

Prayer: Finding Intimacy with God

Session 1: Prayer An Intimate Dialogue

HOME STUDY: our program is on FORMED: www.formed.org – Sign-up then Sign-in.

To sign-up for a FORMED account, use our SJN Parish subscription code: FPVD8M (all CAPS); set email & password.

- Locate our Study Program, “Lectio: Prayer”, one of these ways: 1) type “Lectio: Prayer” in the Search field then click on the result, or 2) click on the *Study tab*; then on *Bible Studies*; click on “Lectio: Prayer”.
- After arriving at “Lectio: Prayer”, scroll down & select ‘Session 1’ (28 mins)

★ Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for calling us to intimate conversation with you in prayer. Give us the strength and the perseverance to continually work to overcome all obstacles to prayer in our lives.

Teach us to listen as you speak to us in the Scripture. Guide us into an ever-deepening love for you.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

St. Francis de Sales

★ Introduction

Have you ever had an experience in prayer where you felt deeply, intimately connected to God? Have you ever felt like you were merely talking to yourself during prayer?

We begin our study on prayer by exploring the importance of approaching it as a two-way conversation. Does God speak to us? And if so, how do we hear him?

★ An Encounter with God – an Outline of the Video Discussion on FORMED:

I. Prayer – An Invitation to Encounter God

- I. Benedict XVI: Christianity is not simply a creed, but rather an encounter with the living God (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1)
- II. We need to be taught how to pray (Luke 11:1)
- III. *Lectio divina* as a method of encountering God in prayer

II. The Problem of Prayer

- I. We know we “ought” to pray, but it often seems like an obligation
- II. Inconsistency of prayer in everyday life
- III. Experience of dryness and aridity in monologue prayer

III. Prayer as Dialogue

- A. God loves us and speaks to us – he speaks the Word, his Son, Jesus
- B. God’s normative way of speaking is through his Word in the Scriptures
 1. St. Ambrose: “When you pick up the Scriptures, God speaks to you”
 2. St. Cyprian: “When you hear God in his Word, he speaks to you”
 3. St. Augustine hears “tolle lege” (take and read), reads Romans 13:11-14, and hears God speaking directly to him
- C. To whom is God’s Word in Scripture addressed?
 1. Historically, God speaks to Abraham, Moses, Mary, Peter, etc.
 2. The secret of the saints is that they hear God’s Word in Scripture as addressed to them in the present
 3. We need to come and listen to God; we need to “take and read” so that there can be a dynamic dialogue with God
 4. Prayer is God’s thirst for us (CCC 2560)

✦ Being Open to God This Week: Focus on One Item This Week ✦

Referenced Scripture are on pages that follow.

1 The Importance of Prayer. “Pray constantly.” – 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Prayer is everywhere in Scripture. “God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer” (CCC 2567). God wrote this call to prayer into the very structure of time from the beginning when he blessed the seventh day and established it as a day of rest and worship (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:8–10) The life of Christ is the ultimate example; he often takes the time to go off on his own for prayer. He prays with and for his disciples. He gives us the most explicit instructions concerning how to pray in the Our Father (Matthew 6:9–13). The apostles’ broke bread and prayed together (Acts 2:42)

- ✦ What does your prayer life have in common with prayer as lived throughout salvation history?
- ✦ How do you keep Sunday, the Lord’s Day, as a day of prayer? How does this influence the rest of your week?

2 The Problem of Prayer. “Be still, and know that I am God.” – Psalm 46:10

If prayer makes it onto your list of ‘should do’ but ‘don’t do’, you’re not alone; but we do need to find a way to put it on the ‘want to’ list. The problem of prayer is nothing new – Jesus’ own disciples asked him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1), and St. Paul lamented that “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Romans 8:26). Our path to prayer is challenged by a culture that has done it’s best to completely eliminate silence and stillness. (1 Kings 19:11–13) We might be able to start a conversation with God, but when He doesn’t respond immediately, we quit. We need patience.

- ✦ What are some things that you can do to cultivate a habit of exterior and interior silence, and practice the art of patient listening?

3 Lectio: “I thirst”. “ – that you also may believe.” – John 19:28–35

The Catechism tells us that God thirsts for a relationship with us, and that prayer is our response to this thirst (CCC 2560–61).

- ✦ Why is it so important to understand prayer as a response to God rather than something we initiate? What effect might this view of prayer have on your prayer life?

Christ’s cry from the cross, “I thirst,” expresses a reality beyond the physical torment of crucifixion and communicates a deep desire, a desire that is only quenched when each of us personally response to Jesus.

- ✦ What does Christ thirst for from you? What can you offer on a daily basis? Weekly? Lifetime?

Read John 19:28–35

- ✦ What need or desire does Jesus express in this passage? What does he receive?
- ✦ What does Jesus give in this passage?
- ✦ What reasons does St. John offer for presenting his testimony in this passage?

4 God Speaks. “We speak to him when we pray: we listen to him when we read the divine oracles” – St. Ambrose

As much as a big booming voice from heaven might make prayer easier, that’s not God’s normal way of communicating. So how are we supposed to hear God speak to us? He speaks to us primarily through his Word in the Scriptures. It may seem like a stretch to take words written thousands of years ago for a particular audience and read them as being addressed to each of us personally. But God’s living Word is big enough for everybody. The Church has always recognized both a literal and spiritual sense (meaning) in the words of the Bible. One passage often has multiple layers of meaning (CCC 115– 119). “If one wants to be always in God’s company, he must pray regularly and read regularly. “When we pray, we talk to God; when we read, God talks to us.” – St. Isidore of Seville

- ✦ Consider your current habits for reading Scripture. Do you read the Bible on a regular basis? Is it for prayer or for study? What are some steps you can take this week to being praying with Scripture or to increase your time in prayer?

5 Truth and Beauty. “We could add that for the People of God, Mary represents the model of every expression of their prayer life. In particular, she teaches Christians how to turn to God to ask for his help and support.”

– St. John Paul II

Read Luke 1:26–38.

- ✦ In this conversation between God (through his messenger Gabriel) and Mary, who initiates? Is this a monologue or a dialogue? How does Mary’s interaction with Gabriel change over the course of the conversation?

Read Luke 1:38–40: As Mary is able to consider, inquire, take in and understand God’s word and will, she then responds both in word and in deed, departing in haste to serve Elizabeth.

References from DVD Outline:

Luke 11:1 – The Lord’s Prayer

He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

Romans 13:11–14 – An Urgent Appeal

Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

CCC 2560

“If you knew the gift of God!” (Jn 4:10) The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. – St. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*

References Supporting Exercise 1:

1 Thessalonians 5:17

...pray constantly...

CCC 2567

God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God’s initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response. As God gradually reveals himself and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation.

Genesis 2:2–3

And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.

Exodus 20:8–10

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates...

Matthew 6:9–13

Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Acts 2:42

And they held steadfastly to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

References Supporting Exercise 2:

Psalms 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!”

Luke 11:1

He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

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References Supporting Exercise 2 – continued:

1 Kings 19:11–13

And he said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Eli’jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Eli’jah?”

References Supporting Exercise 3:

John 19:28–35

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished”; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth – that you also may believe.

CCC 2560 (see above, prior page)

CCC 2561

“You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God: “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!” Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God. *Jer 2:13; Jn 7:37-39; 19:28; Isa 12:3; 51:1; Zech 12:10; 13:1*

References Supporting Exercise 4:

CCC 115-119

According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: “All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal.”

The spiritual sense. Thanks to the unity of God’s plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

1. *The allegorical sense.* We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ’s victory and also of Christian Baptism.
2. *The moral sense.* The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written “for our instruction”.
3. *The anagogical sense* (Greek: anagogue, “leading”). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses: The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith; The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny.

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References Supporting Exercise 4 – continued:

“It is the task of exegates to work, according to these rules, toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgment. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God.”

But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me.

— St. Augustine

References Supporting Exercise 5:

Luke 1:26–40

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren For with God nothing will be impossible.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:38–40

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechari’ah and greeted Elizabeth.