

# Sensing Spirituality

*Beyond the book - This too can be prayer*

**B**Efore most beloved son you should not doubt but should believe in full faith that the Spirit of God has filled your heart when you have embellished His house with such great beauty and variety of workmanship. And lest perhaps you are diffident, I shall unfold clearly and systematically that whatever in the arts you can learn, understand, or devise, is bestowed on you by the Grace of the seven-fold Spirit.

**T**Hrough the spirit of wisdom you know that created things proceed from God and that without Him nothing is.

**T**Hrough the spirit of understanding you have received the capacity for practical knowledge of the order, the variety, and the measure that you apply to your various kinds of work.

**T**Hrough the spirit of counsel you do not hide away the talent given you by God, but, working and teaching openly and with humility, you faithfully reveal it to those who desire to learn.

**T**Hrough the spirit of fortitude you shake off all the apathy of sloth, and whatever you commence with quick enthusiasm you carry through to completion with full vigour.

**T**Hrough the spirit of knowledge that is given to you, you are the master by virtue of your practical knowledge and you use in public the perfect abundance of your abounding heart with the confidence of a full mind.

**T**Hrough the spirit of piety you set a limit with pious consideration on what the work is to be, and for whom, as well as on the time, the amount, and the quality of work, and lest the vice of greed or cupidity should steal in, on the amount of the recompense.

**T**Hrough the spirit of the fear of the LORD you bear in mind that of yourself you are nothing able and you ponder on the fact that you possess and desire nothing that is not given to you by God, but in faith, trust, and thankfulness you ascribe to divine compassion whatever you know or are or can be.

Theophilus On Divers Arts - (12<sup>th</sup>)

acts 13, 22 psalm 26 v 8, 27 v 4 51 v 10, 11...18, 19 1 chronicles 28, 29 11 chronicles 2, 3, 4 Exodus 31 v 1-19



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## Introduction

Why “beyond the book”?

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3 vs 16,17*

### Every book has limits

The Subtitle of this guide “beyond the book”, is in no way intended to distract from the significance that scripture has in Christian faith. It has been written from the experience of being brought up in a community which valued memorising bible verses, and exploring their meaning prayerfully. I also believe that meditating on the Law of the Lord, and the canon of scripture as a whole, helps a person to participate in the grace of God; they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to grow in relationship with God. The particular circumstances of the composition, compilation and editing of the canon of scripture generally regarded as acceptable by Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century gives the bible a unique place in the history of the Church and the history of salvation.

I do however want to emphasise that Scripture is a means, not an end. Christians are people of the Word of God, but how could the Word of God be reduced to a book? This guide has been written to counteract a tendency in some parts of the Church to reduce the practice of faith to strict conformity that binds the truth in paper. This is a human tendency, which I recognise in myself, but it limits the growth of faith, encourages intolerance and can lead to a very “churched” form of idolatry. If you think this doesn’t apply to you, think about how the word “Word” is used in your religious context. Do we talk about the glory of the gospel, or the glorious gospel? Think about how the words ‘Bible’ (or ‘bible’?), God, Holy Spirit and Jesus are used in your sermons and everyday speech. Does your use of the words actually represent what you believe when you take time to reflect on the trinitarian understanding of God?

Scripture helps Christians understand what we believe, who we are, and helps define us as a religious group. However, scripture does not define God and the whole relationship of God with creation. It is not the last word or the whole Word. Christian understanding of scripture itself establishes that there is more to finding a full relationship with God than expressed within the Old Testament. Throughout that collection of ancient texts, we read of people encountering signs of Gods’ presence beyond the established parameters of their religious practice.

What if, rather than thinking of ourselves as Christians taking scripture to the world (which in practice often becomes a mission to make people culturally similar to us) we should instead look for the Word of God at work

in the process of creating? We can test what we experience through the disciplines of prayer, rigorous thought, and maintaining community as well as in scripture.

Scripture could be a base from which we can expand in the creative diversity God has called us to, whilst retaining unity. The Word became flesh (rather than paper) to dwell among us, and is still with us through the Holy Spirit.

### Revelation through relationship

*“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” John 4 vs 21(NIV)*

I have heard it said within Christian circles that there is a demon behind every religion or faith that is not Christianity. At the time I found this very hard to believe. It seemed to require attributing far too much creative effort to forces that the same people classified as being purely destructive. It also seemed to be an unhealthy mental state, where the whole world seems to be against you and you begin to attribute hostile motives to events that you don't understand or which conflict with your comfort zone.

In contrast, Jesus has an optimistic approach to the diversity of religious practice. He does not deny that a time of turmoil and war is approaching where even the close bonds of family will be ripped apart in conflict<sup>1</sup>. However he is recorded as teaching in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (quoted above) that there will come a time when rather than worshipping on the mountaintops or in the temple in Jerusalem, people will worship in Spirit and in Truth. This optimistic outlook suggests to me that we should live lifestyles of worship, where we appreciate our daily experiences and then offer the best of it back to God. As we do this, we will notice that other people are similar to us. If we learn to explore and use our full range of “spiritual senses”, we can then ask if it is right to condone or adopt these other practices, and test whether they are beneficial to the growth of Love and faith.

Although many contradictory practices may be described as being ‘in Spirit’, the essentiality of Truth requires us to be selective in what we do. It is possible to say that there is a “Way” and that each person makes their

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:34-36

path by walking. In this process Christian spirituality can retain its distinctiveness from general spirituality and still grow in understanding.

There is a temptation to forbid certain actions legalistically, acting in order to preserve stability and understanding within a community. A legalistic proscription depends upon human understanding of the Truth and a law-like system of customs. This is contrary to early church practice where the apostles were instructed by God to accept gentiles as gentiles into their predominantly Jewish community. More in keeping with this would be a process based on a recognition of what is beneficial to a person living in relationship with God and the community.

This process can be aided by the use of laws, especially when they are tempered through time and debate. However, a thought dies as soon as it is written down, and unless it is resurrected as a new thought and made vulnerable to change, it is disconnected from the point at which a decision needs to be made. The practice of making a decision about what is beneficial takes this process into account. It requires a person to decide what is true through conformity with the good, rather than to rehearse what is already understood to be correct and conform. Legal systems at their best recognise this and include debate and evolution of judgement within their systems. This approach encourages openness to new ways of worshipping God and frees people to be inspired by the practices of those outside their religious parameters, whilst remaining cautious to ensure that our actions are beneficial. The practice of “Sensing Spiritually” helps develop skills needed to do this.

The word “Spirituality” is used here in a general sense to describe a recognition that there is more to being human than flesh and bones. Both theists and atheists share human experiences such as love, loss and can appreciate art. “Sensing” is used to refer to a human capacity to gain awareness of reality. The physical senses help us do this, and provide a framework within which we can discuss things like the temperature in a room and decide whether or not to adjust the thermostat. They help answer questions about whether a person feels too hot or cold. Learning to sense values would be a spiritual sense which would help a host balance their responsibility to guests with their commitment to environmental action. This may seem trivial in such an everyday domestic setting, but learning to be sensitive to each others’ needs, particularly the invisible ones, is a core relationship skill. A population without such skills and the means to communicate them is ill equipped to cope with crisis that require large scale changes to everyday life, such a political upheaval or a global pandemic.

A significant change in UK cultures throughout the recent centuries is that churches and Christianity are increasingly less recognised as the default or even universal language for people to explore and express general

spirituality. The practice of “Sensing Spirituality” is therefore also an approach to helping develop peoples “Spiritual Literacy” skills. It is hoped that by finding the words to identify, explore, and express their own personal spiritual sensations, people will become better able to value, and find the means to recognise, other peoples’ unfamiliar experiences. Even if two people believe different things, if they can at least recognise the importance and significance of the others’ belief there is hope that a discussion can be entered into with respect.

## Sensing Spirituality

<b>Sensing mystery:</b>	experiences of awe, wonder and mystery about the natural world, human achievement and for some a divinity. <i>#SensingMystery</i>
<b>Sensing values:</b>	attitudes and feelings about what is really important, what really matters <i>#SensingValues</i>
<b>Sensing meaningfulness:</b>	the ability to make connections or to see potential patterns in one's life which give it meaning <i>#SensingMeaningfulness</i>
<b>Sensing a changed quality in awareness:</b>	the feeling of being 'at one' with nature, oneself and others. <i>#SensingAwareness</i>
<b>Sensing 'otherness':</b>	the sentiment that humans are more than their physical elements. <i>#SensingOtherness</i>
<b>Sensing challenge:</b>	being challenged and moved by experiences such as love, beauty, goodness, joy, compassion, injustice, evil, suffering, death. <i>#SensingChallenge</i>

For John Knox in the 16th century education was essential in reforming religious life in Scotland. At the beginning of the 18th century every parish was obliged to provide a schoolhouse and pay for a schoolmaster. Scots have been proud of this commitment to providing education for both rich and poor. For centuries it was seen as a joint effort between the Family, the School and the Kirk. A recognition of this partnership as recorded when responsibility for governance of schools changed. There is an obligation in primary legislation for Scottish schools to provide Religious Observance (RO) as well as education about religion (RE). More recent changes in Scottish culture referred to above required a review of Religious Observance and this can be explored further on the Education Scotland and Scottish government websites

In this review RO/time for Reflection is defined as

*"Community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school's community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community".* (www.gov.scot Curriculum for Excellence: religious observance Published: 30 Mar 2017)

In parliament and non denominational schools it is more usually referred to as "Time for Reflection" and there is a strong encouragement to ensure that

*"all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of RO without compromise to their personal beliefs."* (as above)

Opportunities for this are often provided at assemblies, and by chaplains from churches or other organisations which the particular school community is in contact with. It can be a challenge for some chaplains to make the adjustment from preaching to a congregation who voluntarily attend their meeting to a gathering where the participants have to opt out and be provided with another activity which meets the schools obligations. Following the review training was provided by local councils, and supporting documentation is available online in the form of Curriculum for Excellence briefings such as those referred to above. This guidance introduces the idea of Sensing Spirituality. It is a starting point to develop words to describe the experience of recognising spirituality in general.

Most people are familiar with the five physical senses. Sight, Hearing, Touch, Smell and Taste. These senses are a simplified means to describe a much more nuanced collection of sensations and experiences, which we use to engage with our environment, within our own bodies and to acquire knowledge of life. This could be compared to a game where the sense of taste is explored with a blindfold taste test – or in an adult setting, a whisky or wine tasting!

To apply this to sensing spirituality, for example in an assembly setting, the leader could present something inspiring, and then lead a time of reflection where those present could learn to identify, explore and express what they had experienced. The sensing spirituality terms in the table above can then help provide words to describe what has been sensed.

The typical format of a school assembly can limit the range of experiences which can be offered, and so the guidance encouraged schools to work with staff, parents, pupils and community specialists to develop an integrated approach throughout the life of the school and which includes parents and staff.

Approaches to this could include things like:



- Inviting chaplains to talk from their personal experiences and contribute this element to RE lessons
- A “Thought for the Day” about issues in the news. Information followed by guidance on how to reflect on its implications and pupils’ reactions.
- Small actions which can be carried out to cope with moments of stress

All of this can be taken from the school setting, and used in a community education setting – or community life in general. This book contains many practical examples of ways in which spiritual literacy, sensing spirituality and finding ways to communicate it. At the general level the principle of helping people learn to identify, explore, and express these experiences is more important than agreeing on precise terms. The goal is to provide ways in which having experienced something personally, people are then able to talk about it, in groups of like-minded people – and especially in public. By spending time recognising the significance of personal experiences, it is hoped that people will be able to recognise their significance for others. There are significant differences between the experiences of singing in a cathedral congregation, at an old firm game or at an evangelical festival. There will also be a lot of shared emotional and psychological similarities, if we can work out the language to make them easier to discuss. Fact-checking a political rally is important. That can provide secure foundations for arguments. Learning to discuss the significance of the way in which #SensingChallenge is invoked, and the relationship between #SensingMeaningfulness and #SensingValues is essential in a culture where experts are not trusted and all politicians are viewed as liars. It provides the ability to swim, and recognise dangerous water, even if people are adrift in a post-fact context.

It can take a while to get used to the terms used in #SensingSpirituality. As a contribution to help with this I have been using them online for some time now. I have used hashtag technology (*#TagToIdentifySomethingOnline*) to build up a catalogue of moments where I have identified one or other of the senses. This is primarily on Instagram and Twitter, but a simple search in your preferred browser should find them. The #SensingSpirituality terms overlap, just as the sense of taste overlaps with the sense of smell. They also include many other senses and are used in combinations to describe experiences, similar to the way in which blacksmithing uses a sense of touch to feel the metal, hearing to understand its state, and even taste to sense the fire burning. If you use the hashtag #SensingSpirituality and a search engine, you will be able to find some of these entries. You could also visit the Quartz homepage [www.wordsmithcrafts.co.uk/Quartz/](http://www.wordsmithcrafts.co.uk/Quartz/) for an introduction.

When I am describing prayer techniques in this book I have included ‘tags’ to suggest which Spiritual Senses might be most easily associated with the

experience. Please use them as well in your online presence so that we can build up a digital catalogue that helps develop spiritual literacy. What follows in the next section is an exploration where I use the terms to help me think through my experience of travelling to a festival in Norway as a spiritual experience.

#### #SensingSpirituality in Practice

I participate in the Viking market in Norway as often as I am able. This account is of a journey to it where I made a conscious choice to try #SensingSpirituality, using the 'Six Sensings' to describe the experience. This meant developing the language to talk about the invisible - but sometimes very deeply felt - factors which make being human about more than just tables and chairs. In a global context, this is an increasingly important skill for both those who describe such things in religious language and those who choose not to. This piece describes my experience, hopefully in ways which sound sensible to readers from many different backgrounds.

The journey out there was deliberately leisurely. I took the bus to Edinburgh the day before my flight and stayed with a friend and his family. On the way up I enjoyed listening to Tolkien's translation of Gawain and the Green Knight. The edition I listened to has a helpful introduction, and since I have heard the story told a couple of times before, this time I was able to 'listen' to the symbolism a bit more. I suppose travelling on a bus through the border countries where Arthur's warriors rode and Merlin wandered helped as well.

One of the six sensings is the Sense of Challenge. In the court of King Arthur, challenge is highly valued. There is no celebration without adventure. On this occasion Gawain is the knight who ventures his person. My journey was perhaps less arduous than his! Since starting my trips to Norway I have gradually travelled with less and less of my own equipment and in doing so have come to depend more and more on the hospitality and friendship of others at the festival. In doing so, I have then become more confident in facing greater challenges, as well as having to make

*So, two sensings and I'd not even left Scotland! The RO guidelines describe the sensing of changed awareness as feeling at one with nature, your environment and yourself. Very vague – but before any of these things can be sensed you need to open your eyes. Challenges, setting yourself to adventure does this. Arriving, feet on the ground, in walking distance of your destination is a confirmation that your eyes are open. #SensingChallenge*

sure that my presence is a beneficial one. Listening on the bus I decided to try a further challenge and tell the story of the green knight in the longhouse.

People complain about public transport a lot. I suppose it can become a chore, a necessary obligation placed upon you, for you to get somewhere, in order to work, in order to feed and support your family. One extra load you are obliged to carry. For me, travelling by public transport on pilgrimage allows me to become more aware of what I am doing. The sacrifice of loss of control I make when I leave my van behind is rewarded by a change in Awareness – one of the ‘six sensings’. I became one of a group of many people sharing a loose connection of goals with a changed emphasis and with less responsibility. I found I had different priorities and needed to be responsive to other people’s timing rather than always being the driver.

### *#SensingChallenge*

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Someone once described four main ways in which people experience transcendence – and in my case God. They argued that healthy spiritual development will result in people recognising all four (and the spectrum in between!). On arriving on Bukkøy, I experienced one of them, a feeling of emotional belonging, wellbeing and rightness. It’s the joy of eating a cake baked with hospitality, kindness, memory and expectation of new growth in friendships. Utterly invisible until you talk about it with those who have experienced it too. It is often accompanied by happening to meet people at just the right time which was the case when we arrived at my friend’s house.

### *#SensingOtherness*

*It is easy to say that a pilgrimage is to travel, and on returning to the place you left, find it changed. How easy is it to see the yeast in a loaf of bread though? Or to photograph the joy of finding a lost earring? The Kingdom of Heaven is as powerful and present as the wind but unless you take time to feel the gentle breath through the hairs on the back of your neck all you will notice is the storms.*

A short introduction – for those who have not been to a market before, they are experienced in several different ways. For the organisers of this one, it is the culmination of a year’s worth of planning, juggling, and funding. They arranged for an international group of enthusiasts and professionals to

arrive with their equipment on an island linked to the roads by a long winding path, or a boat. For those who will live in the market, it is a chance to meet friends you only see once or twice a year, to set up camp and to live in a festival community with likeminded people. For the general public, the island farm is transformed into a Viking era market. After leaving your car behind, you walk across the bridge and through the wood until you see the long wooden roof of the King's Hall on the hill above you. Warriors train on the hill as you approach and when you round the corner of the stockade fence the noise and bustle of the market hits you. Rows of traders sell bows, leatherwork and pottery. Musicians play and children learn to ride Icelandic ponies. In the bay, sleek longships lie at anchor waiting to row round the bay. Near the King's Hall, past the clusters of tents which are the living quarters of Viking bands, a hog is roasting slowly - a promise of the feast to follow. Lastly, on the crest of the hill, nestled amongst the trees is the camp of the *Vikingklubben Karmøy*, and the cart house made into a smithy, where I will most often be found.

### *#SensingValues*

*How can you sense what really matters? I think about things, a lot. I read and explore not only the study of a particular set of morals but also thoughts about the nature of values and how humans can experience them. This sort of study is usually an academic exercise. A much more immediate way to study values is to turn upon an island with only the things you can comfortably carry. On arrival, to exchange gifts, find a good honest embrace, a hot meal (and remembering this is Norway with Scandinavian taxes) good strong, dark ale waiting for you.*

For me, after a quick change and dumping of all the modern things that make travelling easy, the approach to the island is a chance to walk through a landscape which reminds me of childhood holidays in Ardnamurchan. The feel of the grass through thin soled leather shoes is springy and we follow the old roads, now overgrown, which once linked docks to the mansions of mighty traders in the Hallstatt era.

This is a market, so over the course of the weekend many goods and services will be bought and sold. Within the community, however, some exchanges are in the form of gifts. A bow for an embroidered shirt or a shining spearhead for...? Perhaps part of the appeal of re-enactment and living history is that people have a chance to exchange goods for goods and time for time. To make immediate decisions of worth based on appreciation and trust without the mediation – and abstraction – of money.

### *#SensingMystery*

*Beauty drips from the trees in lime green needles of new growth. The air is so rich with the usually unseen qualities of being human that you can almost sense them physically. In the twilight it is easier to become aware of your presence in a liminal zone.*

I pay my way by selling copper bracelets, and teaching people how to make them themselves. I make this more than a simple sales transaction. I view it more as a piece of performance art. Using the market as a stage, a member of the public enters into the scene, and I as Cathbad offer them the chance to learn for free. I teach them to use simple techniques to turn a short length of copper wire into an attractive bracelet. For a moment they become an active participant in the market and can leave with a physical object to display this. I give them the opportunity to learn for free, but if they want to take a bracelet away it must be bought. After all, they have made something which is a sellable product! The usual trade is about half the cost of a bun filled with the roast pig mentioned earlier. My companion spent most of his time hammering out rams' heads, and one of his customers actually paid for a ram's head with roast pork. The hog roast vendor acted as a bureau de change, as he had a card machine while we didn't. It is moments like that, which encourage me to describe what we do as art. Simple transactions like buying things can be experienced in new ways.

What would you give to live in a community that valued personal freedom, but not at the expense of harming another? For your work to be an activity that you enjoy, and for that to be in the open air, in the company of people whose presence is refreshing and healing? Would you sacrifice time? An income level that reflects your educational achievement, training and experience? And what if, by participating within that community, you became associated with people who worshipped gods that were not yours, engaged in pagan practices and had a reputation akin to a motorbike gang?

*#SensingAwareness*

*I suppose that part of the common bond I share with those closest to me on Bukkøy is a recognition that there is more to being human than just our physical elements. Or even if they do not share that view, they are interested in discussing the possibility.*

The seclusion of the island and the interdependence of the community help to sense Otherness. At night in the Longhouse, when the drummers play and someone begins to "yoik" it feels easy to slip into a state where I can access a simpler, primal mode of being that is uncluttered with the sophistication and complexities of 21<sup>st</sup> (or 18<sup>th</sup>) century urban civilisation. Or perhaps a hearty singing of bawdy songs would be more your style!

Another occasion to sense the otherness, and perhaps start to meditate upon mystery is during the twilight hours. A market is a short space of special time. Even the dullest person can be on their most pleasant behaviour. It is an occasion people take advantage of, to engage in special activities and arrange special events. These things usually take place when the public have left, within the closer, committed community. Why are these times so special? The difficulty in measuring or finding agreement about such experiences has resulted in some people relegating them to a private realm of knowledge, or even to conclude that they have no basis in reality.

Even in societies when all species who would threaten human life have been removed as a significant threat, these feelings of Mystery and Awareness continue. Perhaps they will prove to be essential in facing threats which are challenging for the individual to grasp, such as climate change.

There is more to the mystery than this of course, but I will discuss heaviness and warmth in the hands or why some hugs can be healing as well as greeting on another occasion. I may even tackle the subject of rune reading. There are some discussions which require knowledge about metaphysics to have taken place before communication can be achieved, and there is not space for that here.

As I mentioned earlier, this year I had set myself the challenge of telling the story of the green knight in the longhouse. This is an ancient story which has survived through many versions and tellings. It comes from a time and experience far removed from ours. I hoped that my mulling over possible meanings and my performance skills would be robust enough to pull it off. To help me, I enlisted the services of some Mummers who could caper and let me pause for breath as they acted out the story. The story is one that explores knightly honour and courage. Perhaps the subtler details were lost in the telling. However, after the telling, throughout the evening, people approached me with stories which reassured me, letting me know of personal unanticipated good consequences resulting from the telling.

### *#SensingMeaningfulness*

*Hindsight is wonderful. Taking time to reflect and revise our story of what has happened. It is tempting to create a fantasy that ignores the reality of our experiences, but with effort and integrity it becomes possible to see the weave of our lives and recognise patterns which make sense of even the painful traumas we experience. They do not disappear and can be transformed into something beautiful. Is it any surprise that the Greek Fates and Scandinavian Norns are described as weavers?*

If, as humans, we understand our sense of being partly through the network of relationships we have with family, friends and society, and this network extends throughout time, then perhaps it is easy to see why this lifestyle of markets and festivals appeals to many people. It could be an adaptation to the individualisation and superficiality of the modern era. It is also a positive choice to find personal meaning in a community of trust.

In the telling of the green knight, Gawain ends up wearing a green girdle as a reminder that although he behaved with great honour, when it came to saving his own life, his courage failed and he was less than honest. On his return to the court of King Arthur, all the knights chose to wear green sashes as a sign of brotherhood and humility. To one who does not know the story, Gawain's green band appears as a badge of honour and his personal shame and selfishness is transformed into a symbol of community.

To engage in pilgrimage is to travel and return to the same place you left, and find it changed. Returning home after a market can feel strange, with a change in routines, diet, and an awareness of the absence of those you have been living so closely with. It is easy to feel like a stranger in your hometown. If this feeling is embraced negatively, it can lead to a hostile opposition between 'real' life and 'festival' life, or the situation where one works all the year purely to enjoy time off. A more positive approach, however, would view the time away to be like having a shower for the mind. Refreshed and seeing things in a new light I return, able to question things that looked normal before I left, and reinvigorate my ordinary life, having changed as a result of my extraordinary experience.



Tuning in

I am going to move on from a general setting of sensing spirituality now. In what follows I will look more specifically at prayer. As has already been explained, I am writing from a Christian perspective. This has been formed from a broad range of experiences and study, but it is still limited to my perspective. I hope that it will be of interest to a broad range of readers too, and that even if you disagree with some elements you will be able to adapt what I offer in a way which you find more beneficial.

What does it mean to say that God is with us every day? Radio waves and Wi-Fi signals saturate urban environments, but they are invisible until you tune in or connect your device. Unlike radio waves, we do not need technological equipment to pick up the Divine signal, because humans are born with the ability to perceive and communicate with God. However, this does not mean that we are always aware of God, and Sensing Spirituality involves developing our natural abilities to talk with God, as well as shaping our environment to help support this. I call this 'active relating to God in prayer'. Rather than go into a deep and complicated analysis of the relationship of prayer to mindfulness, meditation, wishing or magic, I'm going to describe some things that I have found to be useful in my own spirituality, and in groups I have worked with.

In what follows I have tried to avoid the temptation of using an arbitrary activity to make praying seem more interesting or fun. I believe that there is a purpose driving creation. When we engage with our bodies and our cultures – seeking to deepen our relationship with God – the Holy Spirit is waiting, and breathes life into our creative efforts. This is a redemption of the whole person, not just your mind and intellect. Words are important but raising your hand or imagining a picture or colour can be prayer too. Throughout my life I have worked to achieve a deepening awareness of this. I have learned by listening to the experiences of young people and those who the traditional church finds it difficult to attract. In doing this, I have discovered new ways of praying and, I have discovered more about God as revealed through creation.

So, here are some of the prayer methods that I have found helpful. I have divided them into methods of praying and some themes and types of prayer. This is not meant to be a definitive guide, just a collection of suggestions, and a place to start.



## Methods of Praying

### Using your Body.

We have bodies, they are our first artistic instrument. God even reckoned that bodies were so important that he became incarnate, taking a body himself (through Jesus Christ). Here are some suggestions about using your body to help you pray.

#### Shampoo position.

<picture/ photo?>

This is one of the most common positions I have come across – do not be distracted by the comedy name, this is a sound and helpful practice. The name comes from the practice of sitting or standing with your head down and eyes closed, much like you would if you were about to be rinsed by a shower. Some people rest their heads on their hands, but there are many variations.

#### Advantages

This is a comfortable position to stay in for some time. Your body is at rest and you are shielded from distractions that may be going on around you. Most people find that it feels natural to pray from this position, and it is a position widely used in the UK. You are therefore unlikely to distract yourself or anyone else. It is also possible to use subtle variations within the base position to help you visualise your prayer without drawing attention to yourself. These factors make it especially good for using in groups of people who may not know each other very well.

#### Disadvantages:

I find it quite easy to doze in this position, and although dropping off is less dramatic from this position there are other positions which help me focus more on praying. Over-use of any method of prayer can also be less than helpful.

#### Variations: <add Pictures>

Standing up can help, especially if you are feeling sleepy.

You can use your hands to help visualise your thoughts/ prayers. Some suggestions include:

- cupping your hands palm up to receive from God
- clasping your hands in petition
- holding objects, or letting them go. For example, a “holding cross” .  
*See the objects section for more ideas.*
- Praying with your eyes open. Have you tried praying on a bus when you are commuting?

### Kneeling

This is another position that is familiar, but should not be underestimated. Contemporary society has almost totally devalued acts of submission in general. What was once a widely understood symbol survives in moments such as a romantic proposal of marriage. The opening of the Lords' prayer recognises both the intimacy and awe that characterises a Christians' relationship to God. Deliberately kneeling can help us to recognise the awesomeness of God, which in turn helps us appreciate how gentle God is.

### Advantages

Physical movements help us visualise thoughts that may otherwise go unnoticed. They also help me stay awake!

### Disadvantages

As with all physical activity, use some common sense. If it is going to threaten your health, distract you or other people from focusing on God or compromise the reputation of the faith, be very sure why you are doing it. The kingdom of heaven is not concerned with eating the right foods, wearing the right clothes or performing the correct rituals. This freedom from religiosity is given to benefit individuals and the church as a whole, and requires us to take responsibility for testing our motives and activities, so if it is not beneficial, do not do it.

### Variations

Try this in combination with various other positions, or as an aid to preparation or dedication. Or develop it to:

### Prostrate

Sometimes we just have had enough and feel like we cannot go on. At other times we are overwhelmed by the awe-inspiring nature of God. Either way, it is sometimes good to lie flat and prostrate in front of God. This position could follow on from kneeling or start and end with simply lying flat out on your bed. It symbolises dependence, humility, and vulnerability. These are all things that most people try to avoid in everyday life in the UK, and so perhaps the discipline of submitting totally to God is one we need to practice.

### Advantages

In this position you are stable and perhaps most able to forget your body and let your mind wander in prayer. If you have started by stilling yourself, then this can be like placing a "cloud of forgetting" below you as you explore a "cloud of unknowing" above you (as described in *"The Cloud of Unknowing = Anon C14th*).

### Disadvantages

Falling asleep may not be a disadvantage, if you need rest! We need to look after our physical needs too. You are also physically vulnerable in this position, so be careful what space you use. Consider ways in which a safe space may change due to things like weather and the movements of other people.

### Variations

Floating on water, inside or outside buildings, on a roof, in a darkened room. On a soft mattress or a hard floor, with music or ambient noise. Don't forget the importance of smell, whether you are about to eat, or if you have just had a good meal.

### Cross Vigil - Orans posture

The word 'Orans' is used to describe praying standing up with your arms outstretched but elbows bent. This word comes from mediaeval Latin and at one time would have simply meant "one who is praying". If you search for it you will find pictures of people praying in this position from antiquity. The position may also be familiar to people already, perhaps even without noticing it, because it comes naturally. There has long been a special significance for Christians because of its similarity with the position you may imagine Jesus to have been held in on the cross. Stories of monks from the early Insular (or Celtic) church traditions describe them praying in this position while standing in the sea. St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne is even said to have had his feet dried and warmed by otters when he walked back to land!

The cold water would wake you up, and the fire in your arms after praying like this for a while can be a powerful aid to focusing your mind. Not everyone lives near enough to a secluded section of beach to be able to use the sea in this way, but the cross vigil in an orans position is just as relevant in your kitchen at home.

Stand with your arms held out on either side of your body. As you pray, your muscles will start to ache. The objective is not to inflict pain upon yourself, but perhaps it is a way to encounter experiences of our own frailty. Some people exercise using weights. Through repetition they increase their ability to lift. The Christian God does not demand sacrifice, because Jesus has "lifted" the weight of the world. This position may be a way for you to move your heart and mind by moving your body, to help you find an awareness of this effort in the present moment, and to participate with Jesus in a determination to endure.

### Advantages

This one keeps you awake. It is a very physical form of prayer too, and if you find that your mind wanders, it can really help you to focus. There is a very strong symbolic link with the cross, remembering what Jesus has done for us. In this position we can physically and imaginatively step into an awareness

of the description of Jesus on the cross, and remember his call for us to love our neighbours. I find it helpful to pray in cycles of remembering and thanking Jesus, followed by praying for people and situations. Interceding is a type of prayer which I'll describe later, but if you look at early medieval crosses, Jesus is depicted standing like this in metal and on stone, as a hero "Orans" – praying and bound to the tree which links heaven and earth. The symbolism of the position reminds me that as Jesus intercedes for us in heaven, we represent him on earth interceding for others. We can step in and become this link.

Disadvantages.

Not to everyone's taste! As it is a very dramatic position it is important to think about your setting – perhaps avoid busy street corners, unless you are sure of your motives. It is important to be sure that it is a responsive act, and you are not carrying it out just because you are an adrenaline junkie! You also need to make sure there is enough space around you to hold out your arms safely.

Variations

You could think about the direction you are facing. Use your position to help visualise praying for a particular area, or perhaps facing east to remember where Jesus actually died. You could open your hands palm up in supplication or clench them in determination. Lowering your arms can be part of the prayer as well. We can only understand a fraction of what Jesus went through, and of the suffering that God senses through involvement in creation. When we lower our arms, we can be glad of the good things God has given us, and that our experience of suffering is only temporary. The time of day, and locations such as woodland where you are surrounded by trees may also enhance your experience and use of this position. If you have tried other meditative practices such as yoga, perhaps there are more physical positions which will help you develop your awareness of the gospel?

Breathing

Unlike the previous descriptions, there is no specific posture associated with this, but it can be helpful to lie down. This exercise involves focusing on your breathing and becoming aware of your body to help you relax. Our lives can be very busy, and so it is worth taking time to slow down and re-tune your mind. God knew us before we were born, and has prepared a welcome for us in the future – but we meet with God in the present. This is where we can effect change and act. By finding a quiet place to meet with God, perhaps at a regular time and in a special place, we can break free from our past memories and future worries, setting them to one side. With God's assistance, we can re-encounter them with a renewed attitude. In your quiet space sit quietly and close your eyes. Concentrate on what you can hear around you, and the present sensations you feel. Allow yourself to concentrate on your breathing.

Then, you may also find it helpful to say a particular formal prayer to help you focus your mind on meeting with God.

### Advantages

Becoming aware of something you do every day, naturally without noticing, can be special. It can be combined with everything else described here to develop your practice of the presence of God. This is an exercise uncomplicated by a need for objects, and which can be done unnoticed in a crowded space, or in a queue. Take a moment to “catch your breath”, and prepare yourself to continue.

### Disadvantages

We do this naturally, and by making ourselves conscious of breathing we can also mess up the way our body regulates itself. Be careful not to hyperventilate. Breathing will help you become mindful of yourself and your environment. In addition to this, Christians in prayer can become “Christ-ful”. Prayer should not leave you feeling alienated from yourself, or empty. In prayer you may also experience dark thoughts, memories or even emotions like anger. By combining your practice of prayer with talking to people you trust, reading, and the broad range of teachings handed down through the Church you can develop a common sense that will help you identify and deal with such negative experiences when they happen over time.

### Variations

Combine this with everything else! The Holy Spirit is described as wind, let God Fill your Lungs, so that you can sweat Love and Peace.

### The Jesus Prayer

This is a type of prayer from the Orthodox tradition. The classical form of words used in the English language is:

*"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."*

But variations on this are frequently made. The prayer could be used for 15 minutes at the beginning of your day, breathing in for the first half of the sentence, and out for the second half.

This block of time can help focus our hearts and minds on God, through Jesus, and dedicate the day, ordinary time, to God who is waiting for us. The simplicity of the words are a reminder that we are not asked to achieve complicated or extravagant mission. We are simply called to draw close to God, and receive healing mercy that will equip us to be channels of peace throughout the day, for the tasks we encounter in it.

The prayer can also be used at specific times of crisis. It is short and to the point. God is well aware of our needs, and is waiting to be asked for help. Finally, think about what the word mercy means in a Christian context. There is the obvious meaning in connection with receiving forgiveness for our culpable wrong-doing. God's mercy, as shown in Christ's incarnation goes far beyond this though. Not only can we receive mercy in a similar way to subjects petitioning a King, we can also be confident that God is concerned with healing the whole of our lives. God equips us to be agents of transformation - revealing the kingdom of heaven in the ordinariness of daily life.

### **Advantages**

Simple, meditative and powerful. This can be used in most places and at most times. This theme is core to the gospel and can really help you remember your focus.

### **Disadvantages**

Breathing is simple until you start thinking about it too much. It is important to remember that we are reconciled and living in a relationship with God, as well as our need for reconciliation. Remembering this can make the prayer very positive, when at first glance it may look negative.

### **Variations**

If you study the key words in the classic form you can develop your own 'mantra'. The word translated into 'mercy' shares roots with 'healing'. 'Sinner' can be understood as accepting culpability for deliberate action, failure to act and also the experience of having trespassed into somewhere it would be better not to be.

#### [More ...](#)

This is just a small selection of ways in which you could use your body to pray, which may inspire you to work out others with God. Some suggestions that I am not going into here include; fasting, symbolic hand positions, dancing and so on. Please take these thoughts, and explore and expand on them. Pray as you are dancing in a nightclub. Kneel in a quiet lane on your way to go shopping. Wander barefoot in forests where trees become pillars in the cathedral of creation, and the sky is a star studded ceiling through which our thoughts are carried.

#### [Object Assisted](#)

People exist within relationships. How much of your waking life is spent doing things with, for, or because you have been asked to by other people? We

have many skills to help us tell stories and to get to know people. The idea that we can have a relationship with God is central to Christianity. This means that many of the interpersonal skills we use in everyday life can be used in our prayer lives too.

There are obviously some differences between your relationship with friends and family, and with the creator of the entire universe! When it comes to object-assisted prayer, the most obvious difference between God and any other person is that God has no one physical presence on the planet at this time. This absence of a body to relate to has caused problems for people throughout time. Scripture and later Church history contains many examples of criticism of idolatry and inappropriate attempts to worship objects. Scripture also contains references to the use of objects in prayer and worship. The patriarchs set up stones and altars as sites of worship, and memorials of Gods' actions. The artists and crafts-men who constructed the Ark of the Covenant did so according to the design principles for building a portable shrine that were current in the area at the time. Great care and detail was taken in designing the surroundings of the Ark of the Covenant, facilitating people in their relationship with God. Jesus is recorded as using spit and mud when he prays for healing. The New Testament book of Acts describes handkerchiefs and aprons that had been touched by Paul being taken to sick people, and they are healed.

**B**efore most beloved son you should not doubt but should believe in full faith that the Spirit of God has filled your heart when you have embellished His house with such great beauty and variety of workmanship. And lest perhaps you are diffident, I shall unfold clearly and systematically that whatever in the arts you can learn, understand, or devise, is bestowed on you by the Grace of the seven-fold Spirit.

**T**hrough the spirit of wisdom you know that created things proceed from God and that without Him nothing is.

**T**hrough the spirit of understanding you have received the capacity for practical knowledge of the order, the variety, and the measure that you apply to your various kinds of work.

**T**hrough the spirit of counsel you do not hide away the talent given you by God but, working and teaching openly and with humility, you faithfully reveal it to those who desire to learn.

**T**hrough the spirit of fortitude you shake off all the apathy of sloth, and whatever you commence with quick enthusiasm you carry through to completion with full vigour.

**T**hrough the spirit of knowledge that is given to you, you are the master by virtue of your practical knowledge and you use in public the perfect abundance of your abounding heart with the confidence of a full mind.

**T**hrough the spirit of piety you set a limit with pious consideration on what the work is to be, and for whom, as well as on the time, the amount, and the quality of work, and lest the vice of greed or cupidity should steal in, on the amount of the recompense.

**T**hrough the spirit of the fear of the Lord you bear in mind that of yourself you are nothing able and you ponder on the fact that you possess and desire nothing that is not given to you by God, but in faith, trust, and thankfulness you ascribe to divine compassion whatever you know or are or can be.

In the drawn text picture the 12<sup>th</sup> century monk writing under the name of "Theophilus" set out his reasons why visual artists should be confident that they were inspired by God when they crafted objects to help with worship. He also used this as a guide to help the artists develop a healthy work/spirituality balance.

I encourage you to take the time to search for examples

like the story of Jacobs' pillow stone<sup>2</sup>. Compare the archaeology of Egypt and the fertile crescent with descriptions of the Ark of the Covenant<sup>3</sup> and Solomons' temple<sup>4</sup>. Compare and contrast the approved crafting of the stone tablets of law<sup>5</sup> and clothing for priests with Aarons' vetoed crafting of a golden calf<sup>6</sup>. There are far too many questions and discussions surrounding the issues for me to explore in this book. My approach is that maintaining a focus on building a relationship distinguishes iconography from idolatry. If an object contributes to a deepening relationship with God, challenging as well as comforting, and opening our minds to the mystery that is incarnation, then I think that it is beneficial.

### Advantages

Some people instinctively experience reality as being "out there" to be discovered. An environment containing special objects that can be researched rationally or played with creatively can be of particular help in learning to sense meaningfulness. The inside of many church buildings is an example of this, whether filled with sacred objects or consciously emptied of them, the building itself becomes a statement. "Godly Play" uses objects like toys and dressing up to develop this ability in children so that they can learn to find sense in the often exclusively adult environment of church sanctuaries. Outside of sacred buildings, just walking down a street, may help people instinctively with #SensingChallenge, particularly in poverty-stricken or tired and worn-down environments. People are drawn to objects, often expecting to sense something. Whether this is an ancient megalithic ring, a mediaeval cathedral, a Victorian mosaic, a book, a banner, or a toy. If this instinctive sensation is nurtured and respected by their community then from this foundation perhaps they will be able to recognise other instinctive ways in which people encounter reality. For example through the beauty of an accurate argument, or revelatory mystic insight.

### Disadvantages:

Use of an object can encourage us to rely on habit and disengage from making an effort, or, to become narrow-minded and resistant to change, making the things humans have created into a god. In that situation, the object is becoming an idol and we are substituting it for a relationship with God. This can be applicable both for man-made objects, and those we discover in the natural environment. It is wonderful to discover God through and in creation. Sensing a changed quality in awareness through encountering an object, or through a discovery of 'self' in something that was 'other' can also lead to an increased ability to sense 'Otherness'. Objects can outlive their usefulness

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<sup>2</sup> *Jacob and the stone Genesis 28:18.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ark and clothing Exodus 28:3-5.*

<sup>4</sup> *Solomon's Temple 1 Chronicles 28:11*

<sup>5</sup> *Moses and the Tablets Exodus 31:17-18*

<sup>6</sup> *Golden Calf Exodus 32:1*



though and new wine skins are needed to accommodate new wine (*Matthew 9 16.17*)– what sort of person would prefer to keep sour wine so that their bottle won't burst?

Variations:

Think about what objects are commonly used by your community in a symbolic way. It might just be a book and a table, but consider whether there are other less obvious ways in which physical space is used to show the importance of activities or people to the community when they meet and in daily life. If you are from a community surrounded by symbolic objects, why not explore the variety of meanings these objects hold for individuals – or look further afield to find new experiences. Remember that your role can be active too: take a familiar object and find inspiration to make or remake it new, in a way which resonates with people who currently have no connection with it.

Buildings as objects

The early church met in peoples' houses. They used household objects as the symbols of their faith, and adopted the artwork of the cultures early believers lived within. Over two thousand years this community has grown, making itself at home in many different settings. Some buildings are embellished with sculptures, painted, others are left plain like a lecture theatre to focus on the gathering of people and informed understanding of the book. In the information age, the new renaissance, buildings are often multifunction flexible spaces to use digital projection, movement, and craft activities. All of these are large scale objects to help with prayer and worship – every choice can be understood as an artistic statement, although like our bodies we often perceive them as a natural container and only question their form when something has gone wrong.

Advantages:

Constant experience of a place and associated habits can provide a solid foundation for identity.

Disadvantages:

If too much of identity is invested in the place it might be difficult for people to cope when the place suffers catastrophic change or proves difficult to maintain

Variations:

A quiet space in a house, or outdoors. You could also construct a temporary 'place' or shelter – like a den! Either on your own, or with others, to provide a shared experience. Decorating the inside of a space with images might help with processes of transformation, and then you can emerge from the cocoon.

How often have you seen the picture of a saint in a stained glass window? Or a mural, either in mosaic tiles in a sanctuary, or St Mungo painted wearing his beanie hat on a gable end in Glasgow? Part of a Christians' role on earth is to represent Jesus, God, to other people. Although we are not gods and therefore make mistakes or even deliberately do wrong, God through his grace has made us his children and the work of the Holy Spirit can be seen through our actions. This is not limited to our own area, or even our own time, and we are therefore part of a collection of personal histories that spans the ages. It can be helpful to be reminded of Gods' actions through other people, and we can evaluate our own relationship with God by prayerfully considering other people's stories.

Pictures of famous people from the history of the church can be helpful in this process. Much of what goes on when you use an image is instinctive. This is one of the reasons why icons can be so useful, particularly for people who are not inspired by long tracts of text. We should not view this as failure, or as a less intelligent way to worship. If God has been actively relating to people since the beginning, text-based interaction must make up a small proportion of this activity. Using images is also a sophisticated activity. If you are not used to this method, it is well worth taking some time to think about what is going on when you look at an image.

The beauty of a work of art can be inspirational on its own in the moment of viewing. There is also more to be explored and discovered. Think about it for a while.

- When an artist creates, they represent and communicate their thoughts in a complex symbolic language.
- When you view a work of art, you do so from a unique perspective, responding to it, interpreting and participating in your own creation of meaning.
- If you encounter the art in an attitude of prayer, then you open yourself to guidance from the Holy Spirit and this will affect your experience as well, forming a meaning in conversation and relationship...

Take your time – think about these three as threads in a cord and how they each contribute to your experience of prayer.

Much of what I have described above will be instinctive, that is one of the wonders of Art. However, as a guide to informing your instinct, take some time for reflection – the picture can then become like a stained glass window: beautiful in its construction, designed to tell a story, and illuminated by a light that is both far greater than the object, *and* within it, bringing it to life. And you are there in the moment, experiencing it, both creating and

recognising meaning, in a living relationship. Perhaps the visual art can be more than the representation of something absent. Can it be a physical manifestation and an experience of God truly present in the room with you? If this appeals to you, take some time to find out more about the tradition of icon painting from experts in the Orthodox church, some of whom may be a lot closer geographically than you think at first.

As in all things, if you experience something that disturbs you or conflicts dramatically with what you believe to be true, discuss this with people you trust.

### Advantages

An immediate and visual way to encounter the story of people and the history of the Church. A skilful artist can use pictures of people to both confirm the experience of the eternal and challenge assumptions we are unaware that we are making. They can foster a sense of meaningfulness, help the observer become aware of the great cloud of witnesses who surround us and the value of this. Some visual art will also give us a feeling of mystery that allows us to expand the limits of our imagination.

### Disadvantages

Some people find it uncomfortable to see pictures of identities they have heavily invested in imaginatively. Looking at a photograph of ourselves can be an unsettling experience, especially if it is at an odd angle. A visual depiction of a person might seem to limit them to a particular form. Also, the use of visual arts in the context of prayer is still vulnerable to the usual challenges of discussing what is “good art”, and arguments about whether intent is more important than competent technique. Perhaps this is more true when something as emotive and significant as religious figures are the subjects of the artwork. Particular artistic styles can also tend to end up dominating the visual diet in churches, which are perhaps more related to the values of those gathering than that of the wider communities they live in.

### Variations

Icons, Murals in churches, fuzzy felt toys or wooden figures from “Godly Play” stories. The list is quite long if you think about it and enjoy access to an image search on the internet. Before you use an image though, please remember to check that you have permission. Whilst there are exemptions for educational uses of artists work, what sort of an example will you be setting if your community spends more on after worship coffee than on supporting visual arts?

<< add PICTURES to let people do this as they read – not just illustrations >>

## Calligraphy

Have you ever considered reflecting on particular words as if they were works of art? Treating words, especially words like “Love” and “Peace” as if they were objects in an art gallery. Perhaps you have when you read or write poetry. I encourage you to pause for a moment and reflect on the significance of being able to take a thought, represent it in sounds, and then record those sounds using symbols in a way which can last longer than your civilization. I sometimes write using Iron Gall ink, a mediaeval recipe on vellum, which is calf-skin. As I write the ink chemically bonds with the substance of the vellum and grows darker as I watch. It often reminds me of depictions of magical ink in films, especially when I use a goose quill! Words written in this way are easier to relate to as pictures, and the process of writing them takes time, and is often valued before people actually read the text itself.

Having grown up in a literate society, many of us have lost the sense of wonder in the human ability to use written words. Is it possible that in a post-literate era, the mass of textual information that we are surrounded by all the time has led to an overload? The age of reason and technology were built on inventions like the printing press, and reformed churches adopted a lecture theatre architecture with sermons designed to disseminate information quickly to a wide range of people. We have increasingly come to depend upon a common sense connection between a written word and its meaning to get through everyday life, or to read and perhaps even write this book.

Is the connection between a written word and its meaning that simple though? Do nouns derive their meaning from the objects they refer to, or are the objects that are so named defined in the action of naming them? Have you ever used a chair as a table and if so did it cease to be a table when it became a chair again? One of the first tasks given to newly created humans in Genesis is the naming of things, and this is a task that the human race continues to carry out as creation unfolds through time, using words.

Most examples of writing are creative acts. When you write, are you laying a layer of meaning upon the world you experience as if it were an object? Or is the meaning something you discover through participating in a creative process of discovery? What if, as the words take shape, you are participating in existence unfolding its potential through an ongoing divine act of creation. Perhaps the simple task of rewriting a text could give the writer the opportunity to discover new significance through the process of the words taking shape. This too can be prayer.

### **Advantages**

When you pray using calligraphy, it is possible to participate in both through doing and looking. Playing with the shape of their writing is something that can come easily to many people, and paper and pens are readily available. Make sure that you recycle any paper though, or use a sandbox and stylus –

or the whole of a beach! Use of a dip pen and ink can also provide new ways to experience a familiar activity or text.

### **Variations**

If you are someone who finds that they think best whilst carrying out an activity, try meditating on the meaning of a word or phrase whilst you draw it. Try adapting the letter shapes to reflect the impression a word makes on you. You may also find it helpful to continue to embellish the words as thoughts come to you after you have finished the main writing of the word.

To meditate on a word or phrase, you may find it helpful to have it written in front of you as a visual focus. Slow your mind down and think past your common-sense understanding of it.

*Questions to explore where your understanding of the word comes from:*

- Is your understanding from your practical experiences associated with the word?
- Are there uses of the word that you know of, but which don't ring true with your understanding of it?
- Can the word mean different things depending on its context?
- What does each use share in common?
- What does each subtle difference in usage contribute to the richness of the words' meaning?

Use the word as an anchor around which your prayers can wander, lingering on other related words without getting lost. If you find it too hard, give up and ask God for help in your weakness, then start again.

### **Disadvantages**

“Art” is a word that can scare some people. Have confidence in your own work, without worrying about comparing it with other peoples. Take time to appreciate the skill artists develop, and seek to improve but start with the abilities you have and make the most of what you have got. Calligraphy can be exact and precise; it can also be wild, with expressive characters sponged in poster paint with a shaky hand and vibrant colour choices.

### **Maps**

Just as we are in danger of losing our sense of wonder at words, the utility of modern mapping has a hidden downside. We learn to understand how to read maps, usually to navigate, and/ or get a rough idea of a weather forecast, but rarely encounter the technical details of mapping. We get used to the idea that a map represents the landscape as it is. The danger is that we then start to understand the actual landscape in terms of the map. The error in this is clearly seen in the use of a diagrammatic railway map.

Such a map represents the position of stations in relation to each other on the railway tracks and is therefore ideal for working out which train to catch. It does not necessarily convey the distance between stations very accurately, or

the surrounding landscape, and so it can be unhelpful or even misleading should you decide to walk. All maps are like this to varying degrees, and it is a danger inherent in all forms of representation. However, once you are aware of what is going on in the process of mapping, you can start to use maps creatively, and I think this is awesome.

Some mediaeval maps were drawn in such a way that the relative significance of places was indicated by their size on the map and their placement on the paper. For example, the site of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jerusalem, would be big and at the centre of everything. As people navigated by following roads or established trade routes, landmarks and cities were shown in the correct order according to journey times. If you tried to use such a map to navigate in the same way as you would use an Ordnance Survey map it would not be much help. If, however, you want to use it to understand the ideas of the map-artist and their culture, it will contain a wealth of information hard to detect in a modern map. You can explore various solutions to the problem of how to represent a roughly spherical earth on a flat sheet of paper by comparing the Mercator depiction with the Gall-Peters, Cahill-Keyes, or many other attempts. Each has its own purpose and limitations. Do different depictions challenge your assumptions about South America, or Africa when they reveal just how big they are compared with Europe as land masses (or even Scotland and England)?

Why not try using maps and mapping in prayer to help organise and order your thoughts and experiences? This creative act will help you discover relationships between things that you were not previously aware of. You can do this on your own or as a group activity. You might want to start with someone else's map, modifying it to represent your information, or with a blank sheet that will enable you to make your own map from scratch.

*<<show examples of maps>>*

## Variations

### **Visualising community through maps**

- Start with a copy of a map of your local area. Take time out to ask God to open your eyes so that you become aware of things from Jesus' perspective. Then explore the map. Mark examples of Church presence in the area, for example the buildings - where people live, cafés which people meet in regularly, or places of work.
- You can then look at the map and reflect upon whether it shows you needs that the Church should get involved in, or examples of God being at work bringing good things into being outside of the church.
- Highlight areas where you are aware of good things happening (church related or not), and areas of concern. You could use the map to help you become aware of activities and topics of prayer with the Holy Spirit prompting as you 'walk' round the roads.

- Using something like “google street view” may be a way to make this accessible to those who are less mobile.
- Why not add a historical dimension by visiting a website like the “National Libraries of Scotland” where you can view historical maps overlaid onto more recent ones (contains maps of more than just Scotland <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/>).

### **Mapping a picture of your everyday**

- Think about the routes you walk through your local area. It may be helpful to think about it a day at a time, writing down landmarks you pass and places you visit. As you go through the days, if you think about a place you have already written down, put a tally mark next to it, so that the place you go most will accumulate the most marks. Remember to include the place (or places) where you live.
- Make cards for each of the places. You might want to make the ones with most tally marks bigger than the others or write a number to show how often you are there.
- Use blue tack to attach the most frequented place onto the middle of a piece of paper.
- Use a piece of string to represent each days’ journey, start from the middle and attach cards in the order that you visit them. The distance between each card doesn’t matter too much, so try to leave plenty of space around each card. Sometimes the strings will cross over when you visit the same place on different days. Now think about each of the places on the card individually and write what comes to mind when you think of them. Who is there? What do you see? What worries you? What makes you happy?
- Stand back from the map and look at it as a whole.
- Allow yourself time to become aware of the significance of the life you are leading.
- You can then use this map to talk to other people about how they see the same area, to share concerns and hopes. It can become an inspiration for many types of prayer, and can be modified as prayers are answered, people move on and your opinions change. If you made a series of maps then each could be like a snapshot in time and the collection of maps would display the changes in your perception of the area throughout the years.

### **Bangle or Necklace**

If you tend to fidget while you pray this may be of particular help to you. Running a bangle, necklace or even a piece of string through your fingers can help you focus on praying. The habitual repetition of an action can be soothing and help to clear your mind from distractions. Knots or shaped

beads can help you think about points of prayer and worship periodically as you cycle through a continuous cycle of prayer.

A story is told that a Swedish Lutheran bishop watched fishermen fiddling with their worry beads while he was stuck on a Greek island due to a storm. He then worked with this, and by giving each bead in the string a meaning he developed the idea into a devotional activity. In Scandinavia beads are called pearls, so the bracelet is often called “The Pearls of Life”. They are also known by the names “Wreath of Christ” or “Frälsarkransen” in Swedish, and “Kristuskransen” in Norway and Denmark.

You could use this with any formal prayer, or explore the depth and symbolism of traditions such as the rosary. Why not also find or make a necklace that you like, and then create your own prayer pattern to go with it?

### **Advantages**

Objects like this can help us mark the passage of time and control our awareness. The shapes and colours of the beads can enhance this and help remember nuggets of story. The Pearls of life bracelet has a golden bead to remind the user of the glory of God. Elongated beads are a time to pause in silence and so on.

### **Disadvantages**

Remember that the use of the object should be an aid to prayer that provides a base from which you can freely wander under the Holy Spirits’ guidance. As with all objects, there is a danger that it becomes the focus of your attention, rather than an aid to focussing your attention.

### **Variations**

Variations have been described above, but now perhaps consider the ways in which a fidget spinner could help you pray? I knew someone who used the task of tying knots to make a net in a similar way, and perhaps any repetitive task such as knitting or washing the dishes can become an aid to habitual devotion if you invest in learning how to do it.

Visual Arts – more than just attention grabbers.

How many times have you heard the expression “A picture is worth a thousand words”? It is true, a picture of or an actual cup of water will grab peoples’ attention. It will help them engage with a talk, or exposition of scripture. It is also true that low quality pictures, dated graphics, or a dependency on free clip art can communicate unintended and sometimes negative messages. This is especially true for the swipe generation who have



grown up with smart boards in their classroom and an industrialised use of imagery for advertising.

This is not just a stylistic shift though. The further challenge for those wanting to develop Sensing Spirituality is how can you go beyond just grabbing someone's attention, and use pictures and objects really effectively? To access the full worth of a picture they need to be used in ways which help people engage with truth that texts alone cannot provide. Kinesthetic learning, immersive experiences and the arts in general can communicate in ways which are more than just propositional statements and Dogma-like creeds.

The following section examines different approaches to the use of water in a prayer. They are all based on the phrase "Living Water" as used in John Chapter 4

Living water.

*Literary approach to prayer #SensingMeaningfulness*

A strong motivate for building schools with every kirk in Scotland was to give people the ability to interpret scripture for themselves. This is a very rational and intellectual approach, and this has contributed to the society we experience today. Often, however, this approach has shaped bible studies and reduced them to a format similar to an English interpretation exercise as taught in schools. There are ways to build on this bookish foundation though, and smartphones give access to resources to continue the work of the school builders and help make scripture accessible at different ability levels. A concordance or online bible search can be used to seek out texts and other sources which explore and interpret the references to water that contribute to the traditions we have inherited. Having understood a greater range of meanings associated with living water, this can then inform a persons prayer.

*Exploration through analogy #SensingOtherness*

*"Living a spirit-filled life is like pouring water into a jug. The jug can be full of water, and although you know it's full, it's not until the water starts pouring out and being refilled again that you sense the movement, bubbling, and overflowing of the water". - Words to use while pouring water as a visual aid.*

Analogy is the most straightforward way to effectively use a visual aid. It draws on someone's prior learning to emphasise the point you wish to make. This approach has the advantage of being controllable and clear in a simple application. Something familiar is used to help sense something other.

The effectiveness of this activity can be reduced if it has been seen many times before. This narrow focus is most suitable for reinforcing a message which has already been accepted by the participants, rather than to encourage them to explore and discover new interpretations or possible significances. It can help broaden your spiritual literacy though, particularly if it encourages discovery of further analogies.

*Going beyond analogy #SensingMystery*

In John's account Jesus is reported as describing himself as living water. What can we learn about God through playing with water? As you read this, find a glass of water, or better still a jug and a bowl as well.

*Look at the water and anticipate your experience of it. What do you expect when you try to pick up water? How does picking up water compare with picking up soil, air, rock or fire?*

Preparing your mind can help you remain mindful of what you are experiencing. Be aware of the danger of disassociating yourself from the moment and falling into the trap of experiencing your life as an onlooker. As you are reading this, you are probably engaging with it critically. This makes use of your ability to reason, and to compare the opinions presented in it with the rest of your experience and trusted bank of knowledge. These are all useful skills, and the ones promoted by academic education. However, when you pick up the water and play with it you can use other skills. It is an opportunity to sense beauty, to imagine and remember other experiences of water, to experience rather than analyse the moment.

This is not a competition! There is joy and wonder to be found in both experiences of water. Critical analysis of the behaviour of water helped engineers discover steam power. Play, wonder and mindful experience are ways to develop real life experience, which can be enriched using questions and by drawing in knowledge gained through critical evaluation or through stories and texts. Examples include the 'wondering questions' from Godly play, or techniques such as those taught by St Ignatius. It is also important to remember that prayerful reflection on a text only becomes more than an English language interpretation exercise when we allow ourselves to wonder.

*Stop reading! Pick up the water and play with it. Pour it out, drink it? Feel its temperature... then think of words which describe, or fail to completely describe the experience; the sensation and your response to it.*

What have you learned about water and your relationship with it?

## Prayer ribbons

Writing down prayers can help a person concentrate on the prayer and avoid being distracted. It can also help a person think through issues that they are praying about and express them in a more focussed way than in an improvised prayer. Writing prayer down on strips of cloth or ribbons can add an extra dimension of symbolism to written prayer.

When a prayer is written on a ribbon, the ribbon can become a symbol of that prayer. This symbol can then be used in a number of ways (see below) to emphasise unseen aspects of the nature of prayers. Examples of this are when a group is praying together, and each person contributes a ribbon. These ribbons could be woven together to form a table covering or banner. The ribbon will also outlast the initial moment and so can serve as a reminder of the prayer or a reminder to continue to pray. This can help emphasise that some forms of prayer are a process which we engage with that can last months or years.

The persistence of Cloutie trees in Scottish culture, and use of similar activities around the world, demonstrate the way in which this sort of activity can resonate with people.

## Advantages

The ribbon can provide a lasting visual focus for a prayer. The symbol of the prayer can be seen publicly, whilst still affording individuals privacy about the content of their prayer. Each ribbon can be a personal act, and ribbons can also be combined in a communal act. Ribbons can be tied to things like trees and fences, so are especially suitable for outdoor use rather than other options like post-it notes.

Over the last few years it has become increasingly popular for people to leave flowers, notes and other memorials at scenes of tragic events. This prayer activity, therefore, could be a particularly appropriate way of helping people to make a connection between their Christian life and a community response to an incident.

## Disadvantages:

Care needs to be taken in the planning stage about what will happen to the ribbons in the long term. Will they become litter? A public nuisance? If ribbons are found dumped in a rubbish bin by the event leaders, what will that communicate to participants about what the leaders think of their prayers? This is also an example of a wider need to re-examine our use of resources as good stewards of creation – and participants within a global environment where people are vulnerable to climate change induced by activity geographically distant from them.

## Variations:

At an all-age, whole-town, ecumenical Pentecost event, we encouraged people to paint their prayer on ribbons. At the same event we constructed a tepee within which people were continually praying, and offering prayer for

healing. Next to the tepee, we set up the poles for another tepee, but left them uncovered. The prayer ribbons were hoisted on halyards throughout the event, so that they became a visual symbol of the activity taking place in the other tepee as they blew in the wind.

#### Performance and Body art

Working with your body artistically is prone to misunderstanding. Art involving your body is powerful and immediate, and this can help you learn and communicate in a very personal way. However, the individual nature of the art can isolate you from the communal nature of Christianity and God, some practices can also have long-term effects that will remain with us decades after an act. The Old Testament describes the growth and development of Jewish culture and is therefore a source of direct comment on many practices which could be described as performance art. Some of these mentions are positive, like Miriam leading a dance in Exodus. Some describe negative responses, for example when the wife of king David despises him for dancing in a manner and state of undress which perhaps she thought was not appropriate to his station. There are also records of prophets discussing the moderation of their activity with God. Ezekiel tones down his prophetic protest art from eating bread cooked on human dung, to that of bread cooked using animal dung<sup>7</sup>.

These examples are from the Old Testament. As a teenage boy from Glasgow in the 1980's, dancing with floaty scarves in the aisles of churches or on the streets (in a manner akin to teen-pop stars promoting their new release in U.S. shopping malls) was not something which appealed to me, despite encouragement from, and the obvious enjoyment of, those close to me. These biblical examples from a geographically-remote bronze age culture helped me form a reasoned response and temper my emotional reaction. The role heavy-metal music, piercings and tattoos have played in my spiritual development likewise will not be to everyone's taste.

I am writing this decades after the emergence of youth culture, in a world where young people grow up presented with a variety of options from which to

This is not a bible study, but provides some starting points to help you explore the issues discussed in this section:

#### **What defines Christian culture?**

*Freedom,*

Acts 10

1 Corinthians 10 vs 23-33

*But freedom for what purpose?*

1 Corinthians 6 12 -17

#### **Piercing and body modification**

Leviticus 19 v 28.

Exodus 21 vs 5,6.

Acts vs 21 17 – 26 esp. 21

#### **Performance art and prophesy**

1 Kings 18 27-29

Ezekiel chi 4

Daniel chi 4

*(going back to nature?)*

<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel 4:12

form their 'ethos' that goes far beyond the Beatles taking a trip to India. There is a profound need to develop a spiritual literacy which accepts diversity and equips people to discover a sense of identity in an environment where even the body you are born into no longer limits the person you will become.

This section is included in the guide to encourage you to dedicate your sense of fashion and personal artistic expression to God. I don't suggest that people should make buying a new pair of socks into a major ritual, but each choice and action we make can be a practice of the presence of God. Some actions are more significant than others, and these should especially be carried out in the context of prayer. A lot of thought and emotion goes into the design and purchase of a wedding dress, for example. There are already some symbolic items associated with this type of dress, like the veil and the bouquet. What if you recognised the potential of this symbolism and adapted it to express your thoughts and beliefs? Why restrict this level of artistic involvement with your body and environment to one day of your life? Take time out to consider your body, clothes and jewellery and allow your God-given creativity space to express itself.

As usual, I encourage readers to make this an expressive action, primarily between you and God. Consider the effect it will have on other people and be careful not to reduce your art to a mechanistic means of preaching. Perhaps the changes you make will only be noticed by yourself. If you are living in relationship with God, and allow yourself to be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, this can be a way that new life permeates your living. This will communicate much more powerfully in the long term than accessorising to fit in with other church-goers.

An example of an invisible change you could make is to consider carefully the processes which go into producing your clothing, and the environmental impact of your choices. You might be inspired to take a prophetic route by wearing hard-wearing homespun clothes, standing out from the crowd as a witness to an alternative way of living! However, a discussion about ethical consumerism is probably more a matter for prayerful consideration rather than something I should write about more here.

### **Advantages**

These techniques carried out in the context of prayer can be a powerful visual representation of an otherwise invisible change. Whilst your awareness will be heightened in the lead up to, during and after the event, there will often be a long term process as well. This can remind you of the significance and also communicate to others. Imagine a couple tattooing wedding rings on each other's fingers. The link between a sense of otherness about the activity and the physical sensations of the process is particularly obvious in this section.

### **Disadvantages:**

"With great power comes great responsibility!" In most circumstances, the power is primarily going to affect you personally, and your responsibility is to care for yourself. God is passionate, but we do not need to go to extremes

to get Gods' attention or to prove ourselves. All prayer builds links between the world of physical sensation and spiritual sensing. I encourage you to develop the ability to master the subtle power of a song, or a smile at the right time. Also, don't get too hung up on or bogged down by all this talk of art and symbolism! Love and live simply.

#### Variations:

Have patience, trust yourself and God will inspire you. Experiment, but be aware that some experiments have long-term effects – search out understanding of your impulses and ask “is it worth it, even if in the future I think differently?”

#### Group Activities

These methods of praying are particularly suited to group situations. Thinking about how you can use your body to help you pray on your own is important. When we meet in groups, we interact with each other through our bodies, unless you know any telepaths! This makes it even more important to think about possible ways to facilitate praying together. Options range from simply finding somewhere quiet to meet with another person in quiet contemplation to elaborate ceremonies where large numbers of people from a variety of cultures and languages can pray together using a commonly-recognised collection of symbols and actions.

#### Directional Prayer

This is a simple and profound activity you could try at your next prayer meeting, or in your personal prayer. As discussed further in the mapping section, in the Middle Ages, works of art and even maps were often drawn to show the significance of objects to each other, rather than just to depict their physical appearance... Churches were also built facing east so that as people prayed they prayed facing the land where God walked in human form. Facing a particular direction can symbolically represent the importance of a belief, ordering the world around it. Direction can also be used to symbolise common intent as a group of people focus on a particular area.

#### Advantages:

This is a simple action that doesn't require much effort or even mobility. It is also not too weird and the symbolism can be explained without much fuss. People have the option to participate in the prayer activity without worrying about the symbolism and still be part of the group, because you have to face somewhere when you pray and it might as well be the direction that everyone else is facing.

#### Disadvantages:

Make sure you know which direction you are meant to be facing. Obviously this isn't some magical rite that will be ruined if you use magnetic north

instead of true north, it can be distracting though if a prayer leader in London is directing the group to pray for Scotland and all you can think about is “why are we facing west?”

#### Variations:

You could use a variety of directions. The changes in direction can break the prayer time into manageable chunks, with a chance to stretch in between. The change in direction can also help draw attention to a change in the prayers as well. For example, you could start by facing Jerusalem giving thanks for the life of Jesus, then pray round the points of the compass varying the geographical areas and issues as you go.

#### Walking

This has been used in a variety of ways, corporately and in personal prayer. Basically, it is praying while you are walking somewhere. Jesus is described as walking into the hills to pray, especially during stressful times. This activity works on physical, symbolic and environmental levels, and if done with others can show solidarity as well. This activity shares all the general advantages of other physical forms of prayer. It is particularly effective in aiding a prolonged period of prayer, while going for a long walk. I find that the physical tiredness I feel helps me to slow my thinking down and mull over the detail of a matter with God. We talk of walking with God, so what symbolises this better than actually walking? A community could use this as a way of representing Gods’ presence in a particular area, and individually we can use our physical exertion as a symbol of the internal efforts we make to build our relationship with God.

The act of walking can help us build a relationship with our local environment too. This is possible in an urban area as well as by a rural loch or river. You may find yourself ‘sensing challenge’ more often than ‘sensing awareness’ (the sense of a changed quality of being at one with nature) if you walk through a rundown slum, or by a polluted canal . I think we need more of this. The technological ability of humans to change our environment outstrips our common ability to understand the impact of the change. Perhaps the sense of challenge comes from an increasing awareness that we are one with our environment. Crisp packets blowing in the wind down a city street can become prayer flags as the city calls on God to heal humans from consumption. Even in a city, going for a daily walk can help you become aware of the changes in seasons, as winter gives way to spring. Doing this in the context of prayer can help us relate to the presence of rural life in the poetry and art of more formal prayers and liturgy.

#### Advantages

The principle advantage of this prayer activity is that you use the environment that you live in to inspire and aid your prayer. It might take a conscious effort, but if you walk somewhere regularly you can use the time to

sense God at work in the world through the wonders of nature, places with life memories, and even unplanned meetings. You can also open your eyes and become aware of what is going on around you that we need to pray for. In a busy city, house and life, a walk around your local area with your mobile phone switched off can also be a good way to find solitude and anonymity, even in a crowd.

### **Disadvantages**

You need to remember to consider your personal safety. Although switching your phone off is a good idea, it might be good to take it in case of emergency, particularly if you are not almost six foot with a beard and a long leather coat! Try to remain aware of where you are as well, so that if you get lost you can find your way back again. You may find praying unfamiliar in this environment, or that it is hard to concentrate. If so, try sitting down in safe places, or dedicating the next mile or street to a certain issue. Practice praying with your eyes open, inspired rather than distracted by what you see. This activity is particularly suited to intercessory prayer, repetitive formal prayers, and meditation. Remember to look out for what Teresa of Avila calls “consolations” in her book, “The Interior Castle”.

### **Variations**

- Walk on your own, or in a group.
- A pilgrimage can be an extended journey of prayer, with a balance of focused moments and more meditative wanderings.
- Walking together can be a display of solidarity with one another.
- There may be times where walking and singing together are an appropriate celebration of assembling as a community celebration. An example of this would be when Saint Mungo of Glasgow and Columba of Iona and their communities approached each other singing psalms.

### **Labyrinths**

The challenge in a labyrinth is not how to find your way through a maze on the floor – there is only one way. The challenge is how to use the time you have in the labyrinth to learn more about yourself, God, and your relationships. Some are simply used relying on the shape and participant to work through what they bring to the experience. Sometimes guidance can help, for example the simple phrases “Let go, Love, Liberate.” Or in more detail, “Let go on your way in, Reflect on love at the centre, Seek freedom on the way out”.

Here is a more detailed guide, offering a led meditation to help people pray their way through the labyrinth. I wrote them for a youth-work event, and perhaps they will inspire you to think of more ways to learn and use this tool. There are several books written specifically about Labyrinths so I’m only



offering a taste here. Each stage corresponds to a dot on the drawing of the labyrinth.

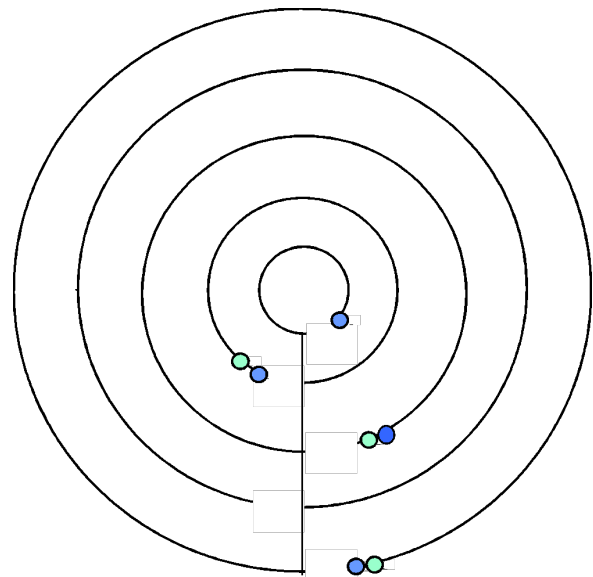
### General Introduction:

On the way in, use the time to think through your layers and to remember what is important to you. At the centre, think about what is most important to you.

On the way out, use the insight you have gained to approach the whole of your life from a new perspective. Re-think, accept, change, or give up things you thought about on the way in.

### Stage 1: Introduction

Welcome to the labyrinth. This time and space is set aside for you to meet with and think about God. As you walk, calm yourself and forget the thoughts and worries that you had a minute ago. Like you take your coat off at the door when you go into a house, leave your worries and awkwardness behind you. You may think about them later, but *this* is time off.



Simple Labyrinth Layout

### Stage 2: Relationships

Part of who you are is made from your relationships with other people. That is why it hurts so much when friends fall out. Use this time to think about your relationships.

### Stage 3: What you do?

Who are you? What do you like, what do you do? Your unique personality is important. Use this time to think about the top five things that make you, you.

### Stage 4: Why you do it?

What makes you get up in the morning? What is the most important thing in your life? Why won't you give up, and what will make you get up, and keep on going?

**Provide a space in the centre to reflect. A jug of water and a cup together with these words:**

*Jesus broke with religious practice and social custom to talk with a woman who needed help. He told her that he was the water of life. He gave her, and gives you now, the option of a "drink" that is God helping*



*you to live, Love, work and play. Drink, feel the refreshing water as you swallow it, and remember Gods' Love and help that fills you.*

### **Stage 5: Who are you? (on the way out)**

Remember what you thought on the way in about what you care about and do. Is there anything you would like to change? God loves you as a whole person, and if anything is worth doing, God will help you to do it well.

### **Stage 6: Who will you be?**

Do your relationships reflect who you are? It is sometimes hard to be yourself in different situations, and hard to know who you can be when there are different demands on you from friends, family, teachers... everyone.

### **Stage 7: Returning is a new beginning.**

You leave at the same place you started from. Nothing has changed, except you. Leave refreshed and feel stronger. If something has helped you, help someone else.

## **Advantages**

This activity shares the advantages of other physical and walking prayer methods. The pattern of the path resonates with some people particularly well, and it works in all age contexts if people are allowed to access it at their own level and if all users respect each other. They can work with children racing in and out, while others work more slowly. The shape also attracts people, and they often feel an urge to walk it. Labyrinths are easy to construct and are very adaptable.

The questions used above are only one of many thought processes. If participants are comfortable with the idea of meditating, the simplicity of the pattern – uncluttered by someone else's thoughts – can be very powerful. In a way, nobody ever walks the same labyrinth. One person can walk using the guide, another can meditate on their own thoughts. This makes the labyrinth particularly useful for facilitating people from diverse backgrounds in taking part in a communal act of worship.

## **Disadvantages**

Unless participants engage with the activity, it will just be walking in a circle. The pattern alone is not self-explanatory and some guidance is helpful. If too many people use the labyrinth at once they will distract each other. This technique takes time and space to set up and clear away.

## **Variations**

Labyrinths can be made from a variety of materials. They are variable in size, and tracing your finger round a pattern on a piece of paper can be an accessible way for less mobile people to participate. The pattern shown above is a fairly standard one, and is elegant in its simplicity. Labyrinths can be square-based though, or even developed into a more abstract pathway. Stations can be set up within the labyrinth to help convey a theme. Portable TV and video links or MP3 players can be used to enhance the experience. Care

should be taken not to lose the symbolism of the labyrinth in a Technicolor show, however. Otherwise, you will find that the labyrinth is little more than a path connecting tableaux together. This isn't a problem if you are intending to run a multimedia experience, or miniature pilgrimage, but there comes a time when it is no longer a labyrinth.

Sea Shanty praying

This is known by more formal names! These include *Polychoral antiphony* or *Antiphonic* singing. This is an ancient form of prayer which uses psalms or other songs in a way where two groups of singers, or a presenter and everyone else take it in turns to sing. The experience can be like waves of prayer and music washing over you. I've called it "Sea Shanty" praying because if you are winching up an anchor or even jogging along a road in a group, music can help the individuals become aware of the whole. I'm not sure how many sea shanties refer explicitly to Christian spirituality, but;

*"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses."* (Psalm 107 KJV)

This technique was developed in monasteries for choirs, and sometimes the twirls of melody form complicated knots building on the core text like the decorations in an insular manuscript. It can provide insights into the poetic composition of the psalms where a line, or half a line will build on the meaning contained in the words it follows. Many modern choruses also work well in this sort of activity, but because they have a different musical form the following variation in approach helps.

- One section of the group chants, singing the chorus or repeating a simple phrase - the phrase is simple so that it does not take much effort to remember it or think about the mechanics of what you are doing. However, the full meaning of the phrase should be rich and complicated, with many associated thoughts. This combination of simplicity and complexity allows a person to focus their thoughts on one of the many mysteries at the heart of Christianity. By setting it to music, a group of people are facilitated in carrying out this activity together. They can draw comfort and strength from each other, as well as participating in a way that involves the whole body.
- The other half of the group can pray specifically. As there will be the sound of chanting, people may feel more comfortable in speaking their prayers aloud. There is, of course, no obligation to do this, but hearing another person pray can help inspire people to pray themselves. You may wish to use an overhead or other display to give a visual focus for

the specific prayers. This could consist of words, passages of scripture, or other artistic imagery.

I experienced this as part of a gathering in Southampton - we chose two people to lead the sections of prayer. We were inspired by the story of Joshua in Exodus Ch 17. While in battle he was supported by Moses praying on a nearby hilltop. We gave the leaders a sword, and while one leader held the sword out, their section chanted. When their arm got tired, they handed the sword over to the other leader who raised it as a signal to their section to start chanting. The section not chanting prayed more specifically about issues we were concerned with at the time. We chose this to anchor the activity which we had created within the context of traditional church prayer and provided visual prompts which loosely followed the structure of the Lord's Prayer.

At any moment in time, how many people in the world are praying? Monasteries were given tax relief by the authorities partly because of the recognised benefit that their prayerful presence had on the community. The chanting section represents this background of support. Of course, at times we are part of the background of support, which is why the groups change over.

**Advantages:**

This method is flexible and can be applied to many different situations. By varying the chants or the displays, you can respond to specific seasons or needs. It is also quite easy to use it with groups of medium to large sizes - as long as the majority understand what is going on, the rest will soon pick it up. It is also quite an active method; it will help people who are worried by silence, or who need the anonymity of a crowd to be involved.

**Disadvantages:**

This can work very powerfully as a visual image. Some people do not think in this way though, and may not find the symbolism helpful. You should be careful who you choose to lead the sections. If you use the sword example, it is better to avoid picking strong young men, as then there is the danger that holding the sword will become an endurance competition. It is, after all, in recognising our weaknesses that we learn to hand things over to God for support. We used a sword, but a staff also has strong symbolic resonance. Others may prefer a conductor's baton. Raising hands in positions for prayer has already been discussed. In this context, just bear in mind that some poses have been appropriated by far right extremists. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he outlines some guidance for thinking about what your gatherings might look like to a stranger. This is especially relevant in a culture where photos shared on social media can easily be shared out of context.

**Variations:**

If you try the traditional approach, take time to study the text. Reflect on the meanings and the poetry and check that the translation you are using will flow. There are simple textual and musical combinations that can be chosen to suit the skill level of those participating. You may even find some suitable sea shanties.

Most of the variety in our adaptations of this method came from the choice of music and visual display. Here are some suggestions:

- For an intercessory theme, you could choose a chant that reflects the ways Jesus acts as an intercessor for us in heaven, while displaying images of specific issues of concern.
- For seeking guidance as a group, you could use a chant that reflects God's presence with us in the person of the Holy Spirit, comforting us, while displaying an image to remind people of God's love, power and involvement with humanity. This could inspire people, reminding them of what we hope for in uncertainty. You could use words or pictures that provoke specific questions relevant to the situation.

Abstract Prayer #SensingMystery #SensingOtherness

*...Worship and praise belong to you, Author of all being. Your power sustains, your love restores, our broken world. You are unceasingly at work, from chaos bringing order and filling emptiness with life.*

*(Eucharistic prayer IV SEC 1982 liturgy)*

*...Worship and praise belong to you, maker of light and darkness. Your wisdom draws beauty from chaos, brings a harvest out of sorrow and leads the exiles home.*

*(Eucharistic prayer III SEC 1982 liturgy)*

We use words to talk about our experiences. Some experiences are beyond our ability to express in our own words though, and perhaps beyond any words. The two phrases above emphasise the creative activity of God in bringing beauty forth from Chaos. If you try to imagine chaos do you think of something empty like the space between stars? Or formless like a vast ocean? Or super massively packed and challenging our ability to explain like a black hole? Some people find order comforting, others need to feel the movement of a chaotic, ever-changing environment to feel alive. Most people are probably a mixture of the two. Perhaps this is why there are several Eucharistic prayers even within a formal framework like an authorised liturgy. Even within word-laced structures there is a recognition that we cannot define God in our own terms.

Central to Christianity is the belief that even if we cannot define God, we can trust God. We can argue about whether “order” or “peace” are the best terms

to describe the result of God's creative interaction with Chaos, or whether physical space runs predictably like clockwork, as some Victorians believed. If you are feeling particularly interested in metaphysics, you could compare and contrast modern western ideas of a pre-existence 'empty space' to be filled, with an eastern or pre-modern Scandinavian 'yawning gap', teeming with a chaotic spawning of existence pouring out like melting ice. The created universe does not always conform to our expectations or understanding. Growth involves change, which can be uncomfortable, and even frightening at times.

Most of the prayer described in this book is similar to conversation you might have with another person. The following techniques are unlikely to be a part of your everyday discourse, unless your friends happen to have an appetite for the surreal. They are still very human experiences though - the awe and wonder which draws people to waterfalls, the truth of the solidness of stone used in the Lorica prayer called "St Patrick's breastplate". The comfort of being with people who build you up in unspoken ways, or in whose presence you find yourself doing things you would not otherwise dream of. Of course, just because something happens when you are praying, does not mean that it is *of God*. It is good to talk to others and test experiences with scripture, reason, conscience, and in the context of community handed down throughout the ages.

### **Colours**

Many people understand colours at an emotional level. Black and yellow stripes communicate danger and fear, red can give feelings of warmth and blue can be cold. Prayer does not have to be filled with chatter all the time. Resist the tendency to feel that you have to talk, and instead, take some time to listen. Sometimes you may see pictures, or hear words. At other times, it might be that you become aware of something as abstract as a colour. For more information about this sort of thing, I recommend the writings of St Ignatius. There is plenty of information available on the internet or in bookshops. Searching online for the Jesuit monastic order in your country may also help you find courses and retreats where you can be accompanied or guided. A possible way in to developing this skill could be to try to deliberately think of a colour and allow this to guide your thoughts, accompanying this with finding examples of the colour in your environment. This could be combined with, for instance, visiting a woodland area. Sometimes you might need to look hard to find a particular colour, and at other times you may be led to bathe in the green with the smell of wild garlic.

### **Advantages**

If you are stuck for words, this type of prayer does not use any! It is a good way to practice remaining in an attitude of prayer whilst concentrating on listening to God, uncluttered in your thoughts.

### **Disadvantages**

It is important that abstract prayer is not confused with religiosity or falsely-pious prayer. God is the Creator and sustains all things. This means that a way to find out about God is to meditate on the invisible qualities of God, revealed through creation. One way of doing this is to abstract from particular instances in order to seek to understand universal forms. For example, it is possible to understand more about what green is by examining many green things. However, if your focus is limited to thinking about greenness, rather than discovering God-in-the-green, perhaps then you will start to create green in your own imagination, rather than opening yourself to the transforming power of God.

Another approach to help avoid a dualistic split between soul and body, or matter and spirit, is to remember that our experience of God is mediated by created existence. We experience “green” through each leaf. Mystical experiences are sensed by our bodies, and God chose to create a cosmos in which he walked and felt tired and thirsty.

### **Variations**

You could try using a word, picture or shape instead.

### **Sounds**

Most people are aware of the use of singing and music in Church. What about sound art, though? Imagine the experience of watching a film without the soundtrack of atmospheric noise. Often this soundtrack is something that viewers would only become aware of if it was unexpectedly absent. Taking this line of thought further, consider the effect having a cinema-quality sound system has in creating an immersive environment - compared with a smartphone. Sometimes musical worship with led singing will transition into instrumental music. Drumming is another technique which can be used individually, or as a collective. The rhythm can help people become aware of their collective emotional identity. This can also be expressed as a tapping foot or a full-body dance. This too can be prayer.

### **Advantages**

These are shared with the description of colour above. Some people are more affected by one sense than others though. In many cultures, music is said to be felt in the soul. When we talk of being “bathed in prayer” this could be experienced collectively far more easily by being bathed in sound, rather than needing to find a swimming pool.

### **Disadvantages**

There can be a lot of cultural snobbery associated with music. It can be a very emotive experience, which is both an advantage as well as a disadvantage. People are, however, usually more likely to be vocal if they have a complaint. As it is abstract, it may be difficult for people to relate to or participate in sound-making as a form of prayer.

## Praying by encouraging sensing a change in Awareness

*“Imagine sitting by a loch eating charcoal-roasted fish and remembering the story of Jesus meeting his disciples after the resurrection?”*

Objects can help people access experiences which are difficult to explain or recall. The smell of fish and chips helps people feel happy in the present moment and remember experiences like holidays by the seaside. This can help someone explore the depths of a story. If carefully introduced, pictures or even smells can help people change the way that they are aware of the moment. This can be described as sensing a changed quality in the awareness of the moment.

Perhaps another way to think about it comes from our experience of dreaming. In a dream-like state, we can become aware of things that our conscious brain overlooks. Doodling on a piece of paper, ambient music and a special space can all help us use our brains in this way while awake.

This approach works closely with storytelling, and can help access the emotional content of a theme. It encourages participants to use their imaginations and prior experiences. If a group practices this over an extended period, or has a shared cultural tradition to draw on, profound moments can arise .

The physical environment and mood of the participants can greatly limit the effectiveness of this approach. It is less suited for teaching, and more for group learning.

## The importance of authenticity of experience

*“This is a piece of a cross I carried from St Andrews to Edinburgh. It was as rough as I felt after the journey, but now the edges have mellowed like my memory from frequent re-use as I bring the story out again and again”. Anon C20th pilgrim*

A good performer can sound convincing, and stimulate an emotional response. Using physical objects to communicate, reinforce or explore a theme can help overcome the reluctance of even a jaded audience to engage. The speaker needs to authentically engage with the topic, but more than that they can lead other people in engaging. A multi-sensory approach can transform an audience into participants. This can help overcome feelings of isolation where people often only engage with each other in an intellectual and individualistic mode. Feeling physical objects, while surrounded by sound can allow people to immerse themselves and re-call, re-member and



in doing so re-think, re-feel and experience opportunities for changes in heart and mind. This can be carried out in an abusive manner, but so can most of the other techniques used in the Church. Shying away from it is a disservice to those for whom it is the primary way in which they become aware of the presence of God.

### Modes of Prayer

There is more to prayer than just asking God for things. The following areas of meditation are about contexts for praying in, or types of prayer, rather than specific ideas about how to pray.

We tend to understand our relationship with God in a similar way in which we understand our relationships with other people. The Lord's prayer is, after all, set out as a conversation. You are probably very used to using different modes of conversation throughout the day. You may not even notice when you switch between praising, petitioning, confessing, or informing the person you are talking to. This means that it is worth taking a bit of time to think about what is going on in each of these modes of conversation. It is also worth pausing for a while to think about other ways in which we relate to people, and even how we exist within relationship beyond our human relationships.

This last suggestion might appear unfamiliar or even strange. A quick introduction might be to reflect on the common practice of "owning pets". That phrase in itself reveals a lot about the relationship which exists between a human and a particular animal. Think about the word "owned" in that sentence and explore the similarities and differences when it is used in the phrase "have you ever owned a plant"? #SensingSpirituality provides skills which can help you become aware of the invisible characteristics of relationships like this. By taking time out to reflect on your everyday relationships you will also discover a lot about your sense of self. What does our relationship with stone tell us about being solid? I'll return to this idea a little later when I discuss the lorica prayer, St Patrick's breastplate. In the meantime, what does it mean that while Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's prayer, he also spent long periods in the wilderness, or up in the hills when he needed to pray?

### Imaginative Prayer

Imaginative prayer is more than just using different materials or visual arts to facilitate prayer. It is praying in a different way – perhaps in a similar way to how you discussed the future with your friends in study leave once your exams were over!

- *It is daydreaming with God.*

- *It is going from what is known, and imagining what could be, or could have been. Exploring blank spaces to help us understand what we know better.*
- *It is accepting that reality could be other than what we think it is, and allowing our mind to be bent until we can believe that people can walk on water or move mountains.*
- *It is exploring understanding through archetypes, symbolism and even connections that might not make sense.*

Examples of how you could use imagination to help you pray include:

- Read a passage of scripture, and imagine you are there in the scene. While reading let your imagination 'colour in' the text. The following questions could help you do this: What do you see when you look around the setting? What are your feelings? Are you one of the characters, or an onlooker who is not mentioned in the text? What happened after the account stopped?
- Whilst praying for particular people or events, images or scenes might come to mind unbidden. This can help inform the direction of your prayers. It might also reveal useful information to help build people up and provide new perspectives. Remember to find trustworthy people who can help you reflect on and interpret your experiences.
- The 'Caim prayer' from the Celtic tradition. Sanctuary spaces around monasteries were marked by a ditch and a wall. Your imagination can help you do this, without the need for so much heavy digging! Draw a mental circle around you when you pray, visualising Gods' presence within it and clearing a space to meet. This practice most probably originated in pre-Christian culture, and the practice may be recognisable to other spiritual searchers. Candles, Incense, or sage have also been used to change the physical environment to help you shape your imaginative one.
- More generally, you could use your imagination to create a place within your mind where you go to pray. Some people have found visualising a tree that they can lean back against to be helpful. What would such a place look like for you? What is there? How does it connect?

It is possible to move things around in your imagination, and to place them in combinations that are impossible outside it. Some form of framework might help this make sense, and imaginative freestyle prayer will benefit from a grounding in formal traditional prayers. Perhaps it will also help you make new connections between things, people or experiences. Remember to leave space for God to participate in this too. Talk with others about practices you have seen to aid the use of the imagination in prayer. If anything worries you, then remember to talk it over with someone you trust.

## Worship as prayer

Awe and Love (#SensingValues, #SensingAwareness, #SensingMystery)

I understand this type of prayer as focusing on the glory and nature of God, and being transformed through entering into and remaining with God's presence. As is the case with much religious jargon, the word 'worship' is currently used almost exclusively in a religious context. Its wider use can still be seen in the names of organisations such as the "worshipful company of Blacksmiths", or in forms of address such as addressing a Magistrate or Mayor as "your worship". Unless you have actually seen a smith turn scrap metal into a work of art, or been rescued from poverty by the ruling of a magistrate, perhaps you are less likely to fully appreciate why people might consider that form of address appropriate.

Most people are more used to the secular use of the word worship when it comes to a human love relationship. Have you ever felt what it is like to have your whole body caught up in the adoration of someone? To find yourself speechless in their presence, or babbling inately because your mind is still trying to cope with the fact that they *actually* noticed you? It is this experience of coming alive when you are in the presence of someone, and being crushed if they reject you, that helps us understand the respect with which you have to treat something/ someone that you worship. It can have power over our very being, for better or worse.

Central to Christian belief is the understanding that out of all possibilities this is the one that God has chosen, and that God in the person of Jesus, has made it clear that the Creator will use this power for the better. Christian worship stems from awareness of this Divine act of Grace. The realisation that God walked among us, and that the Holy Spirit is with us makes the phrase "Good News" an understatement, and this influences the character of all our worship of God. God is bigger than this one act though, and the content of our worship should not end with our understanding of salvation, because then we may forget that we have been saved to live. Bearing this in mind, what follows is a selection of themes for worship. These themes are ones that have helped me become more in Awe of God and to understand Gods' love for the created order, which I am privileged to be a part of. These are just starting points for thought. As you pray, your mind will open to the wonder of God, and you will be able to make your own list!

## Meditations about the cross (#SensingChallenge)

Take some time to wonder what actually went on when Jesus was crucified. What does the cross mean?

For this task I suggest avoiding the intellectual exercise of researching the creeds or historical narrative in order to understand it. Instead start by assuming your received understanding. Take time to contemplate the broad

significance of, such a momentous mystery as the events of Easter and the many different nuances inspired by this process. The whole mystery is well beyond my power to communicate, but hopefully these insights, handed down through time, will help you discover and develop a breadth to your worship in prayer.

Jesus as a victorious warrior. (#SensingChallenge, #SensingOtherness)

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind  
to let the oppressed go free,”* Luke 4:18 (NRSV)

*“...Then the young hero (who was God Almighty)  
Got ready, resolute and strong in heart.  
He climbed onto the gallows-tree,  
Bold in the sight of many watching men,  
When he intended to redeem mankind. ...”*  
- Dream of the Rood<sup>8</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> century anon  
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*“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it is said,  
“When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;  
he gave gifts to his people.”  
(When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)*

Ephesians 4:7–10

The “Dream of the Rood”<sup>11</sup> comes from an era of legendary warrior heroes. It is studied by students of early English language along with other texts like that of “Beowulf”. Whilst these words are early English, the theme is developed on stone-carved crosses and jewellery throughout the British Isles and into Scandinavia throughout the Viking era. Jesus is often depicted bound to the cross, but as a heroic warrior undergoing an ordeal rather than a tortured, suffering, body. The theme the artists explore could be described as “Jesus is worthy of worship because he conquered sin”.

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<sup>8</sup> Dream of the rood, p. 163 “A choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse” Richard Hamer Faber and Faber 1970

Perhaps the idea of Jesus as “a mighty warrior who descended to hell and returned with captives” will resonate with some more than others. If you are aware of the presence of evil in the world, be thankful because Jesus has defeated it. We may continue to suffer, but this will eventually end, and the proof of it is that Jesus has beaten death. This poem was written in a culture where Christians experienced warfare and slavery. There are many other less martial examples of Gods’ glory and power being displayed throughout the scriptures, in history and in contemporary life. For the Christian however, the first Easter morning is when creation is reborn and life in all its fullness is revealed. Could this be some of what motivated Bede to record time counting back before Christ, and forwards after Christ?

Jesus as sacrifice and substitute (#SensingChallenge, #SensingValues)

*“Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice  
You became nothing, poured out to death  
Many times I’ve wondered at your gift of life  
And I’m in that place once again,  
I’m in that place once again.”*

- 20<sup>th</sup> century Matt Redman

This explores the idea that Jesus is worthy of worship because he fulfils the law; all of creation was subject to frustration, bound to decay and death, but now that Jesus has ‘paid the cost of freedom’, hope and healing take the bitterness away. As described in the book of Romans chapter 8 in a new understanding of the creation story, Jesus who is also God the creator bore the suffering of creation in one perfect sacrifice for all of time and for the whole of creation. When we suffer it is for a limited amount of time, and we can hope for the healing of all creation. God is aware of the whole of time, and this is compared to the frustration of giving birth in the hope of children. Whilst the experience of pain tends to be immediate and to grip our attention, the better able we are to contemplate our own deaths and the reality of pain, the better able we are to understand the depth of the sacrifice that Jesus made when he became our substitute. Of course, this doesn’t mean that we should seek suffering for its own sake. It does mean that when we suffer for God’s sake, our suffering can remind us of Jesus’ suffering, and help us to draw closer to God.

Jesus as a lover (#SensingMeaningfulness)

*“... The Lord replied, ‘My child, I love you and I would never leave you. During the times of trial and suffering when you see only one set of footprints in the sand, it was then that I carried you.’ ...”*

- Footprints, 20<sup>th</sup> century anon

How many superheroes are alien? In the popular imagination, even when a character is created to be the best of all that humans could be, they often become too remote to relate to. In the dream of the rood above, the cross is described as quivering and only not falling down flat in worship because it has been commanded to stand. There is more to this experience though, and Jesus can be understood as worthy of worship because of his faithfulness. His action on the cross is a symbol of God's faithfulness to us, and an encouragement to follow his example in being loving and faithful. He is *God with us*. Not only is God showing vulnerability, but God also is participating in a personal and caring relationship.

All these themes for worship overlap and compliment each other. It might be helpful to use more than one theme in a session, but some gatherings may find apparent contradictions difficult to grasp. One approach may be to spend time working through the themes on a day like Good Friday. Inspiration could be provided with a story, scripture reading or other form of art, followed by time for prayer and reflection. Each theme could lead into the next, and the whole experience would contribute to a more well-rounded experience.

[Meditations on the created world \(#SensingSpirituality\)](#)

*'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.'* Romans 1 vs 20

We can relate to God through what we see around us. We are a part of Creation and all things came into being through the Word. If, as it is written, God's invisible qualities are made visible through the created order, do we have any excuse *not* to look around us for inspiration for our prayers?

[In the countryside \(#SensingAwareness, #SensingMeaningfulness, #SensingOtherness\)](#)

Most people living in cities have become separated from the rhythm of the countryside. We still recognise the changing seasons, and perhaps some of the old festivals such as harvest. However, the vast wealth of symbolism formerly provided by a liturgical year – which was linked to the production of food and the working lives of people – has lost its significance, and so is falling from use in many places. Christians may not worship creation, but we do believe that God is revealed through creation and that just as we come from the earth, we will return to it. The church in the British Isles has gone through cycles of intimacy and divorce with nature. What is needed now is for people to learn to understand and re-appreciate the beauty of nature in their prayers. Then, harvest festivals will become inspirations for green activism, and the Cairngorms – windows looking onto the majesty of God.

Prayer in this setting recognises that we are a part of creation. Humans may have a special role, but if we do not respond to climate crises do we risk being drowned in a flood of God's tears? Can we stand by and watch from a position of privilege while others on the same planet face rising sea levels? If the politicians we elect support a global economy where forests are burned, what will the sacrifice of our prayer 'smell like'? Without being party-political, we can all plant trees as prayers. When they wave in the wind, perhaps they will pray for us.

In Industrial and Urban areas (#SensingAwareness,  
#SensingMeaningfulness,#SensingChallenge)

Similarly, as the Church and much of urban culture has become divorced from nature, many spiritual and artistic people would find it hard to worship using industrial themes. Partly this may be because industry is very man-made, and it is hard to find wonder in something that has been made by people for a utilitarian purpose. Another reason may be that in Britain we are very aware of the negative results of colonialism and the industrial revolution. Our large population centres grew up around the need to provide a workforce for types of heavy industry that are no longer viable. In the heady days of zeal for nationalistic progress, church and state were often portrayed as one and images of a heavenly city were frequently inspirations for artwork in Church buildings. The grinding down of people through industrialised warfare, deprivation and long-term unemployment mean that experiences of earthly cities can alienate people from the systems that led to and inspired such descriptions of the heavenly city of God.

Perhaps we remember things like the failures which led to the Tay bridge disaster and we are less aware of the long-lasting legacy of achievements such as the Forth Rail Bridge. Glasgow's gravity fed drinking-water supply or London's sewers, canals and then railways are ways in which a geographically-small union of nations developed in ways that have transformed the world. Many of these structures carry dedications to God, and we should be able to recognise and worship God for the amazing things which have been accomplished. Perhaps we need to be able to do this in order to hope that we can act in ways that can overcome the unforeseen global consequences of this rapid expansion. A full process of forgiveness and reconciliation involves the ability to see things in a new way - acceptance of their real significance and a desire for change. For Christians this is carried out in the context of Christfulness, and could perhaps lead to reconciliation with our global colonial past and the different roles our ancestors played in it.

Festivals and prayer (#SensingAwareness)

Boundaries and categories are important, and recognising them is an essential component of respecting, let alone the higher idea of loving. There are times when it is quite right that congregations of people should group together and express their relational identity in ways that others would not feel comfortable participating in with integrity.

Similar to how the geographical landscape can be described on a map, with physical features to help you navigate and know where you are, we could also imagine a map of ideas and culture to help understand where your mind is. Sometimes the physical map and ideological map will look similar, as factors like dialect, employment, ancestry are still influenced by physical geography. For a long time however, it has not been possible to take this for granted. People are expected to move to pursue careers and the range of options from which people can choose to explore and express their identity has expanded, even if they remain local. People whose parents and grandparents may have accepted the identity of their geographical neighbours (through choice or necessity) will often search for ways to anchor an increasingly fluid ideological map using things like DNA, pre-colonial, pre-modern spirituality, and new-folk religions. Even within traditionally culturally Christian areas, churches are no longer the default institution for expressing events like births, deaths and marriages.

Look around you, and think about the festivals and celebrations that go on in your area. People like to worship things that they believe are good, and will find a way to do this even if society's leaders and religious authorities fail to facilitate them. Some of these celebrations worship things out of proportion, or things that conflict with Christianity, but most of the time they recognise good things that Christians would attribute to Gods' goodness. Christianity was not formed in a vacuum, and festivals which we now think of as being traditionally Christian are often adapted from much older celebrations.

Awareness of this sometimes exhibits itself in a conflict narrative about who has stolen which festival from whom. There are certainly historical records of the Church persecuting indigenous beliefs and outlawing festivals. There are also those of martyrs being persecuted for their Christian beliefs. These exchanges can be emotive and heated, but would often involve much study to resolve. There are many nuances in the relationship between Saturnalia, midwinterblot, a Coca-Cola Christmas and the variety of Church celebrations that take place even in a small Scottish town. A discussion of these is of great interest to anthropologists and theologians, but in everyday conversations or online chats this discussion is more usually informed by the personal experiences of the people involved rather than the actual history. Perhaps whilst it is important not to ignore past atrocities, it is better to spend time developing a common spiritual literacy and exploring consensus about what is noble, true, and honourable.



As the clockwork model of modernity collapses and people explore diverse ways of exploring and expressing their spiritual lives, there will be more and more diverse festivals. These times and events are opportunities to explore the links between the physical world and the world of ideas. If we approach this task in prayer we can learn to find our way around. In prayer also we can find the skills to help others navigate. When you pray, ask for discernment. Then take time to understand what is going on at a festival, and focus on the good and beauty you can see in it. Learn to recognise and worship God, who is at work throughout the whole of time and space, not just at church. Allow yourself to become more optimistic and be prepared to meet God in the words of strangers.

#### Prayer as Praise (#SensingValues)

When we have learned to worship God, praise usually follows naturally. The practice of praising is a discipline, however. There is a fine line between appreciating Gods' work in the detail of life, and using the phrase "Praise the Lord" until it seems meaningless or even daft to those who see you. When praise communicates your experience of worship to those around you it can build people, and the community up. God already knows the innermost thoughts of our hearts, so shouting and other sacrifices are given for our benefit, rather than something which God demands. The other extreme is to be excessively dour and to treat praise so preciously that it takes someone a lifetime to realise that Christians are ever happy or pleased about something. We should be childlike in amazement, if not childish in our actions. Otherwise, we risk becoming hollow shells of humans, afraid to cry at a funeral or dance at a party. Some might be helped by thinking of this as developing a Christlike mind. Through examining our experiences in daily reflection, we can learn to recognise the presence of God in them and grow in confidence. Others might find talking the day through with another person, a soul friend, or trained accompanier, will be their way of finding confidence.

If worship is thought of as an attitude, then praise might be the character which that attitude exhibits in daily life. By spending time in a relationship with God, we will hopefully become increasingly known as people who offer praise when appropriate. Building people up, and recognising the good things in life - if this is how the people of God are recognised, then people will have a good reason to ask about the worship and beliefs which underpin it.

#### Prayer as Practising the Presence of God

(#SensingAwareness, #SensingMeaningfulness)

Sometimes we face a crisis. That is usually when we hit the panic button and try to become aware of the presence of God. This is of course the correct thing

to do in a crisis. What is more difficult is to maintain an awareness of God every day, seven days a week. Sometimes this is because we are so used to panic-praying that we assume that all praying should feel the same. The practice of the presence of God is a gentle form of prayer, more like breathing than hitting a panic button. There is less adrenaline, and less need for many words. What there is though, particularly after the discipline has been practiced for many years, is a sense of peace that is contagious.

The need for this mode of prayer drives the popularity of WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) and PUSH (Pray Until Something Happens) wrist bands.

{Picture}

Christianity, and in particular a prayerful relationship with God, is a whole-life experience. It suffers when it is confined to set times, places or crises. Get into the habit of remembering God when you wake up, when you brush your teeth and when you walk your dog. Just a simple act of acknowledging God quietly to yourself and asking God to be with you in whatever thing you are about to do is enough. Remember to listen. If you find that prayer is becoming an unconscious habit, this is partly a sign of success, and partly an inspiration to slow down and take more time to listen and be aware.

*“At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign of the cross.”* On The Soldiers Crown, Tertullian c 200AD<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion and encouragement

This has all been written from my experience of growing in prayer. It is just an introduction, and my hope is that it will inspire you as a reader to explore places I have not yet been. I write from the perspective of someone with faith seeking understanding. I hope that this approach will help those who share my faith find common ground with those who do not. I have focussed on practical experience of praying rather than theological reflection and encourage you, the reader, to have confidence and experiment. Take time out to evaluate your experiments of course, and exercise your good intentions tempered with kindness.

### Glossary

Introduction to technical terms used, and invitation to practice #SensingMystery to explore the nuances of the big ones.

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<sup>9</sup> The rise of the Church p.144 Norman J Bull Heinemann Educational books Ltd 1967

<b>Sensing mystery:</b>	experiences of awe, wonder and mystery about the natural world, human achievement and for some a divinity. <i>#SensingMystery</i>
<b>Sensing values:</b>	attitudes and feelings about what is really important, what really matters <i>#SensingValues</i>
<b>Sensing meaningfulness:</b>	the ability to make connections or to see potential patterns in one's life which give it meaning <i>#SensingMeaningfulness</i>
<b>Sensing a changed quality in awareness:</b>	the feeling of being 'at one' with nature, oneself and others. <i>#SensingAwareness</i>
<b>Sensing 'otherness':</b>	the sentiment that humans are more than their physical elements. <i>#SensingOtherness</i>
<b>Sensing challenge:</b>	being challenged and moved by experiences such as love, beauty, goodness, joy, compassion, injustice, evil, suffering, death. <i>#SensingChallenge</i>

Further exploration (links to online activity)

Link to Quartz page <https://www.wordsmithcrafts.co.uk/Quartz>

