

Living Faith in Suffolk



Living Prayer I

Images

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Living Prayer 1 is one of the Living Faith in Suffolk resources produced by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and available on www.cofesuffolk.org

It is written by Anne Spalding, 2014.

If you use this course, please let us know at lesley.steed@cofesuffolk.org.

Introduction

Living Prayer I is a Living Faith in Suffolk course for people who want to give prayer some more attention. Perhaps you want somewhere to start in prayer. Maybe you pray over the washing up, when walking the dog or travelling to work, and sense that there might be more to prayer. You may have prayed for many years but want to re-visit some core aspects of prayer for this stage of your discovery and growth. Living Prayer I is intended to enable you to consider prayer in a fresh way.

Living Prayer I is a four week course for groups which enables us to explore prayer individually and together. Like other Living Faith in Suffolk courses, the material has a rhythm that encourages the basic habits of living faith, through attending to God, to each other and to the world beyond the group.

For facilitators

- Each session should last 90 minutes overall including the settling down and welcome. The 'Relating' section each week is important but the 'Bible Story' and 'Activity' are the core of each session. The Activity is expected to take the longest.
- The rooms used for the sessions need to be comfortable enough for people to be aware of what you are doing together. It is also important that people can hear one another.
- To help people listen to one another and to make the timings work, a recommended group size is 8 – 10 people.
- In each session there are things to see, hear and do. A list of resources to prepare is given at the beginning of the material for each session. Think about how to display photos or paintings so that they can be seen.
- It is helpful to both see (read) the Bible Story and to hear it. It is possible to find the words and hear it read on Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com) where NIVUK gives an audio version in UK English.

Session 1: Stopping

Resources needed for this session

- Focus – perhaps a candle and matches, or music.
- Introduction – prepare someone to read the experience (p. 6).
- Poem: search the internet for R S Thomas 'The Bright Field' and prepare someone else to read it. Also photo (p. 6) for display.
- Activity – a collection of stones or Lego™ so that a barrier can be built. Maybe a table on which to build the barrier.

Welcome

An opportunity to introduce ourselves to each other, the building and the whole course.

Focusing

Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating

Where are we? In the whole group share one good thing and one difficult thing about life just now, whatever you feel comfortable to say. Allow two minutes each.

Introduction to today's session

Prayer is not a discipline for its own sake. Prayer is as simple as God loving you in whatever way you are willing to allow yourself to be loved each day. We can start to give ourselves space to become more open to this by stopping.

Here are three examples of stopping and allowing ourselves to notice:

- An experience (p.6): have it read aloud. Pause to take it in.
- A poem: R S Thomas 'The Bright Field'. Have it read aloud. Pause to take it in and look at the photo.
- A photo: a bright field (p.6).

Then share briefly what we have seen and felt. There is no one particular right response to these. We are simply sharing our thoughts.

Bible Story

According to the Bible, Elijah lived in Israel in the 9th century BC. He challenged the behaviour of the people of Israel – especially King Ahab and his wife Jezebel – in the name of the LORD their God (1 Kings 18:18). Elijah predicted a drought (1 Kings 17:1) so Ahab called him ‘you troubler of Israel’ (1 Kings 18:17). During the drought Elijah travelled to find food and drink, performed miracles (1 Kings 17), and made the priests of other gods look foolish so those priests were killed (1 Kings 18:18-40). Then, seeing the rain coming, he ran ahead of Ahab’s chariot (1 Kings 18:46). There had been a lot going on!

1 Kings 19:1-15a: Listen, read and reflect in silence.

- What do you notice?
- What did Elijah notice when he stopped?

Share your thoughts.

Activity

Make barrier of stones or Lego™ to represent what gets in the way of your stopping and noticing. Then remove one piece each. What do you see? How do you feel? What does it remind you of?

Share one thing each from that experience.

Exercise for the week

Over the coming week, take five minutes a day to be still and notice what happens.

You may need to find a place where you can sit quietly.

You may find it helpful to:

- focus on your breathing
- focus on an object or flower
- focus on a word or phrase
- do a routine activity
- listen to favourite music.

Final prayers

Spend some time in silence (two minutes if you are not used to this, up to five minutes if everyone is).

Experience for Session I

Driving through an unfamiliar part of Derbyshire,
on my way to visit friends, I got lost.
“I should check the map”, I thought,
but the roads were winding and too narrow to stop.
I caught sight of a sign to a viewing point.
So I pulled in and parked.
But the view said, “The map can wait”.
In the February mist, a valley
and a viaduct that once carried a railway, transformed into a cycle track.
“I’ll come here again”, I promised myself as I pulled away,
knowing which road to take,
“and give this place the time it asks for”.

Photo for Session I



Session 2: Receiving

Resources for this session

- Focus – perhaps candle and matches, or music.
- Introduction – bread (maybe gluten-free) to share.
- Bible story – Painting: search the internet for ‘He Qi, Martha and Mary’ for display.
- Activity – paper and pens or pencils to note down reflections.

Welcome

After welcoming each other the session follows this order.

Focusing

Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating

Where are we? In the whole group share the experience of stopping and noticing for five minutes a day this week. This is a time to welcome, rather than discuss, what each person says.

Introduction to today’s session

We experience God’s grace in the everyday but do not always notice. So we have to learn how to remember these moments of love and respond to the God who gives them.

- As a result of bombing in the Second World War, many children were orphaned and hungry. Some were brought to refugee camps where they had food and care. But many of these children could not sleep at night for fear that when they woke they would be homeless and hungry again. Eventually someone thought of giving each child a piece of bread when they went to bed. Holding the bread, the children were able to sleep. The bread was their reminder that they had eaten today and would eat again tomorrow.¹
- Share the bread, a piece each. We hold on to God’s grace to feed us until the next ‘meal’ of God’s grace. As a sign of this, each person holds their piece of bread until the end of today’s session.

¹ See Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn & Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Paulist Press, 1995), p. 1.

Bible Story

In this story, Jesus is receiving hospitality in a home.

Show the painting of He Qi's 'Martha and Mary' so that anyone can see it while you listen to the story.

Luke 10.38-42: Listen, read and reflect in silence.

- What do you notice about the different kinds of hospitality given and received?
- How does each person respond to Jesus and Jesus to them?
- What are you drawn to most and least in the story?

Share your thoughts.

Activity

The Awareness Examen is a way of looking back on the day to notice what has brought us life during the day and what has not.

In silence, reflect on your day and ask:

- For what moment today am I most grateful?
- For what moment today am I least grateful?

There are many ways of asking the same question, for example:

- What was today's high point?
- What was today's low point?

- When was I happiest today?
- When was I saddest?

- When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God and the universe?
- When did I have the least sense of belonging?

- When did I feel the most alive today?
- When did I most feel life draining out of me?

- When did I give and receive the most love today?
- When did I give and receive the least love today?

So, again, the key questions are:

- For what moment today am I most grateful?
- For what moment today am I least grateful?

(Pause)

Remember these experiences clearly. What happened? What did you feel? What did you think? Who else was involved?

(Pause)

What exactly was it that made these experiences stand out? If it is a situation you are in often, is it always one you are most / least grateful for?

(Pause)

You might want to write down your reflections, to help you remember (allow time for this).

Share your high and low moments of the day in twos or threes or as a whole group.

Exercise for the week

Over the coming week, take time to do the Awareness Examen each day. Record the moments you are most and least grateful for. This could be in words, by drawing, or by making or collecting pictures or objects.

Twice during the week, consider: How might I respond to the grace of God that I have found?

Final prayers

A moment to gather our thoughts, eat the bread, then:

Almighty God,
we thank you for giving us our daily bread,
for feeding us with moments of grace.
Through Christ we offer ourselves
to you, the God of grace.
In the power of your Spirit,
enable us to respond to your grace wherever we go,
that others may know your grace too. **Amen.**

Session 3: Embracing

Resources for this session

- Focus – perhaps candle and matches, or music.
- Introduction – Icon: search the internet for ‘Vladimir Mother of God icon’ for display.
- Activity – materials for writing, drawing, collage and shaping (e.g. plain and coloured paper, pens and coloured pens, old newspapers / magazines to tear, glue sticks, coloured modelling dough).

Welcome

After welcoming each other the session follows this order.

Focusing

Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating

Where are we? In the whole group share your experience of the Awareness Examen this week.

Introduction to today’s session

Prayer can sometimes feel far away from us. But God wants to know what is in our hearts, in *my* heart. We may be afraid of that because what is in our hearts is not always ‘nice’ – we may be angry or lonely or frightened or lacking in self-esteem – and we don’t like it so we are quite sure God won’t like it either. But God comes close to broken people. For example we read that Jesus was often with those who were disabled or sick, or with tax collectors and other outcasts, bringing life to them.

Take a few minutes to look at a Vladimir Mother of God icon. Christ presses close to the human (Mary) and Mary invites us as viewers into that knowledge and experience. Then share briefly what you have seen and felt.

Bible Story

In this story Jesus was travelling through the town of Jericho, heading for Jerusalem.

Matthew 20.29-34: Listen, read and reflect in silence.

- What do you notice about these men and what was on their heart?
- How does Jesus respond?

Share your thoughts.

Activity

In silence ask yourself, 'Heart, what is your prayer?'

Then write, draw, collage or mould your heart and its prayer.

Spend two minutes sharing as a group your heart's prayer as you feel able.

Exercise for the week

Over the coming week, record expressions of your heart's prayer. You might want to use words (your own or other people's), pictures, poems, songs and / or objects. Please bring your record next week in a book and / or container.

Final prayers

Pray in turn for your neighbour: 'Lord, thank you for [Name]. Please hear the prayer of their heart. Amen.'

Session 4: Blessing

Resources for this session

- Focus – perhaps candle and matches, or music.
- Bible Story – Painting: search the internet for ‘Rembrandt prodigal son images’ for display.
- Activity – a table for holding records of the hearts’ prayers.

Welcome

After welcoming each other the session follows this order.

Focusing

Something that helps us to recognise the presence of God (for example, silence, music, the lighting of a candle).

Relating

Where are we? In the whole group, share your experience of recording your heart’s prayer this week.

Introduction to today’s session

From the beginning, the God of the Bible blesses people. A blessing shows God’s favour and often has practical consequences such as receiving food, health or children. There may still be difficulties in life but God’s favour is known in the midst of it.

In the Bible people also bless one another. Sometimes this is an everyday blessing, ‘The Lord bless you’, just as in English ‘Goodbye’ is a shortened version of ‘God be with you.’ On other occasions a blessing may be sought out or consciously received.

God’s blessing is offered to people as they are, not for what they have done. So no matter who we are or what we are like, God wants to bless us.

Bible Story

This is a story told by Jesus.

Show the painting of Rembrandt's 'The Return of the Prodigal Son' so that anyone can see it while you listen to the story.

Luke 15.11 – 32: Listen, read and reflect in silence.

- What do you notice about the father who is prepared to bless his two sons?
- What do you notice about his sons?

Share your thoughts.

Activity

Each one places their record of their heart's prayer on the table. In silence we acknowledge the broken bits of ourselves. After a minute, someone prays for God's blessing on the person on their right using these words:

'God bless you and keep you,
God smile on you and gift you,
God look you full in the face and make you prosper'
(Numbers 6.24 – 26, *The Message*).

Pause after the prayer to let it soak in. Then the person who has received the blessing prays for God's blessing on the person on their right, and continue round the group.

When everyone is ready, each person names one local or national or international situation on their mind. Together, choose one specific aspect where you would like God's favour; for example something in relation to health, food, education, work, business leaders, community life, or political situation. Pray for God's blessing on each situation in turn, making the one request of God for them: 'We pray for [the people of] ..., asking for God's grace to be among them, and especially asking for ... Amen.'

Discuss how God might be calling us to be at least part of the answer to our prayers.

Exercise for the week

Over the coming week, remember each day God's grace and blessing for yourself. Then pray for God's blessing on one local or national or international situation that concerns you.

Twice in the week, consider: How might God be calling you to be at least part of the answer to your prayers? You may find it helpful to discuss this with someone else.

Final prayers

Look again at the Rembrandt painting in silence.

Finally, send one another out by saying together: 'May the grace of God be with you today and always. Amen.'