)
 Reflections on the Lord's Prayer (VT899)
 Seedlings: For Meditation, Retreat, Inspiration (VT493)
 Spirituality Explored-Joseph Sittler (VT140)
 Struggling with Paul at Prayer (VT92)
 Wellspring of Prayer-Ruth Youngdahl Nelson (VT171)



THE WISH TO PRAY IS PRAYER ITSELF.

-George Bernanos

Devotional Classics-Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups edited by Richard Foster and James Bryan Smith represents another fine resource for spiritual renewal for small groups or for individuals. It "soaks" readers in the devotional classics and organizes the selections and reflections into five topics: "Preparing for the Spiritual Life", "The Prayer-Filled Life", "The Virtuous Life", "The Spirit-Empowered Life", and "The Word-Centered Life." (B1567)

Augsburg Fortress's **All Through the Day, All Through the Year** is a beautiful collection of rituals, prayers, and celebrations for individuals and families. (PR640)

LEARNING CENTERS ON PRAYER is a packet of resources for youth and adults focusing on the theme of prayer. Materials for twelve centers help participants examine different forms of prayer, write prayers, explore different kinds of prayer, and use as models the prayers of Jesus. (PR300)

"A Quest for Silence-How to Enter God's Presence in Silence" is a study guide to help Christians discover the capacity to find God in the silence of everyday life. (PR370)

**IF THE ONLY PRAYER YOU SAY
IN YOUR WHOLE LIFE IS "THANK YOU,"
THAT WOULD SUFFICE.**

-Meister Eckart

Finally, two video series that must be included in this "letter" are **"WRESTLING WITH ANGELS"** (VT1151) and **"DISCOVERING EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY"** (VT1358-1360). Both deal with prayer and God's presence in everyday events. Both are excellent adult education resources. The six sessions in "Wrestling with Angels" focus on God's guidance, the issue of "why me?", prayer, forgiveness, doubt, and love. "Discovering Everyday Spirituality" includes eight-sessions about the hunger many people share for a deeper relationship with God. Topics include "Discovering Everyday Spirituality through Story, Place, Activity, and Ritual.