



HEARING GOD IN OUR BUSYNESS

Suggestions and
ideas for prayer

Collated by Peter & Kerry Christensen

Introduction

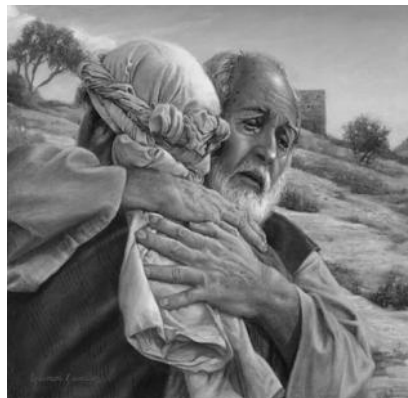
In this booklet are a number of ideas for different ways of praying. Some exercises are more suitable for when you are stepping out of the busyness to regather yourself and others can be used to pray in the *midst* of busyness.

In Jesus' life there was a rhythm of contemplation and action, retreat and engagement. He was always connected with his Father, whether in the midst of a crowd of five thousand needing feeding, on a boat in the middle of a storm, having a meal with his friends, or alone on a mountain top. For Jesus every activity was sacred and part of hearing God in busyness is to realise this.

Naturally not all of these ways of praying will appeal to you as our personalities are all different. Don't try to do all the exercises at once. Ask God to lead you to what will be most beneficial to you today.

You might like to use this booklet as a journal too, and write in the blank spaces your reflections/prayers/reactions arising from these exercises.

Reflection: God is Looking for Us Henri Nouwen



...A fourth truth about the God to whom we pray is that God is seeking us. We do not find God, but God finds us.

God is the good shepherd who goes looking for the lost sheep. God is the woman who lights a lamp, sweeps out the house, and searches everywhere for her lost coin until she has found it.

God is not the patriarch who stays at home, doesn't move, and expects his children to come to him, apologise for their sinful behaviour, beg for forgiveness and promise to do better. God is the father who watches and waits for his children, runs out to meet them, embraces them, pleads with them, and begs and urges them to come home. It might sound strange, but God wants to find us as much, if not more, than we want to find God.

For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair.

Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realised that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not, "How am I to find God?" but "How am I to let myself be found by God?" The question is not, "How am I to know God?" but "How am I to let myself be known by God?" The question is not, "How am I to love God?" but "How am I to let myself be loved by God?" And finally, the question is not "Who is God for me?" but "Who am I for God?"

The good news is that God is scanning the horizon for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home. In the same way, God is looking for you.

Reflect on this reading above. What does it tell you about yourself, God, and busyness?

Scriptural references for meditation on the theme of “busyness”

The Bible is full of stories of busy people and busy times. Jesus often spoke about busyness and our response to it as well. Here are a few examples of God’s invitations to us in the midst of busyness you might like to reflect on or use as material for lectio divina (opposite)

Luke 10:38-42

Luke 5: 1-11

Psalms - 46:10 /
37:24 / 31:14 /
73:23 / 63:8 / 121 /

Matthew 6:
28-30

As you prayerfully reflect on one or more of these passages, what do you feel God might be wanting to say to you? You might like to write this down below or in your journal...

What is Lectio divina?

Lectio divina or sacred reading is a simple and ancient way of praying with Scripture. It leads us naturally from a rational consideration of how a few verses of Scripture might connect with our current life, to a personal response in prayer and a gentle resting in the love of God, the beginnings of contemplation.

This practice emerged in the early history of the Church, finding its way into European monasticism through Cassian and St Benedict. Now it is being reclaimed by Christians as another gift of grace and growth in Christ.

The practice of Lectio divina

Preparation quieten yourself for a few moments and then choose a short passage of Scripture or other spiritual reading (such as the Gospel passages listed on the opposite page)

Lectio trusting that the Holy Spirit is there to help you, read through the passage several times really SLOWLY. Some people find that reading aloud helps to slow them down. Let the words move deeply into your being, like nourishing rain into the soil. Allow a word or a phrase to touch you.

Meditatio reflect on the word or phrase that has touched you, exploring what it means to you here and now. Let the word or phrase speak to your personal situation; believe that through this process God is communicating with you, perhaps giving a word of encouragement or of challenge, or calling you to a deeper awareness of God’s love for you.

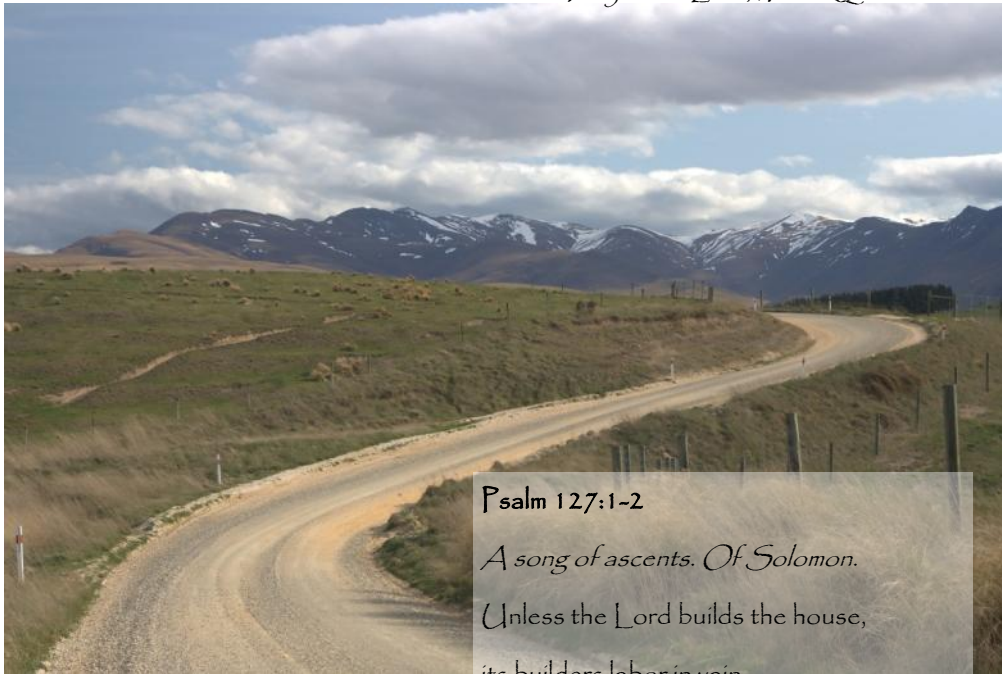
Oratio in this part of Lectio divina, you respond to God. You talk to God about what you have been thinking and what you have heard through the words of Scripture. You might pray your response or write in your journal, even sing or dance or paint your response ...pray as the Spirit moves you whether in gratitude, longing, repentance or intercession.

Contemplatio in this final and most important stage, sit quietly with God, at rest in the presence of the One who loves you. Do not worry that you may appear to be doing ‘nothing’.. Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in the depths of your spirit, deepening your faith. Let the Word move from your head to your heart to dwell there in peace-full silence.

Reflections

"If we knew how to look at life through God's eyes, we should see it as innumerable tokens of the love of the Creator seeking the love of his creatures. The Father has put us into the world, not to walk through it with lowered eyes, but to search for him through things, events, people. Everything must reveal God to us. Long prayers are not needed to in order to smile at Christ in the smallest details of life."

Prayers of Life Michel Quoist



Psalm 127:1-2

A song of ascents. Of Solomon.

Unless the Lord builds the house,
its builders labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard in vain.

In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking
finding scope for faith begun.

*from a hymn by Shirley Murray,
New Zealand Hymnbook Trust, 2000.*



Soaking prayer for spiritual exhaustion

Flora Slosson Wuellner in her book "Feed my Shepherds" (Upper Room, 1998) suggests that, when we experience spiritual exhaustion and inner fatigue, we lay aside all forms of prayer and reading, even intercessory prayer, confident that God will take care of those for whom we normally pray, while we rest. She suggests that we use 'soaking prayer':

"Make your body comfortable and at rest...Think of God's warmth and light surrounding you, as if you lie in the sun, or a pool of refreshing water if the sun image is too hot! ...You may wish to let your body slowly and gently rock from side to side as if being cradled. Or you may just wish to lie very still and let God's light and breath flow slowly and deeply into every part of your body....your whole self is washed in God's presence... After a few minutes of soaking prayer, lay your hands gently on your heart, abdomen, your forehead, over your eyes and pray very slowly: The living love of Jesus Christ now fills me.....

.....calms me..... heals me.....renews me. Touch or think of any part of your body that is in special need and pray this prayer of Christ's indwelling presence. Use any words that you feel are right for you." (page 124-5)



Prayer for taking off your shoes

Creator of fire and water,
Your burning bush has turned
Into a bubbling brook
And I have taken off my shoes
Having heard you call my name.

You do not speak in fire only, Lord.
In water you have sung your songs
And you are singing still.
Today you chant a memory-song
To my grown-up heart.

You are washing my anxiety away
You are reminding me of days of old
When I had time to play.
I stand barefoot upon the stones
The rushing water,
Lapping at my heels.
The sharp stones pierce my grown-up soles
My tough child-feet have worn away
As I grew up, forgetting to play.

Creator of the rocks and streams,
I'm growing up once more
I'm taking off my shoes
And remembering to adore.

My feet are getting tough again
My heart is getting young.

(A prayer by Macrina Wiederkehr, from her book, 'Seasons of Your Heart: Prayers and Reflections', 1991, Published by Harper San Francisco.)

Meeting God in little moments

Choose a **symbol** to place on your desk to remind you of God's presence with you through your day (e.g. a rock, candle...)



Look out the window, up into the sky or trees.

Light a **candle** as a symbol of God's living presence with you now



Put a leaf in your pocket and when you feel it during the day remember God's presence with you

Whenever you remember, **feel your feet** on the ground. You are here. And this is where God is, in the present.



Whenever you **wash your hands** pause to enjoy the moment. Let the running water remind you of God's living waters refreshing your soul.



Breathe. Be aware of your breathing. God is here with you as you take each breath.

Eat slower than usual. Savour each mouthful.



Take a **coffee break** with God. Talk to him as you would a friend about your day and what's going on for you.

As you are **getting dressed** for the day recall this verse: "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). Jesus, I clothe myself with you today... with your beauty, strength, love, understanding, patience, peace and joy.



Take a few moments to **notice the sounds around you.** You are part of God's world.

The rhythm of our prayer

Our whole lives are prayer – both when we retreat for time alone and when we are in the midst of a busy schedule. We are called to be contemplatives in action, but melding our ‘being’ with our ‘doing’ proves a constant challenge. We often struggle to integrate our prayer life into our daily routine. Often our lives get out of balance—usually by too much action and not enough time spent resting in God.

Reflect on the rhythm of your life during the past week. Trace the cycle of action-prayer-action during these seven days of your life. On the page opposite you might like to draw this as a daily or weekly cycle. Or you could draw it as a balance scale with retreat and action on opposite sides of the scale.

What strikes you as you look at the rhythm of your prayer?

- Knowing that everyone’s needs and personalities are different, do you feel that *your* life is in balance? Is there something you need to adjust?
- Think about the things which nourish you in your prayer life—have you been able to incorporate these into your schedule lately? Are there other things you would like to try?
- What might Jesus want to say to you about the rhythms in your life? Is he inviting you to a different rhythm in this time of your life?

Sketch or draw your rhythm of prayer

Drawing as prayer

Take a large sheet of paper and, with crayons or felt-tip pens, make a diagram or a drawing of the significant activities which cause busyness in your life.

When you have finished, choose a 'Christ'-colour - ie any colour that you feel could represent Christ for you. Draw this colour over the page to remind you of the moments of grace and encounter with God within these different activities. Or you can draw a 'Christ-colour' over activities where you desire to more clearly know God's presence during them.

Talk to God about what you have discovered in this process.



Photos as prayer

Find or make a collection of photos. Look through the photos and ask God to draw you to a photo that has something that fits with how you feel about the busyness you are experiencing. When you have selected an image find somewhere quiet and look at the photo and talk to God about it...

Think about what drew you to this photo, and then you might like to ask yourself some of the following questions:

- What thoughts/feelings/reaction does this photo evoke in you?
- What does it say to you about the busyness you are experiencing?
- What does God like about this photo?
- What would he like to say to you through this image?
- What do you want to say to God about how you feel right now?

Keep the photo – you might like to write some of your reflections on the back or paste it into your journal.



Addicted to busyness

“May this be the year when I give my energy to my heart’s desire”

For some of us, busyness is an addiction or, in more biblical language, an idol. It is something which keeps us from being real before God. If you feel that this is you then you might like to prayerfully read this prayer by Macrina Wiederkehr on the opposite page.

What is your heart’s desire? How can you attend to it more?



Prayer from the Cross of My Addictions

Jesus, for so long I have carried the cross of my addictions. I have been nailed to things that keep me from surrendering my life totally to you. These things that I am so attached to are the iron bars that keep me imprisoned in the narrow space of my own will. It is a lonely space and far from freedom. Yet grace keeps a soft hand on my heart, squeezing it on occasion until I am brimming over with desire for a saviour.

Jesus, you are that Saviour. You are the One who will anoint me with the holy oil of detachment. You are the One bringing good news to my heart. You glance at my heart with all its broken promises and your glance is like soothing ointment for all the nail marks in my life.

Jesus, you are the only One who can free what is captive in me. You lead me out of my self-made prison and bring me the good news of a year of jubilee. May this be that happy promised year. May this be the year when I let you all the way into my life. May this be the year when everything that is ruined, lying fallow, and unrooted in my life be raised up, renewed, and discovered. May this be the year when I give my energy to my heart’s desire. Dress me again in my baptismal robes for the seed is finally taking root. I am being transformed into another Christ. All praise to you Jesus, Saviour and prophet, sent to me from Yahweh to bind up my wounds.

So be it. Amen, my God, Amen.

Macrina Wiederkehr, from her book, ‘Seasons of Your Heart: Prayers and Reflections’, 1991, Published by Harper San

A body prayer

This prayer is a role play where you will act both Mary and Martha, with a seat signifying Jesus. Find a quiet and private space with an empty chair. As Mary you will be sitting at the foot of the chair (Jesus), as Martha you will be standing over the chair (Jesus).

First, slowly read through Luke 10:38-42 several times. Don't try to analyse it, but rather soak it in.

Sit or kneel at the foot of the chair, imagining that Jesus is sitting in it. Enjoy the peace of sitting there listening to him like Mary was...As you sit, talk with Jesus about how you feel or respond to what he might say to you. How does it feel to just sit and be with Jesus? To stop rushing?

After a while start to think about Martha (your busy self) rushing around in the kitchen. How does it feel to be sitting here while she is rushing about? How do you feel when you stop to rest or relax or enjoy yourself? Are there any feelings of guilt? Again, talk to Jesus about this.



Now, stand up to become Martha. You might want to rush around the room pretending to be busy at whatever you are normally busy with...Get into the role of that busy part of you. Then stand over the chair and tell Mary off in front of Jesus. Martha didn't hold back with her words: "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" Tell Jesus how you feel about Mary just sitting quietly and listening while there is work to be done. How do you feel about it? Jealous? Angry? Wishful? Resentful? Talk to Jesus about what you think or feel. Are there any particular people or parts of yourself that make you feel this way?

After a period, return again to that place of sitting down at the foot of Jesus. (It is important to finish in a safe posture of peace in this exercise). If you need to, ask for healing of any part of you that might react like Martha. Or you might like to ask Jesus to show you how to be more like Mary in the context of your life.

Sit in peace at Jesus' feet for as long as you want. Rest and relax in his company.



Hints for making the most of the silence

1. Do nothing at all... just “be” ... sit or kneel or lie down and wait for God to lead, to speak, to put ideas and thoughts and pictures and prayers into the mind. Rest and relax in the Lord.
2. Weather permitting go and enjoy being outside.
3. Use something to “spark off” your prayer : meditate on a Bible passage related to the theme, or use some of the material provided; pray the words of a favourite hymn or song or prayer.
4. Use the time to have an honest talk to God about where you are at... face up to yourself and your particular needs, trusting that God will deal with these if you give Him time and room.
5. Think about your current prayer life and ask God if He desires to show you any new ways of praying.
6. Spend some time journaling... writing or drawing your ideas and explorations about your life and where God seems to be... or about His absence... then talk to God about what you have written.
7. Use coloured pens or crayons to express what is happening for you at this particular time in your life.
8. Feel free to spend time talking with one of the retreat facilitators if an issue arises which you want help to explore.

