



*Worship at
home*

JOINING TOGETHER
WHEN WE ARE APART

Introduction

BY REVD GUY MARTIN-SCOTT

Nearly 400 years ago John Donne wrote a set of twenty-three devotions at a time when he thought himself close to death. In these devotions he compared people to countries and stated famously that "no man is an island" that all of humanity was interconnected. At this time of social isolation due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Donne's words may sound empty as we start to feel the effects of enforced isolation.

However, Donne did not only argue that we were connected with each other but also with God. Although our usual way of being church - gathering together on a Sunday morning - is stopping, we are still connected as members of the body of Christ and so we can still worship together even when we are apart.

With that in mind, what follows in this booklet are a variety of ways that we can stay connected through worship and prayer within our own homes. Drawing on spiritual wisdom throughout the centuries these resources will not only bring us together today in common worship but also unite us with the Church that has gone before us.

I hope that these resources will sustain you spiritually in the weeks to come and, in the knowledge that we all will be using the same material, keep you connected you your church. Through this we will still be the Church: united in Christ no matter the distance between us.

I would like to leave you with another image that Dunne employs to describe humanity. He compares each of us to pages in one large book and although it may feel like we have been torn out of that book and separated from one another we have hope of being reunited once more.

*"but God's hand is in every translation;
and his hand shall binde up all our
scattered leaves againe, for that Librarie
where every booke shall lie open to one
another."*

John Dunne, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, XVII

Lectio Divina

DIVINE READING

What is Lectio Divina?

Lectio divina means 'divine reading' and is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. It finds its origins in the early church dating back to monasticism in the 4th century. The noun *lectio* derives from the verb *lego* meaning to pick or choose; and so lectio divina may be said to be a kind of divine picking or choosing of a given sentence, phrase or word of scripture through which God himself speaks.

This slow meditation on scripture is undertaken not with the intention of gaining information (this is not a Bible study!) but of using the texts as an aide to contact the living God through his living Word, hence why it is called 'divine' reading.

How does it work?

There is no set technique or method to lectio divina. However, in the 11th century a formal method was produced in a letter known now as *The Ladder of Monks* and describes a ladder with four rungs leading to Heaven, each rung being one of the four steps in his method of prayerful scripture reading.

These steps are *Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio*, and *Contemplatio* or in English: Reading, Meditation, Prayer, and Contemplation. What follows are brief instructions on how to put this method into practice.

1. **Choose a passage** - this could be a favourite passage of yours however it is best not to do this too often in case we get into the situation where we inadvertently start to choose what we want God to be saying to us. If you are having difficulty choosing a passage then try the daily readings as offered by the church which are not too difficult to find on the internet. If you are having difficulty see some suggested passages below.
2. **Pray** - Once you have your passage, pray. Ask God to speak to you through the passage you have chosen.
3. **Read** - Read the passage slowly. Remember, this is not a task to be completed but an act of worship, a time to delve into the depths of your passage and lift your heart to God. As you read the passage listen for a word or phrase that attracts you and then sit in silence repeating the word or phrase in your head.
4. **Meditate** - Read the passage again, slowly. As you pause on the words or phrases that strike you, ponder on what they mean and how they connect to your life. Try to articulate what the words or phrases say to you in a single sentence.
5. **Pray** - Read the passage again. Consider how God has spoken to you in this passage and what your response to him might be. Think about how God might be leading you to act differently in light of this.

6. Contemplate - Now take some time simply to rest and remain in the presence of God. You may want to record some of your thoughts or prayers in a journal so you can come back to them later.

To sum up lectio divina: reading *seeks*, meditation *finds*, prayer *asks*, and contemplation *tastes*.

Through this practice I hope you find a meeting place for a personal encounter with the Living God.

Suggested passages

Below are some suggested passages to start you off.

Genesis 2.4-9

Isaiah 55.6-9

Matthew 7.7-11

Matthew 9.9-13

Matthew 11.25-30

Matthew 15.32-39

Mark 4.35-41

Luke 8.4-8

Luke 15.1-7

Luke 18.35-43

Luke 23.39-43

John 15.1-11

John 21.15-17

1 John 4.7-16

The Body Prayer

JULIAN OF NORWICH

Plague and prayer

Although we are living through the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic there have been many before it and no doubt many will follow it. However, one pandemic stands out among the rest - the Black Plague which took around 200 million lives in four years across the globe.

Julian of Norwich was six years old when the Black Plague was at its height and she managed to live through it to develop a way of connecting with God through a series of yoga-like poses called *The Body Prayer*.

Body and Spirit

There has always been a profound connection between the body and the spirit. We worship God not just with our spirit but also with our bodies: we stand to sing, kneel to pray, sit to listen to scripture and sermons, some even genuflect before the altar. All are examples of using our bodies in prayer.

This connection between body and spirit is made most clearly in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and

the promise of the same bodily resurrection to eternal for all who believe in him. And so it is entirely appropriate for us to pray not just in our heads, or through our mouths but with our entire bodies too.

The Body Prayer

Julian of Norwich created this body prayer as a simple and beautiful way to pray without words.

The body prayer consists of four poses: await, allow, accept, attend.

Await - a posture of receiving, held with cupped hands extended at the waist to receive the presence of God. Await God's presence however you may experience it.

Allow - a posture of opening, reaching up with the hands open to the coming of God's presence.

Accept - a posture of standing with hands cupped at the heart taking in whatever comes.

Attend - a posture with hands extended and palms open in willingness to act on what has been given.

Move through each of these postures slowly and listen for God as you focus on each of the intentions. You might like to do this in silence or you might prefer gentle music or to speak your thoughts to God.

An Alternative Body Prayer

Another example of a body prayer is given by Paul Dumbille who uses the following hand positions to guide a time of prayer.

Clenched fists- we bring to mind any anger, frustrations, and disappointments in life.

Praying hands- we open up and connect to God bringing those things before him.

Open hands- we let go and listen to what God has to say.

Join hands- we join our spirits with others in carrying out what God wishes for us.

Again, move through each of these postures slowly and listen for God as you focus on each of the intentions.

The Labyrinth

MOVING TOWARDS GOD

Labyrinths

Labyrinths were first used in the time of the Ancient Greeks as simple designs on pottery and coins based around the myth of Perseus and the Minotaur - a beast who inhabited a winding cavern with only one way in and out.

During the 13th century several European cathedrals inlaid labyrinths into their floors - perhaps as an alternative for those who could not make a pilgrimage for one reason or another. Although they fell out of popularity they have recently had a resurgence as an alternative way to pray.

The practice of finger labyrinths

Although it may be difficult to find an actual labyrinth to walk round and pray then you can always take your finger for a walk around a labyrinth instead. A finger labyrinth is a small labyrinth, usually printed on paper, on which you trace the paths with your finger (you can find one in this booklet). Tracing the pattern with your finger can produce similar experiences to that of walking a labyrinth.

Before beginning to journey along the path of the finger labyrinth find somewhere quiet to sit, centre yourself and focus on the present moment. Close your eyes and listen to your breathing. When you are ready to begin open your eyes and start to trace your finger slowly along the path.

As you trace your finger toward the centre allow all your thoughts, anxieties, and worries to leave you with each turn. Lay them before God. As you continue this journey, bring before God the reason you have come before him - ponder it and bring it before God.

When you reach the centre of the labyrinth, pause, pray, and listen for what God may be revealing to you in that moment. Seek God during this time.

As you start your journey out of the labyrinth take time to integrate whatever you have experienced into your life. How can you put what God has revealed to you into practice? What new things is God calling you to?



Prayer Walk

FINDING GOD IN YOUR GARDEN

based on Whitchester Christian Centre's Woodland Prayer Walk

Encountering God in creation

God created the whole world and the whole world reflects his glory and so it is hardly a surprise that we can encounter God through his creation. This can be done easily within your own garden.

Ways to use a garden prayer walk

Before you commence your prayer walk find somewhere to sit or stand, close your eyes and spend some time listening to all that surrounds you. Take a moment to worship God for who he is and what he has made.

When you are ready walk around the perimeter of your garden, talking to God as you do. As you walk around your garden stop to look at objects, plants and animals that you come across. What do they tell you about God's character? What do they make you think of? How do they make you feel? Allow what you see and your reflections on what you see to guide your prayers.

On the next page you will find some reflections on things you might find in your garden.

Reflections around the garden

A flower: See how delicate the petals are (Matthew 6:28-33) God takes great care over all his creation. You are incredibly valuable to him. Think about all that means. If you find it hard to believe that you are valuable, consider asking God to show you how valuable you are.

A stinging nettle: Work was intended to be a blessing to us. However, when Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 2:15-17, 3:17-19) part of the judgement on them, and through them us, was that obstacles were put in the way of their/our work. This caused work to be harder and meant that not all of the results of our labours are good and useful. In Jesus this curse is broken but it is not yet removed so that we still struggle with it. Spend some time to bring your work before God. Are there any struggles that he wants to overcome with you? Does it feel futile and fruitless? Is it a blessing to you that you want to thank God for? Are there any “nettles, thorns or thistles” that he would like to deal with or that you want him to help you with?

Some deadwood: How long has the piece of dead wood been there? Is there anything living in it or growing on it? Would any of those things be growing or living in a living tree? As you look at the deadwood reflect on the following scriptures: John 12:23-26, Romans 6:5-11. What does it mean to be dead to sin and alive to God? In what ways does this produce fruit?

Reflections around the garden cont.

A rock/stone: God is described as a rock in at least 19 Psalms. The idea being that he provides safety and security, refuge and salvation from enemies. In Matthew (7:24-27) Jesus says that anyone who listens to his words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house upon a rock. Do you feel safe with God? Do you or does anyone you know need to know God as refuge or a firm place to stand? If so ask God to help you/them know that or ask him to be that. Consider also praying for the persecuted church around the world.

A bird: Birds appear in several places in scripture as a reminder or demonstration of God's provision (see Matthew 10:29-31, Isaiah 40:28-31 and 1 Kings 17:5-6). Remember and give thanks for ways that God has provided for you.

A tree: The kingdom of God is described by Jesus as like a mustard seed that starts out very small but grows into a tree, the largest of garden plants, and birds came and perch in its branches (Matt 13:31-32). Think and pray about ways in which coming into God's kingdom provides shelter. Where is the kingdom of God growing in your own life or around you? Where would God like to grow it more? If you don't know ask God to show you.

Finishing your walk

Sit on a bench or chair in your garden. Look out upon all that God has created and say the following prayer:

Lord God, thank you for the care and attention you give all that you have made. Thank you for your love for me. Help me to know your presence as I go about my daily life. Cause my love for you to grow and help me live a life of love that pleases you each day. Please give me wisdom to know the way that I should go so that I will remain in you all the days of my life, Amen

The Ignatian Examen

SEEING GOD IN THE EVERYDAY

taken from Ignatianspirituality.com 'How can I Pray?'

How can I pray?

A great way to pray is to look for God's presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Daily Examen. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us.

1. Become aware of God's presence.

Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

2. Review the day with gratitude.

Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

3. **Pay attention to your emotions.**

One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings? God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

4. **Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**

Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

5. **Look toward tomorrow.**

Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

Finishing the examen

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. End the Daily Examen with the Our Father.

Praying for others

BEING CHURCH IN ISOLATION

Isolation and prayer

Although the danger of COVID-19 is very real, so too is the danger of isolation. Loneliness has been linked to premature death and so it is of vital importance that we continue to pray for everyone we know who is isolated.

You might like to consider:

- Using a photograph of them as a means to focus your prayers.
- Light a candle for them.
- Write their names down on pieces of paper and stick them in prominent places around your house such as your fridge or bathroom mirror.
- Find some pebbles in the garden, wash and dry them and then write their names on them. Put one in your pocket and pray for them each time you feel that stone. Or, if you have a lot of pebbles, put them in a jar and pick a few out each meal time and pray for them before you eat.

As well as praying for them, let them know you care. Call them on the telephone, send them an email, letter, or text or even video call them if you can. You can be someones answer to prayer.

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Paul Dumbrille, *Involving the body in Prayer*,
<http://anglicanprayer.org/index.php/2017/04/14/involving-the-body-in-prayer/>

John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*

William Tenny-Brittian, *Prayer for People who Can't Sit Still*

Whitchester Christian Centre, *Woodland Prayer Walk*

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray/>