

Before You Begin:

1. Gather Your Materials:

- Print weekly Prayer guide.
- Bible
- Journal
- Pen/Pencil

2. Pick A Daily Time for Prayer:

It will help to have a set time of prayer each day. Picking the same time each day will help you create a routine of prayer within your daily life. Review your weekly calendar and find 20-30 minutes a day that you can schedule on your calendar for your daily prayer.

3. Create Your Prayer Place:

Find a place in your home that can become your prayer place. Make it a sacred place by placing a few meaningful items that help you enter into prayer. Examples might be: A candle, a picture, an image or icon, photos of your family or friends, etc.

4. Review the Handouts:

- Claiming Our Hearts Desire: Naming a Grace as We Begin
- *“Creating a Daily Contemplative Prayer Practice”*
- Lectio Divina
- Ignatian Contemplation

Claiming Our Hearts Desires: Naming the Grace We Seek As We Begin Prayer

By Becky Eldredge

To help make our contemplative prayer more personal to our daily needs and life, we always start by reflecting on the grace we seek. Whether we are praying with Lectio, Imaginative Prayer, or Colloquy we want to put words to our desires and needs as part of our prayer time. Naming the grace is the way we make our needs known and trust that God is with us and cares intimately about us. Grace is a deep infinite well that continues to invite us to explore new depths of our faith. Its existence is what propels us into new horizons in our relationship with God.

St. Ignatius invites us to name the grace we seek at the start of every prayer time, “to ask God for what I want and desire” (*Spiritual Exercises* #48). In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the retreatant is given a grace to pray for during each meditation and exercise. St. Ignatius goes on to say more, “The petition has to be according to the subject matter; that is, if the contemplation is on the Resurrection, one is to ask for joy with Christ in joy, if it is on the Passion, one is to ask for pain and tears with Christ.”

Naming the grace we seek allows us to claim the desires of our hearts and get in touch with what God might be offering us to learn more about. As David Fleming, SJ says, “Perhaps expressing what I truly want from God may also act as a preparation of my inner being for an openness to God’s entrance into a particular area of my life” (*Draw Me Into Your Friendship*).

When we are not making the Exercises, the grace we seek matches the subject matter of our lives and of our desires of our hearts. Pausing to name the grace we seek at the beginning of our prayer period invites God into our inner most desires and longings of our heart. We may enter prayer feeling tired or weary, and we ask for the grace of rest. We may enter seeking help with a discernment question or for guidance on a situation in our lives, and we can ask for the grace of clarity. And on and on. As our lives happen, relationships grow, and life is lived, the desires of our heart changes. Pausing to name the grace we seek is another way of inviting God to be with us in our everyday lives.

Here is how we can do this at the beginning of each prayer time:

- Place yourself in the presence of God
- Ask God: *What is the grace I seek?* Or you may know as you come into prayer the grace you are seeking, and you can tell God the desires of your heart.
- Notice what word arises within you. It might be something such as rest, peace, clarity, courage, hope, light, love.
- When a word arises in your thoughts, turn this into a prayer. *God, I seek the grace of _____.*
- After naming the grace you seek, enter your prayer time using the prayer method God invited you to use in prayer.

Creating a Daily Contemplative Prayer Practice

By Becky Eldredge

Beginning Prayer:

1. Once in your prayer place, intentionally place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Take a few deep breaths. As you breathe in and out slowly, remind yourself that you are never alone, and that God is with you right now.

Name the grace you seek:

1. Each week, there will be a suggested grace of the week. In addition to asking for that grace at the beginning of each prayer period, St. Ignatius invites us to name the grace we seek at the start of every prayer period. After placing yourself in the presence of God, simply go to God with the question...what is the grace I seek?
2. Notice what word arises within you? Are you seeking rest? Peace? Clarity? Courage? Hope? Light? Love? Mercy? And on and on the list might go. When a word arises in your thoughts, turn this into a prayer.
3. God, as I begin, I seek the grace of _____.

Review of daily prayer:

1. At the end of your prayer time, St. Ignatius also invites us to do a review of prayer. This simply involves a look back over the minutes spent in prayer with the question: What happened here?
2. It might be helpful to purchase a spiritual journal where you can jot down what you noticed in prayer. Perhaps you might write the word or phrase from scripture that caught your heart. Maybe you jot down a memory or image that God stirred in prayer. You might note the feelings that rose within you as you prayed. Did you feel hopeful? Sad? Frightened? Afraid?

Prepare for the next day's prayer:

1. As you close out your prayer time, take a brief look at the scripture or meditation you will pray with for the next day. St. Ignatius calls this preparing for the next day's prayer.
2. Skimming the reading or meditation for the next day allows it to begin to marinate in you and ready you for your next prayer time.

Weekly Review of Prayer:

1. At the end of each week of prayer it will help to do a weekly review of prayer. This is similar to the daily review of prayer; the only difference is looking back over your daily notes of prayer to jot down what has happened in this week's prayer time. The practice of reviewing your prayer is a beautiful tool to help us discern the movement of God within our hearts and also within our lives.
2. The art of looking backwards and reviewing our prayer actually helps us continue our forward movement and growth in God.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a slow, rhythmic reading and praying of a Scripture passage. Here are the steps of Lectio Divina:

Before beginning prayer, select a Scripture passage to pray with and have it open in your lap. Begin prayer by settling in and getting quiet. Close your eyes and enter your inner chapel. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer time.

Read: Pick any passage in Scripture. Slowly, thoughtfully, savor the living word. Linger whenever a word or phrase touches your heart. As you hold the word or phrase that caught your attention, ask yourself, *What might God be offering me?*

Reflect: Read the passage in Scripture a second time. This time, notice what feelings are stirring in response to the reading. Ask yourself, *What is God saying to me in this passage? What is God offering me? Asking me?*

Respond: Read the passage a third time. As the words enter your heart, note which word, image, or idea God is inviting you to savor. Respond to God from your heart. Speak to God of your feelings and insights. Offer these to God.

Rest: You might read the passage a fourth time. As you savor the gift of God's words, simply close your eyes and listen. Sit quietly in God's presence. Rest in God's love. Listen to God in your inner chapel.

After you feel your prayer drawn to a close, take a moment to review your prayer. Journal any insights or things you want to remember about what happened in prayer.

The Steps of Ignatian Contemplation

Ignatian Contemplation is a prayer method St. Ignatius recommends when praying with the life of Jesus. It not only allows us to hear and read the words of Jesus but also moves what is going on in the Scripture into our imaginations. This helps us not only hear Jesus but also watch the way he moves and acts.

1. **Select a Scripture:** Pick a passage from one of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.
2. **Read:** Read the passage several times slowly so that you almost know the story well enough to share it with another person.
3. **Image the Scene:** Close your eyes and imagine the scene. Imagine what the scene looks like. Who is in the scene? What are they doing? Where are they located? What do you notice about the environment? What smells are there? What sounds? Let the Holy Spirit guide this unfolding in your mind for you.
4. **Put yourself in the scene:** As the scene begins to take shape in your mind, put yourself in the scene. Notice where you are.
5. **Notice what happens:** Let the story unfold in your mind. Stay with it until you feel nudged to move to reflection.
6. **Respond and Rest:** Share with God what you noticed and experienced. Then rest in God and let God speak to you.
7. **Reflect:** Reflect back on what you experienced in prayer. What did you learn about Jesus? About God? About another character in the scripture? About yourself?