



40
Ways
To Spend
5 Minutes
With God

Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

- attrib Fr Pedro Arrupe



40 Ways To Spend 5 Minutes with God

Re-write November 2023

If you have found this prayer guide helpful, visit The Invitation Center theinvitationcenter.org where you will find guided prayers and meditations and helpful conversations with teachers, authors, liturgists, and spiritual directors.

The Invitation also offers classes and retreats throughout the year for your growth.

If you have any questions about this prayer guide or anything else dealing with spiritual formation, please feel free to inquire josh@theinvitationcenter.org

Welcome!

You've done it! If you are taking time to read through this, then you have begun praying already. It's true. Even the smallest desire to learn to pray is a gift only God can stir inside of you.

Consider why you are reading this guide. Truly, I encourage you to pause here and consider what has led you here.

Perhaps you have always thought you were bad at prayer, and you need some help. Perhaps you are a newer Christian, and you feel like you don't understand what prayer is. Perhaps you are a more seasoned Christian who is bored with your faith, and you want to imagine what more you can discover in your relationship with God?

Prayer is possible when we suspect that there is more available, more of God, more of this world, more of yourself.

Your First Five Minutes of Prayer

The first step is to use five minutes to prayerfully read some of this introduction, look over the whole of this guide, and get your bearings. Familiarize yourself with what lies ahead and discern what you might use tomorrow for your next five minutes of prayer.

It might seem silly to consider just five minutes of prayer. Most of us carry so many obligations and addictions that we need a simple,

to produce results. We return to prayer when we begin to understand that there is no other place to go.

While each of us has a different prayer, the greatest thing you and I have in common is our deep need for God's love and help. It is difficult to accept this deep need for help and it is difficult to accept that we have no control over when, where, and how God will help us. It is difficult to let go of our need to achieve before God. It is difficult to allow ourselves to be beginners. Before God, we are always beginners.

November, 2023

This prayer guide is a work in progress that is written and re-written alongside the growth of the Invitation. The first draft of the guide was written in 2015 to serve a local church. This revision is a substantial re-envisioning of the prayer guide in light of the development of The Invitation, a spirituality center that creates time and space for God at the vital intersection of contemplation and justice.

The Invitation hosts a growing podcast, a private practice of spiritual direction, facilitating and designing retreats, as well as two formation experiences. The Invitation School of Prayer is a nine-month study and practice of the rule of life. The Invitation School of Contemplative Listening is a two-year certification program in spiritual direction.

Much of the Invitation's offerings are aimed at pastors and lay leaders. This prayer guide and a third, forthcoming formation experience, The Failure Lab, a 90-day study and practice of powerlessness and spiritual friendship—these offerings are intended to be more accessible to the local church, practices that can be approached by individuals or small groups.

If this prayer guide is helpful for you, please consider visiting www.theinvitationcenter.org to learn more about the Invitation.

Feedback on this prayer guide and further questions can be sent to josh@theinvitationcenter.org

day. Consider what benefit going to sleep a half hour or a full hour earlier might have to your life, your relationships, your, work, and prayer.

40. Sit in silence within your heart, mind, strength, and soul, and embrace your weaknesses and failures, your doubts and suffering as gifts that require you to depend on the help of God more actively and readily. It is difficult to sit in quiet dependence on God when we are holding on to aspirations to fix our lives. In the vocabulary of Saint Paul, all the suggested helps within the prayer exercises above are meaningless trash compared to the opportunity to know Jesus more intimately in the depths of our souls (Philippians 3). This final practice of silence, stillness, and solitude is an invitation to relinquish our need to attain anything. This is a continued surrender of your control and expectations. This is not a glib, superficial prayer. It is not a prayer you cannot fake or force. It is a gift of the cruciform nature of Jesus, to die to yourself and to freely pray *not my will but yours*. As we decrease our ego and lust for power, we become more spacious and capable of staying in love with God for the sake of others.



How Do I Know if I'm Doing any of this Right?

Those who have climbed a mountain of considerable height will likely have mistaken a mountain ridge for the summit.

You have hiked for seven or eight hours. Exhausted you begin to assume that the end must be near. As you progress, you eventually see a place where the rock seems to come to an end. So, you set your sites toward what you perceive is your destination. However, as you continue toward that horizon for another hour, you begin to realize that is not your destination. The summit lies further behind the ridge that you are now climbing over. You couldn't see the summit because it was hidden behind the ridge you are now standing on.

Our climb toward God is like this. We are mistaking ridges for the summit. What's even more disorienting is that with God there is no summit.

Before God there is no way to evaluate our prayer. We cannot even assume that prayer is of value only when it results in specific signs of transformation. Jesus teaches that we can judge a tree by the fruit that it bears. We hope for tangible growth in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control just like we hope that we might experience some tangible sign of God's love in prayer. But even here, we can't have expectations of God or of ourselves.

Prayer is a holy waste of time. We return to prayer not to get anything out of it. God is not a genie in a bottle. There is no magic way

approachable way to practice daily prayer. Those who have attempted daily prayer likely have experienced some starts and stops. When we place unsustainable expectations on ourselves, we may be faithful for a time. But then when we fail to stay committed, we become frustrated with ourselves. This frustration can leave us in a worse condition that is no more open to God's love than when we started.

Consider how much of your life is already governed by small daily practices: putting on clothes, making a quick breakfast, gathering all your things before you head out the door, making a cup of coffee, checking your email, brushing your teeth, and washing your face before bed....

We give ourselves to many of these basic practices that shape our days. Consider what could happen by simply adding five minutes with God to your daily routines. A five-minute daily walk would benefit your health. Five minutes of news would help you stay on top of politics. Five minutes a day with a friend would deepen your friendship. Likewise, five minutes of prayer will familiarize you with the Creator of the Universe, the Lover of your soul, the God who knows you better than you know yourself.

Many of us avoid being more intentional about our prayer because we have unrealistic, lofty ideals of what spiritual practice should be, and we don't want to set ourselves up for failure. Our intent here is to begin somehow, someway with the attention we have available today. We need to let go of unhelpful idealistic fantasies of becoming a saint. We turn to small, consistent prayers as we become more familiar with our deep need for God's help.

A humble five minutes daily will be more helpful to you than 20, 30, or 60 minutes sporadically.

Really? 40 Ways?

One philosopher teaches that there are as many kinds of art as there are human motives. If we consider prayer the most essential art God has designed us to practice, we can say that there are as many kinds of prayer as there are human beings. This means that Prayer is a vast subject. There are myriads of ways to open ourselves to God; so many that it may seem futile to try and map all the ways. No book could contain all the possibilities.

This list of prayer methods is not intended to intimidate you but to give you hope. We get stuck in our spiritual growth when our prayer seems routine and monotonous. When prayer seems limited, our concept of God is limited.

There is always more to discover of God and there is always more for you to discover of yourself. Each of us is a unique constellation of heart, mind, body, and soul. And different versions of each of us emerge as we age and change, so our approaches to prayer also need to evolve and grow.

Prayer is Easy?

Perhaps you picked up this prayerbook on a whim. Perhaps didn't begin with any particular intention to pray, and now you are looking over the pages feeling overwhelmed or even confused. I invite you to pause again and notice if there is any desire for God stirring inside of you. Can you notice any possible opening of love in your heart when you consider that there is more of God and more of you to discover? Could God be calling you deeper into his love?

If you would like to proceed with this prayer guide, please be patient with yourself with what might lie ahead. Many of us who have been going to church for quite a while are still intimidated and restless when it comes to prayer. We have not yet learned how easy prayer is.

Perhaps the most difficult thing about prayer is accepting how easy it is. The difficulty is not with prayer itself. Prayer is our greatest help. It can fill us with the deepest delights, as the Psalmist says, *In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand are pleasures eternal* (Psalm 16). We were designed by God to pray. In fact, it is impossible for you not to already be praying. To be alive, to breathe, to think, and to love, to move around on the earth—our existence is made possible by the creative, sustaining, loving presence of God who can be found everywhere and in everything. God is already praying within you.

The difficulty is whether I can direct my attention to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and actively participate in prayer. The difficulty is with you and me, with the hardness of our hearts, with how we keep our hearts closed and preoccupied. We don't like wasting our precious time and attention, especially on a God we cannot see with our eyes.

By saying that prayer is easy, we mean that once we begin—once we create a time and a space for God—he will, by his Spirit meet us and draw us deeper into his love. When we return to prayer, we are returning to our home in God. Prayer is easy because it's a return to a way of being and loving that we already know.

Opening to prayer may seem a bit strange at first. But once we find our rest in the prayer, as we continue in prayer and make it part of our daily rhythms, we learn to trust this is what we were originally created for. After you have spent some time in prayer, you will look back with relief and gratitude. You will know how much easier it is to live life in and through God rather than without Him.

If Prayer Is So Easy, Then How Do We Begin?

Prayer is simply responding to Jesus' invitation to enjoy his love. Prayer is not a matter of dutifully folding our hands, closing our eyes, and asking God to help us with a list of needs. Our need for God is much deeper than any single prayer concern. Prayer is about opening ourselves to the presence of God so that his love will saturate all that we do—all our concerns about our health, family, friends, work, and play, all our worry about our past, present, and future.

your five minutes to notice and pay attention to your breath. Do not feel guilty when distracting thoughts come. Simply offer those thoughts back to God placing them in his care. Then focus on the subtle work of stilling your soul. For some people, it is helpful to write down those distracting thoughts to move on from them.

36. Further prepare a quiet place by arranging religious pictures, a cross, or any kind of meaningful art nearby that will especially help you shift your attention away from anxious thoughts and distraction back toward God's presence. When distracting thoughts arise, open your eyes and gaze at a helpful image. It may be helpful to place the image directly in front of you or to hold it in your hands. Some find help gazing at the image for a few minutes or even for the entirety of their prayer. The image can serve as a kind of sacred text. Instead of Scripture, the image reminds you of various things about yourself, others, or God. This might become distracting, or it might be a helpful way to remain at rest.

37. In a similar mode to the previous exercise, a piece of religious jewelry, a special ring or cross pendant, a hand-held cross, a candle, or incense might be helpful for you to move from a distracted, busy rush more effectively toward a posture of calm rest. As our minds wander, emotions race, and bodies continue in restlessness, the tactile sense of holding something sacred in your hands can be an aid to stillness. Likewise, the aroma therapy of incense, essential oil, or some other fragrance may also be helpful. Throughout the day when you find yourself especially anxious, take the cross or ring off and hold it in your hand to offer brief prayers in between tasks, as you walk from one location to the next, or as you sit in meetings. As a special gift of jewelry from a loved one reminds you of that relationship, this piece of jewelry can serve as a reminder of your relationship with God. With a candle, sit calmly watching the movements of the flame. Allow the candle to focus your attention on stillness.

38. Create more inner stillness for God throughout your day by eliminating an unnecessary daily habit. Playfully and creatively cultivate boredom in pockets of each day. Remove some or all internet access, news, music, email, or texts from your morning routine, your drive to work, during a lunch break, from dinner through bed, or even throughout the whole day. Cultivate the habit of moving away from these distractions. Notice the refreshment of not having your mind, emotions, and nervous system agitated by continual noise and stimulation. Allow God to fill this new empty space. Spend part of your five minutes in further wordless prayer. Then reflect in your journal on how this kind of fasting is helping you stay more open to God.

39. Fast from busyness by saying 'no' the next time you are asked to go above and beyond your regular day's responsibilities. When you fast like this, you are also fasting from your need for significance—indeed, your need for approval. Use your five minutes to consider other ways that you can eliminate busyness and rush from your life. Identify how to create margins in your life so that you don't need to rush through each

Read each word carefully and slowly lingering in the sound of each word. Return to this quiet rest between each reading. Notice how the passage can help you settle down into your soul. Avoid trying to make anything happen and avoid needing to figure anything out with your mind. Trust the refreshment of being quiet and still.

32. Center yourself, quiet your heart and mind. Recall where your thoughts have been wandering. Notice how your emotions have been pushing and pulling your attention. Scan your body from head to toe. Notice any tension in your muscles and joints and the shortness of your breath. As you gather a sense of these vivid, active parts of yourself, surrender your control and dismiss your expectations to wait on the presence of God in silent trust. Cultivate a deep trust that God is meeting with you in ways you don't need to understand, feel, or perform.

33. Identify a prayer word, a single word, or a short phrase that especially allows you to calm and quiet yourself. This could be a word or phrase that you've noticed in Scripture or something from a spiritual reading. Center yourself in silence, slow your breath, and calm your thoughts. Repeat the word or phrase carefully and lovingly both with your exhale and inhale. Pay attention to how you can further calm and quiet yourself. Continue with this recitation for the full length of your five minutes. Forgive yourself if your mind wanders and allow the word or phrase to draw your attention back to rest and stillness. The Jesus Prayer mentioned above in the mind prayers is an example of what can attend to your calm stillness. As you inhale, silently recite the phrase, *Lord Jesus Christ Son of God*. Then with your exhale continue, *Have mercy on me a sinner*. Note that within the tradition of praying the Jesus Prayer, some have altered the length of the words even to just repeat only the holy name of Jesus with each breath.

34. Get out into nature for a short walk. Begin by inviting Jesus to join you along the way. Allow the beauty and presence of nature to calm and quiet yourself. Walk slowly and pay attention to your breath. Notice the rhythms of each step, each movement of your joints, the roll of your foot from heel to toe, the bending of your knees, and the turning of your neck. Let this slow cadence gently expand your awareness of God's presence revealed all around, in, and through you. Try this gentle prayer walk at different times of the day or in different seasons. Does early morning or late evening cool air help? Can morning light or the stars at night help slow your breathing so you can turn away from anxious thoughts and more easily open yourself to God's presence?

35. Prepare a special place in your home that helps you quiet and calm yourself first by considering your posture. Where is a good place to sit quietly? Choose a good chair, a prayer bench, or a cushion, that will keep your back upright. Depending on your body type and flexibility, you might find more help sitting attentively on the floor. The idea is to not sit up too rigidly and become anxious or to lean back and get sleepy. You want your head and neck to gently rest in alignment above your shoulders, spin, and hips. Your posture should allow you to freely breathe in through your nose filling your diaphragm and out your mouth. Use

Prayer begins by merely opening yourself to God's presence. The goal of our life is to give and receive God's love. We actively participate in prayer when we open ourselves to this love. What does this mean?

Imagine yourself in a busy place filled with people, an office, or a coffee shop. You are occupied with a task—an email, reviewing your calendar. You are lost in thought, and so you are closed and inattentive to the people that surround you. But then a close friend appears across the room and walks toward you. Your heart moves. You recognize your affection and gratitude for that friend, and so you open yourself to her company. You welcome her as a companion as she sits down to talk.

Prayer can be this simple: a practice of opening your heart to the Spirit of God in your midst. God is not across the room. God is right next to you. God is already in your heart, deeply within you, loving and sustaining you. When we pray, we practice the joy of recognizing and opening ourselves to this companionship.

How Do We Accept this Invitation and Enjoy God's Presence?

The most freeing part of our prayer is also one of the most discouraging realizations: your prayer is not my prayer, and my prayer is not your prayer. There is no standard program of prayer that will help all of us give and receive God's love. One of us needs more silence. Another person hungers for more Scripture. Another enjoys writing out their prayers in a journal, and another prefers walks in nature.

It can be frustrating and even lonely to accept that God reveals himself to each of us in different ways. Yet our hope is that this prayer guide can free you to find the prayer that is especially helpful for you.

We've said that prayer is easy once you have overcome yourself and found your prayer. Prayer is easy, but you and I are difficult. And it can be difficult to find your prayer. We discover our prayer over time through creative, playful trial and error. Try different kinds of the suggested prayers in this guide. Experiment and discover what especially helps you open to love and stay open.

There is a holy risk here, a wager. Once we have identified our willingness, we attempt prayer in whatever way possible. We make space and set aside time to take the risk of opening ourselves to God. We risk in faith that God is near and that he will reveal himself to us.

Beware of Expectations

The holy wager of prayer is that we open ourselves to love without expectation. Expectation is a great hindrance.

Expectation is that God will reveal himself to us in a certain way at a certain time.

Expectation is that our experience of prayer today will match what we have experienced in the past.

Expectation is the false idea that only big, long, and serious prayers will change us. This kind of expectation turns out to be more about us, about our spiritual muscularity than about the loving presence of God.

Expectation is that if we pray a certain way, then God will love us more. Prayer is not a way to earn God's favor. It is a way to surrender to God's love. Prayer is not about how we can get God's attention, that he should pay more attention to us. God is already intimately acquainted with every detail of our lives. God is more aware of us than we are of ourselves. Prayer is the way God gets our attention.

Beware of Control

As you proceed with this prayer guide, focus on what makes sense. Don't worry about what is confusing or frustrating. Of course, you can ask hard questions. You need to ask hard questions. But the first movement is to somehow begin with a willingness to find some small way to begin opening our hearts. As you notice what makes sense and settle into some form of trust, even the smallest five-minute portion of trust, you will be better postured to ask the harder questions.

Control is one of the dangerous obstacles of our modern way of thinking. Those who are primarily people of the mind may want to have control by understanding and agreeing with every idea in this guide before proceeding. Those who are of the heart will not proceed until they feel emotionally safe with prayer, not until they authentically *feel* like praying. Those who are interested in strength will struggle with prayer until they know it will help them accomplish something tangible and of significance.

These are all forms of control that can be overcome with the help of the Spirit, through patience and time. Jesus taught that the faith of a mustard seed can move mountains, so we begin prayer with the smallest portions of trust.

Here is where people who by nature live out of their souls may have an advantage. The soul is the misunderstood arena of our inner selves because it is seemingly the hidden, mysterious, and deeper part of our beings. As you proceed, trust that "deep calls unto deep (Psalm 42)." In prayer, the depths of God are reaching you in ways that are beyond your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. There are things God wants to teach you that you cannot understand right now, things that can only be learned by personal experience of God's love.

Okay, there is Something Difficult About Prayer

I've said that prayer is as easy as opening your heart and that the difficult part of prayer is really our hard, closed hearts. Prayer is easy because we are designed to pray. We can even say that prayer is the most human of all disciplines. There is something easy and natural about prayer.

To Love God With All Your SOUL

We have left the vocabulary of the soul for our last consideration not because it is the best or the most important but because it is the most comprehensive Biblical term we have for understanding what it means to be alive.

There is a quote that has been unfortunately misattributed to C.S. Lewis: "You do not have a soul. You are a soul that has a body." Lewis not only did not say this, but it also is a statement that further reveals our fragmented understanding of ourselves.

For the ancient Hebrews, the soul is not a disembodied spirit. The soul is the whole of you person. The soul is the all-encompassing arena of a person that integrates our thoughts, feelings, and embodied actions.

We are introduced to the Biblical concept of the soul in the creation story in Genesis. When God forms a human out of the earth, he breathes into its nostrils to make a *nephesh*, a soul, a living creature. This is the most deeply primal, sacred understanding of ourselves. We are souls, a combination of the spiritual and the physical, God's breath plus dirt.

When we think of those things that access our soul, we rightly consider those things that are beyond our words and explanations. Music is the most helpful way to imagine this part of our existence. The best of any form of art or music can move us deeply in ways that almost nothing else can. Yet the reality of music especially functions in both spirit and body. On one hand, music seems invisible and ethereal. Yet on the other hand, those who are making the music, the musicians—they are vigorously moving their bodies. And those listening to the music will likely move their bodies as well if not to dance, then to sway and even sing along.

It's no surprise then that *nephesh*, the original Hebrew soul was sometimes used to refer to a body's neck, throat, or physical hunger and thirst. When Israel complained to God, they cried out, *we remember the foods we used to eat in Egypt, but now our nephesh has dried up* (Numbers 11:6). To say the soul is parched is not a metaphor. The Israelites were saying this part of myself that is living, that thirsts for water is depleted.

In one sense we have been engaging the soul already throughout this prayer guide. There is no way to engage the heart, mind, and body without engaging the soul. Yet for these prayer practices, we will be attempting to attend to this deep, whole arena of ourselves that like music is beyond the control of our thoughts. These prayers can engage the emotions and the body but are not limited by either.

These prayer practices encourage us to release any expectation that we need to accomplish anything in prayer other than to settle down into our souls and rest. The intent of these prayers is described in Isaiah 30:15, *God says to Israel: Your freedom, your liberation comes from your willingness to withdraw and rest in me.*

31. Read through a short passage of Scripture (a Psalm is highly recommended, three or so verses) three times. Center yourself in silence, slow your breath, and calm your thoughts before beginning your reading.

Speak freely to God. Do not try to stuff frustration or anger. If tears come, weep. If anger comes, groan out loud. Notice what is happening in your body as you lament. True lament opens us to God and relieves the heaviness. Despair increases the pain and increases the burden of the pain. If this lament is too overwhelming, share your lament with a spiritual companion.

28. As you consider the oppression of others, consider the pain you bear. Reflect further in a journal, how have you been made to feel small? What people, places, institutions, and places set your nervous system on edge? What makes you experience shortness of breath, and dizziness, causes you to sweat, makes you freeze, flee, or fight? Where is there injustice in your body? We are intentionally opening to this lament in brief movements. If you discover an overwhelming sense of pain, you don't need to be alone. Resolve in your mind to reach out to a spiritual companion, pastor, therapist, or spiritual director.

29. As you consider the great needs in the world and your own pain, return to the list of your gifts and strengths developed earlier in exercise 25. How have you previously offered creative goodness to the world? How are you currently offering help and healing to others? How would you like to serve God in the future? Meditate on who you are becoming. Who would you like to become in six months or a year? How do you hope God will transform you? Be specific and write out a description of how you might grow in your ability to lovingly give of your time, energy, talent, and resources.

30. Begin experimenting with a moderate 24-hour fast by eating one moderate meal of one serving and two small meals of a piece of fruit or nuts. Combine this fast with abstinence from unnecessary time on the internet, listening to the news, watching TV, or sports. Use your extra time for prayer and Scripture. If you normally eat these meals with friends or co-workers, use only 5 minutes of your regular table time to pray in solitude and then re-join them drinking water or tea. As you experience hunger pangs, join this minor experience of suffering to your prayer. Allow the hunger to remind you of your deeper hunger for God.



Yet prayer is difficult because we cannot control God. If you spend any length of time attempting prayer, it is difficult because we want to understand when we have made progress. Prayer is difficult because we cannot expect anything. Before God, we will always feel like beginners. These are difficulties for any of us but especially hard for those of us who have great accomplishments.

Jesus teaches about the difficulty of prayer when he explains that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Two things can be considered for our understanding of Jesus' meaning. First, what if "entering the kingdom of heaven" is not about what happens when we die, but instead it's about our invitation to live in and through God today?

Jesus is saying, it's hard for a rich person to pray in a way that allows them to be drawn deeper into God's love right now, today.

Second, what if a "rich person" is self-dependent, someone who has means and accomplishments? Jesus is saying that *it is nearly impossible for someone who is self-dependent to open their hearts to God*. It will be very difficult for someone who has never known deep, inner need to become actively dependent on God's love.

To Heal & Integrate a Wholeness of Heart, Mind, Strength & Soul

Prayer takes place in and through any part of yourself. You can pray with the strength in your body just as well as your heart. There are mentally active forms of prayer as well as wordless prayers that arise in the secret parts of your soul. Our intention in this prayer guide is to pray in ways that help you stay open to giving and receiving love with God.

Some of us by nature and nurture tend to function more from the heart and others from the mind, some from the soul and some from strength. Yet, giving and receiving God's love becomes more effectively possible when we heal toward an integrated wholeness. We intend to become alive to God in and through every part of our beings.

Our model for this healed wholeness is inspired by the Shema, the greatest commandment that Jesus recounts in the synoptic Gospels. It's fair to say this prayer guide is a study and practice of the Shema. *Shema* is the Hebrew word for the command to listen in Deuteronomy 6:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Shema, is to hear, to pay attention, to consider, and to perceive. As we've mapped here, *shema* is to be open, not distracted or ignorant, to be aware, to let God in. The openness that God asks for in the *shema* is all encompassing, to be attentive to God with all of your faculties, all of yourself, and to implement all this attentiveness into every detail, every arena of your practical lives. Be aware and open to God's presence and love when you talk with your family, with your neighbors, when you go to sleep and wake. Place reminders of this openness everywhere. A reminder on your door, others on your body.

While inspired by the *Shema*, this prayer guide does not attempt to be a strict, literal interpretation. There is no singular way of understanding the heart, mind, soul, and strength in the Bible. There are different nuances about these faculties within the books of Moses that also vary from the Psalms. The Apostle Paul's teachings about the inner self and the body resonate with Jesus' teachings but are also different.

However, this prayer guide does appeal to the ancient Hebrew concept of the unity of a person. With the rise of science and our various personality tests, we end up overly categorizing each other and ourselves. We conceive that the heart, mind, strength, and soul are more fragmented and disparate than they are.

As a culture we tend to disparage older ideas and idealize new ones. However, we are more depressed and lonelier than ever, and the best of contemporary neuroscience today reveals that the practices that will regulate our nervous systems best are those that help us become more present to ourselves when we are well-rested. These are practices that reverberate throughout our Scriptures, to not be afraid, to calm and quiet our souls, to present our bodies to God in worship and prayer, to cease striving, and to even take a day of sabbath rest. The ancient Hebrews' radically whole and unified view of a person is vitally needed today.

As you pray through these various modes of prayer and notice what makes sense, what is helpful, what allows you to stay open in love, as you become more familiar with the deeper parts of yourself, you will also grow wider. This healing is about integrating your heart, mind, strength, and soul. As you know your heart more intimately, you will perceive its relation to the strength of your body. As you become more familiar with yourself as a soul, you will be more able to calm your mind and your heart. As you are more conscious of your thoughts, you will more carefully and lovingly find ways to redirect your thoughts toward love.

Holy Spirit into this practice of noticing yourself and consider if there are ways that you can better care for your body. How is your health, nutrition, diet, exercise, and sleep? Take some notes in a journal about your intention to care for your body.

23. Find a Gospel account of Jesus' or the apostles' ministry. Read through the passage and allow it to enlarge your sense of God's mission to build his kingdom on this earth in and through you. Pray, "Thy kingdom come through my life, God!" Then identify a call to action, a way to put hands and feet to your prayers. Read a short passage of Scripture carefully and then prayerfully identify one specific way that you can respond to the passage with your words and actions. How can you risk in faith this day? Is there someone you can secretly bless? A note of encouragement? An act of service?

24. The Benedictine monks teach *Laborare est Orare*, work is prayer. Whether you are a stay-at-home parent, on a construction site, or working in an office cubicle, use your five minutes to consider how God is already involved in all your labor today. Consider the ways you move your body, how engage other people, the things you do with your hands, your eyes, and your breath. Is God not already with you in each detail, each feature of your day? Now imagine how you can be more attentive to God in your work. Will you need to work more slowly and carefully? Will you need to take breaks? When you take breaks, can you put your phone down, step outside, and take a deep breath? Invite God to accompany you through all your tasks.

25. Make a list in a journal of all the ways that you are strong, and the ways you are contributing to creativity, peace, goodness, or justice on the earth. Make a list of all your gifts and talents—physical, emotional, and intellectual strengths. List even the things that you are marginally good at. Once you are finished, review your list prayerfully asking God to help you see your sacred dignity. Notice the strengths that stand out, the ways you especially create and offer goodness to the world. Trust that despite your weaknesses, he has prepared you to be his hands and feet on the earth, to establish his kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." Rest in this assurance.

26. As you consider the goodness of your gifts, what real needs in the world are you called to respond to? Reflect in a journal response to any or all these questions: what oppression do you notice in the world? What powers, people, places, institutions, and systems are squeezing and minimizing your dignity and the dignity of others? How do you experience the pain of this oppression personally? How does noticing this pain in others affect you?

27. It is one thing to be able to name the oppression in the previous exercise. The next step is to lament this pain. Return to your responses from the previous exercise. Review them carefully. Add any further details to what you've written. Allow yourself to be honest about the thoughts and feelings that arise inside your body. Allow yourself to lament and

The Sabbath is essential to the ancient Hebrew understanding of prayer. The fragmentation we suffer today of our hearts and minds separated from our bodies is largely the result of our inability to slow down. Recent neuroscience reveals how our society breathes too much oxygen because we are conditioned to push ourselves, strain, and strive. This excess oxygen releases the chemical cortisol into our brains which perpetuates the cycle of anxiety and depression. How are we to love God with all of ourselves if we are consistently depleted?

None of us can know how much stress and strain we carry in our bodies until we develop our capacity for the *sabbath*, in Hebrew *sabat* which means to cease or to rest. The Jewish philosopher, Abraham Joshua Heschel explains that sabbath rest is not intended to serve as a pitstop that will enable a hectic life of rush. Instead, our practice of a day of sabbath rest is intended to transform the way we live the entirety of our lives.

Notice the counter-cultural holy irony here: we worship God with all our strength by learning how to rest. This corresponds to our character of Jesus, the crucified God who demonstrates his power through meekness and mercy.

The counter-cultural nature of loving God with all of ourselves extends into the realm of justice as sabbath rest teaches us to know when enough is enough. Because we trust that God is our provider we no longer need to push ourselves to work longer and harder hours, and we no longer need to manipulate others to work longer and harder oppressive hours.

As our lives are fundamentally shaped around our response to the great command to love God with our whole selves, our hearts, and minds, we rest in a deeper trust in God. We no longer need we learn to let go of the greed and lust to continually acquire more and more that we don't need.

21. To present your body as a living sacrifice, acknowledge the presence of God. Then direct your awareness lovingly to your body by beginning with a breathing exercise. As you inhale allow for a gentle two-second breath. Hold the breath for one second and then exhale slowly for four seconds. As you breathe in, further welcome God into your body. As you briefly hold your breath give thanks for your body. As you breathe out release any heaviness, anxiety, and exhaustion. Practice this breath pattern for a minute then take a few minutes to scan your body from head to toe noticing any remaining knots of tension and anxiety. Carefully stretch any limbs or your neck continuing to release the tension. Consider the uniqueness of your body "fearfully and wonderfully made" and thank God for it.

22. In the spirit of the previous practice, center your body, heart, and mind with careful, slow breath. Once you are grounded and at rest, scan your body from head to toe noticing tension and exhaustion. Invite the

How To Use This Guide

First of all, you are welcome to playfully skip around this prayer guide. You might practice each prayer in succession, or you might choose one to practice for a whole week before moving on. You may want to skip to the strength prayers to spend time with prayers of the body and justice. Be creative as you proceed.

Below you will find sections with ten suggested prayer approaches for each of the four arenas of our being: heart, mind, strength, and soul. There is a range within each set of ten. The first few suggested approaches may seem more approachable, and the later approaches may seem more creative and vulnerable.

This does not mean that any approach is more advanced or spiritual than others. The best prayer is the prayer you can engage today.

One five-minute session of prayer might simply be discerning how you will use this prayer guide. There are two ways into discernment:

What do you desire? What makes sense to you?

And/or

What do you sense is God's desire for you? Do you sense God is inviting you to a specific way to grow in prayer?

We can learn much about ourselves by comparing and contrasting our desires with what we understand to be God's desire for us. There may very well be a tug-of-war inside of you. You may be wrestling with God. Or you may have a distorted sense of who God is and what God's attitude is toward you. Perhaps your first movement of prayer is to find ways to rediscover God's gentleness, patience, and kindness?

As you discern how to approach this prayer guide, understand there is a bit of work involved in prayer. But remember that in prayer we work so that we can rest. We put in this effort not to earn but to respond to God's love so that we cooperate with and rest in God's love.

There is an inherent pain that we will experience simply by choosing to give our attention to prayer instead of those other things that we otherwise occupy and preoccupy ourselves with. The fundamental question of prayer is where we find our life, our strength, what nourishes us and gives us rest. There is a holy strangeness here. To find true rest, we will need to experience the sting and agony of not resting in other things. To say yes to God, we will need to say no to some other things at least for a time to create space in our hearts to be alone with God.

Jesus says, *Come to me if you are exhausted. I want to teach you how to rest. There is some constraint in learning from me. There is a burden, but it's a light and easy burden compared to all the other heavy burdens you carry.* Matthew 11:28

As you work through this prayer guide, find the prayers that help you rest.

Even though the prayers are arranged under heart, mind, strength, and soul, there will be lots of overlap in each suggestion because it is

impossible to pray without involving all four to some extent. Think instead of where your prayer begins. For example, you may begin focusing on what is stirring in your heart. But as you focus on your heart, your mind and soul are engaged, and eventually your strength too.

The soul practices are perhaps the only methods that should eventually move you toward your inner self without any particular attention given to your emotions or thoughts. Yet it is still necessary to use your mind and heart to arrive at that kind of soul stillness, *to calm and quiet your soul* (Psalm 131).

Things You May Need:

Bible

Journal

Some kind of spiritual and/or theological reading of your choosing

A candle, crucifix, or any kind of image or object that helps you direct your attention to God.

Calendar

Timer

Yes, a timer. If your life is already too full, if you struggle with discipline in general, we are going to trust God with micro-adjustments measured with a timer. Jesus says that we can move mountains with the faith of a mustard seed. So, we humble ourselves by offering God the mustard seeds of five minutes daily, and we use a timer to know when we have started and finished.

If you decide on a way to practice the prayer guide, map it out on a calendar. Identify in advance what part of the day is best for your pause. Mark that five minutes on your calendar and plan around it. After you complete the session of prayer, make some kind of note on the calendar or in a journal.



To Love God With All Your HEART

Our society has a lot to say about the heart. *Be still my beating heart. You broke my heart. She played her heart out. I'll hold you in my heart. You stole my heart. He has a cold heart. Just follow your heart.*

street. We can re-read the Old Testament account of the Shema here in light of Jesus' additional teaching. When the religious scholars asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment, they were asking for a single command. Yet, Jesus responds with two, the Shema from Deuteronomy and then he adds from Leviticus, "to love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus explains that the whole teachings of the Law and the Prophets can be summarized in these two commands. Yet notice how Jesus is truly naming three loves: love of God, neighbor, and self.

How we love God with our hearts is directly connected to how we love with our bodies. How we love God is related to how we love others, and how we love others corresponds to how we love ourselves.

We will consider in the next section how the *nepshesh*, the Hebrew word for soul originally meant throat or neck, the bodily place where we breathe. This resonates with *kilyoht*, a word that can mean heart yet at times also means our kidneys. Again, we can see that the ancient Hebrews experienced the immediacy of how our inner selves are located within our outer, physical selves.

When we think of a strong person, we think of someone who has applied their inner desire to the strengthening of their muscles. We become stronger when we have decided in our hearts to train and stretch our bodies.

If this analogy between our inner muchness and physical fitness leans toward vanity, consider the insight from addiction recovery communities to "bring the body and the mind will follow." We can proceed to God first through the heart or the mind, yet these inner regions can become engaged when we posture our bodies before God. This is the insight of the Apostle Paul when he asks us to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, how offering our bodies allows us to not be conformed to the world so that our minds are transformed and able to perceive the will of God (Romans 12).

Another way addiction recovery communities explain the wisdom of the body is to say that we act our way into right thinking. Some Christians might be concerned that we are on the verge of works righteousness here, that we might be trying to prove ourselves and earn God's love.

The focus of prayer is not to earn God's love but to instead cooperate with it. There is nothing we can do to acquire more of God's love. He already loves us more than we can imagine. The question is how we can perceive God's love so deeply that we are transformed to live and move and exist in and through His love (Act 17:28).

We are also considering loving God in and through our bodies and justice here in response to the fundamental importance of the Sabbath to the teaching of the Old and New Testaments. The Shema is the first of God's commandments that we are to follow and teach to our children and grandchildren so "it will go well with you," so that we might live long and flourish.

receive love from God? What can you insert into your daily habits to redirect your thoughts to love? What can you remove, or how can you position yourself so you are more likely to stay attentive to love? Are there certain situations that make it especially likely that will be distracted from love?



To Love God With All Your **STRENGTH**

Praying with all our strength may be the most important arena of prayer for us especially today, at least in the way we will map strength here. We've considered prayers of our affections and of our thoughts. Some of us are more heart-driven, and others live more through our minds. In this third arena, we are acknowledging that another mode of prayer is expressed through our tangible, physical, just actions. For our purposes in these prayer exercises, we will consider how loving God with our whole selves is expressed in and through our bodies and justice, especially in our agency to participate in the building of God's kingdom on earth.

Me'od is the Hebrew word translated into English as might or strength. The trouble with this translation is that *me'od* is an adverb. Surprisingly, the Deuteronomy account *me'od* is not specifically speaking about our literal strength. It emphasizes the exceeding extent to which we love God. *Me'od* can mean, very, greatly, or more emphatically, our muchness. For example, *me'od* is used in Genesis to describe God's pleasure in creation, that God saw everything he had made as *me'od* good, or very good.

Our challenge here is to translate the ancient, holistic concept of a person into our present culture that has overly separated heart from mind and mind from body. We've considered the battle between our minds and hearts, the angel on one shoulder, the devil on the other. This battle becomes even more vivid and three-dimensional when we consider the way we fight between our inner thoughts, desires, and motives and how we live in our bodies.

We considered that if we are going to love God with all of ourselves, our practices of this love need to saturate every practical arena of our lives, the ways we are in solitude, how we talk to each other in the street, and how we apply the wisdom to our bodies binding it to our arms and our foreheads.

It's fair to translate the Shema as *love God with all your deepest self and do this exceedingly in and through the way you eat and drink, how you go to bed and rise in the morning, and how you walk down the*

But what is a heart? Do you know your heart? Do you know how to find it? God stands at the door of our hearts and knocks (Revelation 3:20). If we know where the door of our heart is, we can open our hearts so that God can come in to be with us.

Who can know the human heart? It is deceitful yet also mysterious. We don't know our hearts partly because we are part of a broken, fallen world. But we don't know our hearts because there are regions of the heart that are deeply connected to the unnamable nature of the soul.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for heart, *levav* is almost synonymous with *nephesh*, the soul. *Levav* is the center of our being. It is the seat of our emotions, desires, and our thoughts. It's possible to say the will is also in the heart. When we choose to do something with intention, we do it with our hearts.

In the ancient world, there was a unity between heart and mind. There was a great shift in the Western mind with the rise of science that has disordered our thinking and feelings. In experience this is a tension between sound, careful reason, and the risky, passion of our hearts. As we heal, our hearts and minds will reintegrate. In time we will be more able to think through our hearts.

The suggested prayer approaches below pivot off what you notice stirring in your heart. For some noticing a stirring in our hearts will make immediate sense. Others will struggle to not default into calculating and reasoning with their minds. For them, listening primarily to emotions and desires will seem strange and even forced. These practices do not try and figure anything out or approach God as a puzzle or a problem to be solved. For example, there are helpful skills and tools to study the Bible, but we don't need those things here. These heart movements of prayer are intended to warm the heart and enflame love.

1. All prayer begins with and is sustained by gratitude. It's not that we need to force or fake happiness. The question is if I can give thanks for anything right now, even the most seemingly small things. Use your five minutes to review what is immediately in front of you that you are thankful for. Slow your breath and calm your mind and heart. Give thanks for your breath. Give thanks for your body. Notice any pleasing features of the room you are sitting in. Be present to the space and time you've set aside. With the time remaining, in a journal make a list of any other parts of your life that fill your heart with gladness. If there is any single item of goodness that is significantly delightful, take a few moments to silently treasure this goodness in your heart.

2. Find or return to a short passage of Scripture that is worshipful. Read through the passage two or three times slowly and pay attention to what word or phrase especially stirs your heart. Write that word or phrase in a journal. Then sitting quietly, say these words slowly and lovingly back to God treasuring each word in your heart. Don't worry if your heart and mind get distracted and wander as you are reading. Just return to

the words as much as you can opening your heart more and more with each repetition. Time allowing, write a one-sentence observation of what you noticed about your heart.

3. Read a short passage of Scripture. Then re-write the passage in the form of a prayer for your heart. For example, if you spent time with John 3:16, your prayer might read this way: *I don't love the whole world. Help me love the way you love. Help me know this love in my heart.* Pray through this prayer a few times joining your attention to your breath with long, slow, and gentle inhale and exhale. Be attentive to how your breath and prayer join your heart and mind and open you lovingly to God. Time allowing, write a one-sentence observation of what you noticed about your heart. You might even write your prayer down on a small piece of paper to carry with you and return to it throughout the day.

4. Slowly and lovingly scan your memory of the past 24 hours. In your imagination, recall where you were with some detail to re-experience the life you are living. Scan this memory. Be attentive to where you can notice God's love. List in a journal several things that you have been loving. What has your heart been returning to again and again? What are you preoccupied with? A person? A task? A place? A thing? Write down anything and everything that comes to mind whether it seems small or great. If you notice loves that harden or distract your heart, confess this sin quickly and ask God for help. If you notice loves that give you joy and hope, give thanks to God for these gifts of love.

5. Spend your five minutes of prayer sitting quietly considering this: *what is it that I really desire and hunger for right in this very moment?* If you could say anything to God right now about your desires, what would you say? Pay attention to the movements of your heart. Sometimes we don't even need words to describe what we are saying in our hearts. Allow your heart to open to God in and through your desire. Then ask God to guide you through your desires. Is your desire helpful or troubled? Do you want to respond by saying thank you or help?

6. As you consider your heart in the previous mode, pay special attention to what desires are closing and hardening your heart. We will all go through seasons of desolation. We are all healing from various addictions. Spend five minutes confessing your need for God's help to soften and purify your heart. You might even find a friend who you can confess these sins to. Trust that God is faithful to forgive you. He will separate your sin from you as far as the East is from the West.

7. As you consider what it is that you really want in your heart, you may be afraid of your big desires. Perhaps you assume that you'll never get what you really want. Perhaps you assume your desire is wrong? Spend five minutes considering whether God placed that desire in your heart. Is this a gift from God? Is it a way that He might be speaking to you? Or is this big desire somehow closing your heart leaving you heavy and anxious? Sometimes we can't tell if our desires are from God or not, and that is okay. For today, acknowledge who you are right now—the

you truly believe. If you can only write out one sentence or part of a sentence, give thanks! You've begun a process that you can continue tomorrow.

17. If you approach the method above with sincere honesty, you will eventually confront things you don't know, questions, and doubts. These are holy ways for you to more deeply engage God. Take five minutes to think about what doesn't make sense about your faith. Then write out sentences that begin with *I'm confused by.... I'm frustrated with.... It's hard for me to believe....*

18. Continuing with the doubt, confusion, or frustration from the previous exercise, spend five minutes thinking about where to find some answers. Review your questions prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to give you insight. Your mind may be directed to even more questions, and that is okay. However, notice how sincere questions can turn into doubt and doubt into despair. Instead of choosing the despair of unbelief, let your questions motivate you to go deeper toward God. Your mind may also be directed to sources of insight like a Bible passage, a section of a book, a hymn, a prayer, or even wisdom you've gained from a person. Spend time prayerfully returning to these sources of insight. Reflect in a journal on what you are learning. Alternatively, you want to document in your journal a plan to reach out to others for discussion. What is your next step of faith?

19. One helpful gift of the mind is the capacity to make plans for our creative good. We make plans to do well in school. We make plans for our diet, exercise, and finances. Some make birthing plans as well as vacation plans. How are you making plans to know and be known by God? Instead of waiting to make a New Year's resolution, what would you like to add or remove from your life that will allow you to live more fully in and through God's love? Consider with discernment, how is your sleep, diet, and exercise? What are you taking into your body and mind? How do you spend your spare time? How do you rest? Identify one or two things you can adjust in your daily rhythms. This planning does not need to be a holistic overhaul. In fact, in the spirit of these five-minute prayer practices, what smaller, more simple adjustments can you plan into your daily routines that will lead you toward deeper love?

20. To discern what might be adjusted in your life, it may be helpful to consider your thoughts at a more granular level. What is it that you think about most of the time? Where do your thoughts return to throughout the day? In the previous section of heart exercises, you were invited to notice your desires and even your fears. Surely our thoughts return to what we want to move toward and what we want to move away from. Begin making a list of all the things you think about from day to day. You might want to take two days of five-minute sessions to accomplish this. It might even be helpful to make lists of your thoughts for a whole week. What thoughts persist? What thoughts come and go? How are these thoughts helping or hindering your ability to give and

12. Consider the method above, but this time read the passage of Scripture a few times out loud. Alternatively, read the Scripture out loud with another person or a small group. Corporate and communal reading of Scripture is more of the norm throughout the history of Israel and the church. Using our minds does not need to be solitary. Reading Scripture aloud and with others can allow you to especially notice how alive and vibrant the Bible is. We often let the Bible seem ordinary and lackluster. We pay closer attention to the things we love and revere. The intention here is to elevate your sense of the Scriptures' sacred goodness.

13. Memorize a passage of Scripture, a classic prayer, or the lyrics to a hymn or worship chorus. Recite these words slowly two or three times. Sit quietly and rest quietly between each recitation allowing your mind to focus and return to the intent of the prayer. This kind of slow repetition of short prayers has been practiced by Christians for centuries. For example, the Eastern Orthodox 'Jesus Prayer' is used this way (*Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*) and can be repeated several times to calm and focus your mind and help you remain open to God's presence.

14. Develop the habit of perusing Scripture or some form of spiritual nourishment. If you especially have an appetite for some kind of brain stimulation throughout the day, identify some form of spiritually nourishing content to turn to when you experience restlessness. Instead of checking your email, texts, social media, and news platforms, find your way back to Scripture or a spiritual text. Like the exercises above, you are not trying to figure anything out. You are attempting to nourish your mind in the sacredness of prayerful reading. It's easy to spend five minutes listening to an audiobook or a podcast. That may be helpful. But for this discipline, find ways to return again and again to a reading that stimulates your curiosity. If you look over a helpful paragraph or page in the morning for a few minutes and then return to it for a few more minutes during a break in the day or before bed, you can easily accumulate five minutes total.

15. Read a passage of Scripture paying particular attention to what word or short phrase inspires you to meditate on ideas about God's character. Pursue the personal being of God in the reading. *Who is this personal God that I am speaking to when I pray? Who is this being that I love?* Write the word or phrase in a journal and then reflect in writing a description of how this Scripture helps you trust and enjoy God.

16. Use your five minutes to think about the definition of your faith. A church or a family can teach you certain things about what faith means, but what do you believe? Begin sketching out your beliefs by prayerfully considering the different ways you can finish this sentence: *I believe....* What do you believe about God? What do you believe about your ability to know and be known by God? What do you believe about how and why God made you? If salvation is real, what are you being saved from? Don't just write out what seems like the "right" beliefs, consider what

person who has these big desires. Settle down into your desire trusting that God sees and hears you and that God will help you.

8. If you have taken a closer look at your desires, at what you truly want, have you noticed loneliness? Spend your five minutes reviewing your relationships. In the privacy of your journal, feel free to list the names of those you spend the most time with. None of these people can heal you. Consider which relationships especially help you open to God's love and which relationships close you. Talk to God about these people. Ask for insight into how to love and be loved by these people. Is there a particular relationship that needs more attention? What do you want to say to God about that person? None of these people have a perfect love. Ultimately this loneliness is a sign of your need for God, yet we are designed to be in relationships, to give and receive God's love with others. Is there a person or a group of friends you can connect with regularly so that you can help each other stay open to God's love?

9. Spend your five minutes of prayer sitting quietly considering: *what do I fear?* In a journal make a list of everything that concerns you, everything that weighs on your heart. Do this briskly without stopping to address a single item or trying to make an exhaustive list. Write down whatever seems the most immediate. Once you've got a sufficient list, prayerfully look over each item. Notice which concerns seem especially swollen and difficult. Ask God for help and to bring peace into this pain.

10. If you already carry great wounds and fears in your heart, open your heart for a few minutes to welcome this pain. It may be helpful to write a note about the wound in a journal and/or to say the name of the wound out loud. As the wound stings and weighs on your heart, direct your heart back to God in love and trust. Locate God's nearness to you. Find your deeper desire for God, the desire beneath all desires. Open your heart to receive this help. Breathe in God's life, peace, and love.

Note: if you have wounds of trauma or struggle with depression and anxiety, this prayer may be especially troubling. That is okay. Don't feel guilty or give into despair. Prayer can open us up to reveal how we need help. If this prayer seems too painful, move on to another approach. Or you might use this time of prayer to consider seeking the help of a pastor, counselor, or a spiritual director. Perhaps the Holy Spirit can help you think of who you can ask for help.



To Love God With All Your *MIND*

The first consideration of loving God with your mind may surprise you: despite the great help of science, you are not a computer. Despite our school systems with all the standardized testing, there is no objectively correct way to think.

It will be helpful for you to notice how your mind functions independently from your heart, yet your thoughts are not so far away from your feelings as you might have supposed.

Your heart and mind function together in ways that are specific to you. You are the only one who has ever thought the way you think. Your mind and heart weave together in a way that makes your thoughts uniquely yours. The question we are examining in this section is how your unique mode of thinking helps or hinders you from loving God.

We have trouble loving God with our minds today because we misunderstand what the mind is and what it is for.

Do you recall how cartoon characters sometimes wrestle between the haloed angel that appears on one shoulder and the devil with a pitchfork on the other? Today we battle like this between our minds and hearts. You might imagine your heart or mind on either shoulder. Sometimes your mind seems like the troublemaker, the overbearing parent, the rigid, confined, spoil sport. Other times your mind can get you out of trouble and help you establish safety, structure, and sanity.

It is true that some of us are by nature more cerebral and others are more emotional. Yet the divergences we perceive between the heart and mind are overwrought. This is a relatively young way of understanding ourselves.

The ancient Hebrews understood a person as a unified whole. There is no place in the Bible where the mind is objectively separate from the heart. The Hebrew words *nepeš* and *levav* are translated as “mind” in the Old Testament. Yet these words often refer to the whole life of a person including the soul, emotions, desires as well as thoughts. In fact, *levav* is the Hebrew word used in the Shema translated as heart as in, “Love the Lord with all your heart.”

The ancient understanding of a unified, whole person is striking when we compare the Old and New Testament accounts of the Shema. Only three faculties are listed in the original Deuteronomy account of the Shema, to love God with all our heart, soul, and might. When religious scholars challenged Jesus to name the greatest commandment almost 1500 years later, in the Mark and Luke accounts, Jesus lists four arenas: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Jesus was himself translating this deeply Jewish wisdom to the Greco-Roman culture, a philosophically different culture that had already begun to conceive a person as separate, divergent parts. For Jesus to emphasize the comprehensive nature of the greatest commandment, he needed to include this fourth capacity. Loving God with all includes loving in and through the mind.

The heart and mind are so deeply interconnected in the ancient, Eastern understanding that another Old Testament term for heart,

kilyoht, or the “inward parts” can also be translated as the literal kidneys. When we consider loving God with our minds, we are interested in our gut instincts.

For the sake of prayer, it may be helpful to consider two modes of the mind: the preoccupations that your mind attends to throughout the day, and then also how you occupy your mind with the active use of your intellect.

We are all preoccupied. Our minds are always at work in relatively conscious and unconscious ways. We dwell on things. It is natural for us to ruminate on a thought, to have the thought return to our conscious consideration again and again. This could be a nagging thought or a delightful, loving thought. This arena of the mind has to do with both the seemingly small, domestic parts of your life, the tasks, the people, and also the larger personal and public happenings, the newsworthy things. Our minds are always sifting these things without much intentionally active consideration.

The question for our discernment is to choose what occupies our thoughts. How can we actively use our intellects in prayer to intentionally place God into our field of vision? Here we are specifically deciding that certain things and ideas need further consideration. The concern is if we are using the meditative, loving capacities of our minds or if we are attempting to figure out ourselves, each other, and God with the calculative controlling mind.

We don't have much direct control over our preoccupations. Yet by attending to what we occupy ourselves with, we can reshape our preoccupations. Much of the suggested prayer practices in this section recommend habits of the occupations of your mind that will help you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to heal and redirect the deeper thoughts that flow through your mind throughout the day.

To think about something, to pay attention to it, to consider, to gaze upon. The things we pay attention to are the things we end up loving.

11. Find a passage of Scripture you would like to consider prayerfully. This could be a passage that you are already familiar with or a passage that you've not spent time with before. For now, avoid a passage that is especially confusing or troublesome. Identify five to ten or so verses, perhaps half a chapter of the Bible. Read this Scripture two or three times slowly without rushing. Our intention here is not to figure anything out as if the Bible is a coded box of mysteries that we can unlock with our minds. There is much in the Bible that is confusing and strange. For this reading pay attention to what resonates and makes sense. Look for recurring words or phrases. Identify a theme or a specific verse that especially stands out. Search for meaning that helps you trust in the nearness of God's help and love. Note in a journal what insight you have gained and begin your prayer tomorrow by revisiting this insight.