**SUGGESTIONS FOR A PERSONAL RETREAT**

**Theme: Prayer and My Life**

**Materials needed: Bible, Journal, Pen, Hymn Book, Snacks or Lunch (depending on your time frame)**

You may work through this cycle one to four times depending on the time that you have to give.

Find a comfortable place where you can be alone and quiet.

**ARRIVE and Get SETTLED**

Let God’s presence fill your consciousness and simply rest in this presence…just as you might with someone you love dearly and feel no need to speak to, just to be with. Let yourself be like a child cradled in the lap of a wonderful parent or grandparent; or perhaps gently supported in an ocean of light; or enfolded in peaceful warmth. Let yourself be held in God’s tender embrace; rest and soak up the love that holds you.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Spend thirty minutes in Silent Listening

“*A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening. Soren Kierkegaard*

**SCRIPTURE READING** (Use one passage for each cycle.)

Matthew 4: 1-11; Psalm 63; Matthew 6:1-17; Romans 8:18-39

Scripture doesn’t have to be one-way communication. It invites us to respond, question, debate, and celebrate its offering. When we begin to ‘talk back’ to Scripture, it comes alive and becomes interactive. Our critical thinking skills engage with our spiritual ‘feelers,’ strengthening our faith.

**RESPONSE**

Journal (spend time writing in your journal – perhaps enter into a dialogue with a character in the Scripture)

Prayer

Action

* Your response might be a specific act of service or care
* You may recall a hymn that ‘speaks’ to you. Find it in hymnal, read or sing it!
* You may have an image in mind, draw it

**READING AND REFLECTION**

Read any one of the attached readings. Do they resonate in any way with the scripture you read?

**REFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

Take time to reflect on the reading (s) you chose. What response do they call forth?

**RECREATION AND REST**

Take a walk, take a nap, have a snack or lunch. Use this time to let all that you have read/written sink into your being.

**REPEAT THE CYCLE** as time allows.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

My Lord, how good it is, how blessed to be with you in this place in prayer. Send me from this place in the power of your ever present Spirit. Amen.

**READINGS FOR REFLECTION ON “PRAYER AND MY LIFE’**

“I have said that the spiritual life has to do with how God relates to us and how we in turn relate to God. Prayer is the essential expression of this relationship. Like the spiritual life itself, prayers are initiated by God. No matter what we think about the origin of our prayers, they are all a response to the hidden workings of the Spirit within.

God’s desire for us ignites the spark of our desire for God. God’s guiding heart nudges forth our prayers to be led. The apostle Paul assured us that the Spirit “helps us in our weakness” and “intercedes with sighs too deep for words. (Rom. 8:26). Have you considered what an astonishing promise it is that the *Spirit prays in us,* and does so “according to the will of God?” Perhaps our real task in prayer is to attune ourselves to the conversation already going on deep in our hearts. Then we may align our conscious intentions with the desire of God being expressed at our core.

Prayer expresses our relationship with God. It should not surprise us that this relationship parallels in significant ways our relationship with other persons. It cannot be forced, but grows best in the soil of freedom and mutual commitment. The health and vitality of this relationship depend on clarity and frequency of communication. And any form of intimacy requires time spent in each other’s presence, time simply to explore and enjoy the gift of companionship.

Prayer involves freely entering a relationship of communication and communion with God, for the sake of knowledge, growth and mutual enjoyment.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

“I would like to pray again.” What a beautiful grace to want to pray. Prayer is a gift, yet it is the work of a lifetime. Why do people stop praying? Why do they begin again? Prayer is always a lost and found phenomenon. Prayer, l like each human life, has many stages of growth and development, decline and loss.

Prayer, like love, is not something one achieves once and for all. It is a special kind of consciousness, awareness, attention, presence.” - From *Gathering the Fragments* by Edward J. Farrell

“Christian prayer is always a response to a presence already felt. The awareness of a desire to pray again is already prayer. As the desert fathers so often said, ‘If you want to pray, you are already praying.’” – From *Gathering the Fragments* by Edward J. Farrell

“We tend to turn to prayer in extreme moments: great joy, ‘O, how good God is!’ When all human sources have failed, ‘O, God help me.’ Anguish, guilt, fear send us to God when no aid is near or, if near, would not understand. But prayer may be so much more: a way of life, a resource, a comfort, a continuing communion.

This continuing communion does not come about without effort. It is an exercise of the spirit that has a discipline of its own. I like to send myself to a dictionary for the actual definition of a word which I have been using rather freely. Webster enlarges my concept of the word discipline: ‘training which corrects, molds, strengthens, or perfects.’ There is nothing harsh about that, rather something encouraging. Through training a desired end can be achieved.” – From *A Book of Hours* by Elizabeth Yates

“Most people think of prayer s an audible activity which calls for the cessation of all other activities. There can also be an inwardness of prayer which does not interfere with other activities and produces no outward, visible indications that it is taking place. There can be a continual prayer of the heart and mind which does not interrupt our daily routine. There can be such a profound prayerfulness at the center of our beings that our entire lives are saturated with prayer and the miraculous potential for having a continual inner communion with our Lord.” –From *Praying the Name of Jesus* by Robert V. Dodd.

“Prayer is something more than that which we do with our minds. It also involves our hearts and spirits – that deeper part of our personalities to which only the Spirit of Jesus has access. Prayer in its highest form requires more than conscious effort. It also requires the surrender of our innermost selves to Jesus, giving him permission to make our lives a continually flowing fountain of unceasing prayer. When we have learned how to do that, we will have discovered the secret of the prayer of the heart.” – From *Praying the Name of Jesus* by Robert V. Dodd.

“You’ve felt the call. Perhaps, through prayer, God is prompting you to be more intentional about drawing near to the Source of Life. Maybe you’ve grown a little tired of the tried and true devotional methods of your past and wonder just how a person moves deeper in awareness and understanding of the presence of God. … Once I experienced a variety of ways to pray and listen to the Spirit, I began to get to know God, enjoy God, and be at peace with God’s creation a whole lot more.

…

There are many different ways to pray … Lectio Divina, Examen, Body prayers (like a Breath Prayer, Walking the Labyrinth) are a few examples. Be aware that mining the depths of our souls can be tough work at times. We discover we are in need of healing, and recovery almost always involves some pain. If we are honest in our prayers and conversations with God, we come face to face with ugly emotions, destructive habits, and self-deception. I remember once turning to prayer after a serious illness and beginning to sob in distress. Concerned about this, I consulted my pastor, asking, ‘ Isn’t prayer supposed to make me feel better?’ She smiled and said, ‘Not all the time. Prayer opens our heart to the loving presence of God, and that presence may ask us to grieve and let ourselves experience our pain.’ That’s when I stopped seeing prayer as a remedy and allowed it to become a living relationship with the living God.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

**DIRECTIONS FOR LECTIO DIVINA**

1. Read your passage slowly and carefully. Reread it. Notice any word or phrase that ‘jumps out’ at you. Read the passage again.
2. Meditatio – take your word, phrase or image from the Scripture and ponder it in your heart.
3. Oratio - Let your soul be deeply in prayer and let your heart be in dialogue with God. How does the word, phrase, image connect with your life today? How is God present to you in it?
4. Contemplatio – Rest silently in the presence of God.
5. If you desire, write about this prayer experience in a journal.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**DAILY EXAMEN**

1. Become aware of God’s presence
2. Review the day with gratitude
3. Pay attention to your emotions
4. Choose one feature of the ay and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow

**BODY PRAYER**

Breath Prayer – In Hebrew and Christiam thought, breath is closely related to the Spirit. The Hebrew word *ruach* means breath, spirit, or wind. First used in Genesis as “the wind of God swept over the face of the waters” as the earth was being formed. This multifaceted word points to breath as both a life-sustaining action for humans and a God-infused action in creation. A breath prayer is one that moves in and out on the wind of your breath, as the Spirit of God intermingles with your own spirit. It reminds us of the time the resurrected Jesus breathed on his disciples, saying, ‘Receive the Holy spirit.’ (John 20:22) This is a wordless and imageless prayer that involves more being than doing. You are simply observing and following your breath. As you breathe, your body, mind, and spirit are enlivened by God’s Spirit.

Sit quietly for 5 – 20 minutes (set a timer if possible). Pay attention to your breath. Breathe through your nose. Focus your attention either on your inhalation or exhalation. Feel the breath moving across your nostrils and entering your lungs. If your attention wanders, bring it back to your breath. Seek relaxed yet focused awareness. When your time is up, express your gratitude to God for the breath of life.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Thompson, Marjorie J. Soul Feast ©1995 p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. p. 31-32 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Blythe, Teresa A., 50 Ways to Pray ©2006. P13-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. p. 46-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. p.86-87 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)