

## Talking to God: Everyday Prayer for Everyday People



Christopher News Notes

*“Prayer is an aspiration of the heart; it is a simple glance directed to heaven; it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy.”*  
—St. Thérèse of Lisieux

**O**UR DESIRE FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIVINE IS STRONG. We all grapple with the mystery of life, its meaning, our place in the world, the desire to be part of something larger than ourselves. How can prayer guide us in addressing these questions?

Rev. John L. Dietzen writes in *The New Question Box* that a personal relationship with God “includes sharing with Him our joys and sorrows, our hopes and disappointments, our wonders and our regrets—all of which are nothing else but prayer.”

People of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances pray formally and informally, alone or in groups. If you look, you’ll notice pray-ers all around, from bus riders to ballplayers, soldiers to schoolchildren. Prayer also plays a part in life in ways not always obvious to an outside observer. One shopper, irritated while waiting in line, prays for patience. Another person uses dishwashing time to express gratitude for the day’s blessings. A doctor prays for guidance before surgery.

Some people feel prayerful and reverent while walking on the beach, watching a sunset, or sitting in the park. A noted musician once said, “Bach gives us a chance to pray.”

## Prayer: A Part of Life

*“Answer me when I call, O God of my right! Thou hast given me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.” —Psalm 4:1*

Prayer is essentially a conversation with God, noted Father John Catoir, the former Director of The Christophers. It can occur “with or without words, in a place of worship...or in the silence of your heart as you go about your daily work.” People are moved to pray at the computer or workbench, in a simple chapel or a magnificent cathedral.

- Richard Meier, a renowned architect who is Jewish, designed Rome’s Jubilee Church in a working-class neighborhood. Meier said, “The central ideas for creating a sacred space have to do with truth and authenticity...a search for clarity, peace, transparency, a yearning for tranquility, a place to evoke other-worldliness in a way that is uplifting.”
- The late George Nakashima, a noted Japanese-American furniture designer, studied architecture but later turned to woodworking. He designed

chairs, tables, cabinets and more in his Pennsylvania studio, shunning ornamentation for the beautiful adornment in the natural grain of the wood. “Work for him was a spiritual calling, a linking of his strength to a transcendental force, a surrender to the divine, a form of prayer,” said Mira Nakashima about her father.

- Boston attorney Eleanor Druckman found that her religious conversion and deepening prayer life affected her work. “When somebody comes in with a broken relationship or an anger or a lawsuit they want to file, I am able to sit with them, hear them, and allow them to speak from their hearts,” she said. “I truly encounter God...There seems to be a presence of spirit helping us sort through our confusion and our anger and our blame.”

## Pray For Your Enemies

*“I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” —Luke 6:27-28*

Cheri Fuller wrote in *Today’s Christian Woman* about following Jesus’ example in dealing with a person who has caused harm; for example, someone who “talked behind your back at church, mounted a campaign against you in the PTA...or hurt you in other ways.” She believes that when we obey Christ’s command to pray for our enemies, we are drawn closer to God, experience a change of heart, see God at work, and feel better emotionally and physically.

If you find it hard to pray for enemies, don’t get discouraged. Pray first to be able to forgive them. Remember, though, that forgiveness does not mean allowing anyone to continue abuse or violence.

## Prayers of Healing and Hope

*“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is sorely troubled...Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of Thy steadfast love.” —Psalm 6:2-4*

*Lord, I know not what I ought to ask of You;  
Only You know what I need;  
You love me better than I know how  
to love myself.  
O Father! Give to me, Your child, that which  
I myself know not how to ask for.  
I would have no other desire than to accomplish  
Your will.  
Teach me to pray. Pray Yourself in me.  
—adapted from a prayer by  
Bishop Francois Fénelon*

A belief in the healing benefits of prayer isn’t new. Dr. Herbert Benson, former head of the Mind/Body Medical Institute, noted that when trying to relax through meditation, most of his patients picked prayers, “be they Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, or Hindu.”

Arizona psychiatrist Carl Hammerschlag also believes in prayer’s power, noting, “Prayer inspires hope, and hope changes the nature of the immune system.” This is not to say that God cures physical ailments every time we ask. But God always listens and always offers His presence in our troubles. Rev. Mark Gardner, an Episcopalian hospice chaplain in California, noted, “It is not easy to open our hearts when we are angry, afraid, hurting. But when we do, healing and peace can enter into and proceed from us.”

Rev. Gardner visited a quadriplegic woman who was on a ventilator, dying of cancer. The woman was an agnostic. She appeared to be angry, yet hungry to find life’s meaning. Finally, she recalled a prayer from St. Teresa of Ávila, which she had learned years earlier: “Let nothing disturb you; let nothing frighten you. Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone is sufficient.”

“In her last days,” recalled Rev. Gardner, “when her raging subsided, she spoke that prayer from the depths of her being.”

## Pray As You Can

*"When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

—Matthew 6:6

A website produced by the Jesuit Community Centre in Ireland encouraged people to find a personal way of praying.

"One of the biggest 'dead ends' in developing my spiritual life is to want to have someone else's spiritual life," read one of the meditations found on the site. "I may find myself thinking, 'I wish I could pray like them.' But if I am a schoolteacher or an accountant or looking after my children all day, then that rhythm of prayer may just not be suited to me. 'Pray as you can, not as you can't' is a maxim that is frequently overlooked, leading to a lot of unrealistic expectations."

When you look within yourself, you will find that you really can pray anywhere and everywhere. "For years," explained Barbara Bartocci in *Episcopal Life*, "I thought a more spiritual life was something 'out there' to be achieved by people with a bent for holiness—not for someone ordinary like me, who juggles a zillion daily demands and hasn't the time for more than church on Sunday and a quick prayer at night." She learned otherwise, and made the following suggestions:

- "Alarm Clock Alleluia"—When your clock goes off, pray the psalm, "This is the day the Lord has

made. Let us rejoice and be glad" (Psalm 118:24). Commit to a day of gratitude.

- "Telephone Thanksgiving"—Say a brief prayer of thanks each time you answer the phone today.
- "The Gas Pump Minute"—As you pump gas, visualize God's spirit flowing into you and filling you with holy energy.
- "Red Light Contrition"—When you're stopped at a traffic light, ask yourself if you've been rude or otherwise failed to live up to your best. Pray a sincere, "I'm sorry."

## Prayer: Rest and Contemplate

*"Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

—Philippians 4:6-7

In addition to active spiritual pursuits, we must "feed our need for interior peace," said Rev. Gary Zuraitis. "Interior peace can only come from reflection and meditation that lead to dependence on God. A core value is personal prayer—prayer that goes beyond the letter of the law."

Too few of us know how to slow down and "just be in God's presence." In *Take Back Your Time*, Rabbi Arthur Waskow recommended reclaiming the Sabbath as a day of rest. This supports "people whose religious and spiritual traditions call for time for reflecting, to be calm, to refrain from doing and making in order to be and to love."

Tom Caruso, writing in *America* magazine, said, "Contemplative prayer...teaches us to sit in the presence of God, to let go of everything that distracts us...The goal is to do nothing, to think of nothing, but simply to be and accept that God loves us unconditionally, absolutely, for who we are, not what we do."

  
**"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."**

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