

Tools for prayer

Talking heart to heart

Prayer is heart to heart dialogue; not only our words to God but God's word to us. Prayer is as much about sharing feeling as thought, and the psalms in particular give us the language and imagery to express what is deep within: our longing, fear, need, gratitude, joy or pain. Here too we can also sense the heart of God reaching out to us.

*You are a hiding-place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me
with glad cries of deliverance.*

*I will instruct you and teach you
the way you should go;
I will counsel you
with my eye upon you.*

From Psalm 32



Write your own psalm expressing the words you want to express to God from your heart. You may also sense words from God's heart to you and these too might become part of your psalm.

You may find it helpful to use some of the following headings as starting points for your psalm. Add your own words to the end of these sentences:

Lord you are...

I am...

I feel...

I don't understand why...

I long for...

I picture my life today as like...

I remember your goodness to me when...

I look to you for...

I sense you say to me...

Lord you are my...

Reflection

Being simplified under the gaze of God

*What I needed was the solitude to expand in breadth and depth
and to be simplified under the gaze of God,
more or less the same way a plant spreads out its leaves under the sun*

Thomas Merton: *Elected Silence*

When I read these words they settled with me.
In the complexity of all the needs, desires and anxieties that push and pull me
around I recognise that I too need to 'be simplified'.

I notice it is a passive verb. I am not to simplify myself; instead I am to place
myself under the gaze of God who alone has the dexterity and patience to
unravel me.

I notice too that being simplified means we become more not less.
Under the gaze of God our breadth and depth expands like the leaves of a plant
drawn into life by the sun.

A natural process of growth takes place that isn't forced or strained but is the
realisation of what has always lain hidden within.

Our being is focused rather than scattered...integrated rather than pulled apart.
We are stripped of non-essentials so that what is real and true and useful is
revealed.

Our co-operation is needed; we must sit still long enough before God for the
liberation of our true life to begin.

Being simplified will hurt but it will also heal.

God's gaze persuades us to release our tight grip on what confuses and
diminishes us, and take hold of what is unfamiliar: enduring and trustworthy love.
Placing ourselves under the gaze of God we allow the Creator to be creative.

We dwell under the gaze of God.

When we gaze we allow ourselves to be absorbed by what we see; our attention
is steady; our eyes do not lose their focus.

Does God then 'gaze' at you and me in this way?

I for one do not consider myself that interesting or significant that another would
choose to look at me so attentively

Yet we are invited to place ourselves 'under the gaze of God' - eyes that choose
to see and by that gaze, go on creating us.

God gazes at us always but it is through solitude that we turn our eyes to meet
God's. We seek the one who has always sought us. We align our lives towards
God as a sunflower turns its face towards the sun.

Looking into God's eyes, life becomes simpler,
yet deeper, richer...

Staying still to perceive movement

*Morning by morning he wakens – wakens
my ear, to listen as those who are taught*
[Isaiah 50.4]



Walking today I saw a kestrel hovering in the sky over a single point, eyes intent on the ground below, seeking out the slightest movement.

The attentiveness sometimes took some effort: the kestrel beat its wings not to travel but to remain in that one place.

At other times the moving air by itself seemed to hold it in position. But when a change in the wind began to move the kestrel away it resumed its wing beat to return to its watch.

Living in attentiveness to God's presence in all things has something in common with the kestrel's flight. It begins with a wing-beat, turning ourselves towards God and seeking his presence. We light a candle as the day begins, or say a prayer, or read words of scripture. In this way or that way we seek God who is ever in search in us.

There are moments within the day when it seems no wing-beat is needed; the moving air holds us in awareness of God-with-us.

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But in another moment our focus is lost; we are no longer in the seeing place, the hearing place. Instead we become lost in the demands we make of ourselves or others make of us, beaten about by the swirling currents of our needs and desires, without the steady gaze on God that can help make sense of these things. The beat of a wing is needed to bring us back until we can rest again on the uplifting air.

The kestrel has eyes and ears for its prey; stillness helps it be sensitive to movement.

Our steady focus helps us sense the movement of the Spirit:

- What is it Lord that I see?
- Why does that sight so touch me?
- Why when I read those words from the bible does my heart beat faster?
- Why do I feel such excitement or sadness, attraction or fear?
- What are you showing me Lord as I keep my gaze on you?
- What is the significance of what I hear and how are you inviting me to respond?
- How are you at work in my life, and how can I co-operate with you?'

We hover over the moment, avoiding the temptation to simply move on. There is something to see here: - something to learn. But to perceive it we must stay still.

*Morning by morning he wakens,
wakens my ear to listen
as those who are taught.*

An Easter Reflection: Seeds and their growth

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. [Mark 4: 26-28]

I am waiting for the weather to be a little kinder before I begin sowing seeds. I have packet upon packet of them collected from the dried seed pods of plants I grew last year: peas and beans, cornflowers and scabious, lettuce and sunflowers, cosmos and cucumber.

In themselves they are not much to look at: a small, dimpled round ball, a speck of dust so easily taken away by the wind, a bell-shaped piece of grit. To a casual observer they seem to hold little sign of life, in their greys and browns, and hard, dry coats.

And yet they hold inexpressible, irrepressible life.

Hold one of those small seeds in the palm of your hand and wonder:

How can this piece of nothingness hold within it a tender shoot, the first green leaves, a stalk that sways in the breeze, questing roots that seek out nurture from the dark earth, a flower that stretches to the sky, and even a seed head to give life and colour for a time yet to come?

Different images spring to mind:

The seed is the word God sows in you: his word about who you are and what your life is for; the first glimmering of understanding of his desire for you.

If you make my word your home you are truly my disciples; you will learn the truth, and the truth will make you free [John 8:31]

The seed is Christ, the grain of wheat that falls to the earth and dies, and so bears a rich harvest: The garden tomb is where life stirs on Easter Day. As the seed coat breaks, the stone is rolled away. Our lives awaken in Christ.

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 1 Corinthians 15: 42-43]

The seed is the hope we sow when we go where God invites us and act in response to God's call: the smallest of seeds will become a great tree where the birds of the air will find shelter.

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.' [Mark 4: 30-32]

You and I are seeds. God is drawing forth our hidden self

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. [Ephesians 3: 14-21]

Tools for Prayer

A Prayer for the Dark

Winter reminds us of how much darkness is part of our experience of life. The nights are long and light lasts a few brief hours. We tend to see darkness negatively as the absence of light. Darkness may carry with it a sense of threat or danger. We are not in control in the same way as we are when we can see our way. We make artificial lights to avoid the unknown of night. When we are in trouble, confused or in pain we may feel ourselves to be 'lost in the dark'. And yet many of us will have learnt as children to close our eyes when we pray. We let go of the stimulation of our moment by moment existence to rest in a presence that is in every moment and beyond every moment. God is in the darkness as well as in the light. Night invites a deeper trust to that presence and care that is always there. Night bids us relinquish our weary efforts to micro-manage life. We let go – not into nothingness – but into Love...hidden from us perhaps, but very real. God bids us rest.

Find a physical dark space. Turn off the lights.
You might want to light a candle but be open to the darkness surrounding it that makes this light shine so brightly and warmly.
Sit quietly, relaxing into the moment.

As worries, concerns, thoughts and fears come to mind
neither fight them, nor cling to them.
Let them come and go, passing them over into the darkness.
Rest the palms of your hands on your thighs, turned upwards and open;
that way your preoccupations can slip away from your grasp
and God can look after them for you.

You may feel you want to move away:
darkness and stillness allows inner anxieties and hurts to surface;
they can seem overwhelming.
But stay in the dark.
Just as your eyes slowly adjust to the night
so you might begin to sense the presence of a Love you can trust and rest in,
surrounding and enveloping you
clothing you with kindness..

Thoughts and words of prayer may come,
but you may also find it enough to simply rest without need for words.
There is no need here for explanation
and often words fall so short.
It is enough to 'be'.
Because the God of love is so close to you, you cannot see him.
Because divine light so dazzles you, you are in darkness.
But you are in God
And God is in you.

Reflection

A resolution for a new year.

Like many others I have often not carried through my new year resolutions. Or to be more accurate I have – but only for a day or two! I wonder if in part this has been because I have plucked them from the surface of my life rather than allowing them to arise from some deeper place within. 'I will drink less coffee through the day'; 'I will tidy up my desk at the end of each day, not allowing any clutter to accumulate'. These good and useful wishes need attending to; yet they do not reach to the core of me. Instead as I walk around the park near our home words form themselves into a prayer: 'How can I 'be' unless I draw near to you?' If my life is not grounded in God I am all over the place, I am not at home with myself and I have nothing to share. So my first 'resolution' is not about coffee or my desk. It is to turn to the one whose gaze is always turned to me; it is about a way I desire to face life, my work and my relationships. Of course that turning will need to find its practical expression day by day, and it might even mean I am more moderate in my coffee consumption and I respect my desk more. But the turning comes first...and last.

In the Epiphany season we hear echoes of this inner resolve to turn towards Christ.

The wise men from the East resolutely follow the star. [Matthew 2]

The servants at the wedding feast of Cana are told to fix their attention on Jesus: 'Do whatever he tells you.' [John 2. 5]

Two disciples of John the Baptist are drawn to ask Jesus 'Where are you staying?' and are invited to 'Come and see'. They 'remain with him that day'. [John 1. 35-39]

Simon and his brother Andrew respond to Jesus' invitation: 'Follow me'. [Mark 1.17]

Jesus chooses twelve apostles 'to be with him' [Mark 3.14]

Other steps will follow, but they have no meaning without this first and enduring one: to resolutely set oneself towards Christ, seeking his company, attending to his word, walking in his footsteps.

Give me the grace to seek you,
for you seek me.
Turn my gaze towards your face,
for you look with love upon me.
Draw me to my home in you,
for you are at home in me.

Tools for Prayer

Prayerful Knitting

By Sarah Goodwin

A Background

Many of us seem to be knitting these days. What is it about this ancient art that keeps people working through the knit 1 purl 1 repetition? Compassion and a love of knitting can combine into a prayerful ministry that reaches out to those in need of comfort and solace.

Historically many cultures and traditions use knitting as either a pastime or as a task to 'get done' before days end when creating necessary garments to be worn.

Knitting however can also be considered in a contemplative reflective and prayerful way. The repetitive movement of knitting is a way of quieting and refreshing us at the same time and can enrich and strengthen both the knitter and even perhaps the person who is being knitted for.

In American society today many churches have a 'Shawl Ministry' where either individuals or groups of knitters knit and pray into their work creating eventually a gift for someone who may need some comfort in their lives at that time.

"Knitting is the simplest and most ordinary of activities, yet somehow it mysteriously contains within itself the potential for expanding our conscious awareness"

This type of work is an old concept used by Tibetan Monks, native Americans and other cultures. It is a way of serving those less fortunate by the creation of a garment of beauty through prayer and love.

The clicking of needles helps slow our minds and provides the knitter with a sense of stillness in their sometimes chaotic lives.

By knitting in sets of three even the stitches can invoke a sense of the Trinity and the union of mind body and spirit.



Peace I leave with you,
my peace
I give to you;
Not as the world gives
Do I give to you.
Let not your hearts be troubled,
Neither let them be afraid.

John 14:27

Prayerful Knitting

How do I start?

"Experiencing your body and mind working together you may find yourself in a place where you can listen to God and may hear God"

Everyone responds differently through their acts of prayer. Find a comfortable and peaceful place to be.

Ponder the knitting wool, what it feels like. Think about the sheep it came from, the shepherd who tended them, the shearer who sheared them. Think of those who have come before, the many knitters through the ages who have also created.

Concentrate on one thing.

Perhaps begin by knitting a easy stitch (garter or stocking stitch). This will allow you to adopt a rhythm which you can pray into. For example:

Knit Lord, have mercy on us

Knit Christ, have mercy

Knit Lord have mercy

Some people find knitting whilst repeating a mantra fits their rhythm of knitting.

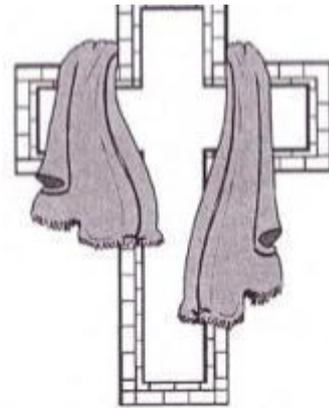
(similar to the use of prayer beads)

Maybe consider listening to music or sacred traditions such as Taize chants.

You may like to focus on a particular person you may be knitting for. Knit your prayers into your work or sing them! A favourite hymn would be a good place to start. Many blessings can be knitted into your work.

There is no hurry! Take the time to ponder, to reflect, to relax and be still.

If at any time you discover a friend or colleague shares a similar interest in knitting and prayer, then get together and share each others' thoughts and ideas. Who knows you may even start your very own shawl ministry at your church!



Further reading / information:

www.Ravelry.com You can find patterns for prayer shawls/ blankets and information on groups on this international knitting forum

Knitting into the Mystery

by Susan S. Jorgensen and Susan S. Izard
ISBN 978-8192-1967-1

The Prayer Shawl Companion

by Janet Bristow and V. A. Cole-Galo
ISBN 13 978-1-60085-003-5

Any questions please do email me:

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Tools for Prayer

Going through the motions

Sometimes people make an outward show of action without their heart being in it. They are 'going through the motions'. But before we dismiss the 'motions' in favour of the purity of the inner spirit it helps to remember that we are bodily people; physical actions can help make our spirit ready. This is certainly true when it comes to prayer. Choosing a regular place, posture, and way of beginning and ending our prayer can provide a supportive framework for the building up of our openness to God.

Place: Making a particular room, or seat, or walking route a habitual place for prayer. Of course we can pray anywhere. But through repetition the mind and spirit begins to recognise that in entering *this* place I am setting myself to pray. Your 'place' might be your kitchen table at a quiet time of the day, a bench in a park where you walk your dog, your seat on the train on the way into work, or a corner of a room in your home that you set aside as a meeting point with God.

Greeting:

Words or gestures you use to acknowledge that you have entered God's presence. This might be the lighting of a candle, the bowing before a cross, or the saying of a particular prayer or a verse from one of the psalms. For example:

To you O Lord I lift up my soul.

Psalm 25.1

Regular usage helps us move more quickly into prayer. We understand we are here for this purpose and for no other.

Posture:

A physical way we set our bodies: sitting with hands open and resting on our laps, or, if walking, a slower, measured pace that begins to settle us down.

As these physical settings become familiar, our spirit begins to work in unison, helping us be relaxed, open and attentive.



Ending and moving on:

Just as we have greeted God at the beginning of prayer, so we choose a way of closing this time, whilst remaining open to God's presence and leading as we go about our day. Again this might be a physical action, words of prayer or a combination: blowing out the candle, bowing to a cross, or words from a psalm:

*'Make me know your ways, O Lord;
Teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
For you are the God of my salvation;
For you I wait all day long*

Psalm 25:4-5

Reflection for the end of Summer – Movement and stillness

Summer gives way to autumn. Spend some time today taking in the sights, sounds and essence of this season,

As we look out on a garden, a park or a tree-lined street we are aware that we capture it in a still moment, as if in a photograph. And yet everything is in movement: the season journeys on, and what we see today will take a different form tomorrow.

As we come before God in prayer we do so within a still moment. And yet around and within us everything is moving: events are unfolding; our thoughts and feelings turning this way and that way.

And what of God?

God is still, and still moving.

Summer gives way to autumn.

The sun slips lower in the sky.

Colours are intensified in the fresh morning air.

Berries ripen on wasteland and hedgerow.

Creation is still, and still moving.

Changing seasons of the earth and of the heart.

Times of sorrow and times of joy.

Moments of clarity and moments of confusion.

Times to begin again and times to let go.

Changing seasons of the earth and of the heart.

As we contemplate the changing seasons

of the earth and of our lives,

we also touch what is still.

God is ever creative in our lives

ever alongside, ever making new.

God's stillness is not that of the stone

but of the ever-flowing stream,

loving into being all that it touches

working its way into every furrow of our experience.

Still, and still moving.

What stillness is asked of us?

To continually seek God,

whatever the season.

To go on co-operating

with the work of Love in our lives

Then our stillness becomes the movement of the Spirit;

a channel for the river of life.

Reflection – Building a Soul Shelter

I am in search of a haven, yet I must
build it for myself, stone by stone.

Everyone seeks a home, a refuge.

[Etty Hillesum]

In 1941 Etty Hillesum, a young Dutch woman of Jewish descent began keeping a diary as a way of focusing her desire to live a more centred and fruitful life. It was an accident of history that she began this spiritual search just as the Nazi occupation of Holland was taking firmer hold and life for Jews was becoming more restricted and uncertain.

We all seek meaning within a particular context. Hers happened to be the war and Nazi persecution. It concentrated her search but this is our search too: 'Who am I?' 'What is my life for?' 'Who is God and what does this mean for me?' 'How do I meet the challenges life throws at me?' 'How can I live more at depth rather than at the surface of things?'

Etty Hillesum came to realise that if she was to get anywhere she needed to build and maintain a 'soul shelter' – an inward space where she could rest in the presence of God and reflect on her experience. She adopted a variety of practices to help form and maintain this sacred space: daily meditation, the keeping of her journal, and contact with a mentor who kept her faithful to her search for an integrated and fruitful life.

Etty understood that this dwelling place of God within was the spring from which came her own capacity to live generously, without being ruled by self-absorption and fear. It was a transformational space where the most difficult of sorrows and anxieties could be received and remade, allowing what began as destructive to become creative. This shelter held the depths of who she was, for in its depths God was held, and she was held by God:

And that is how I feel, always and without cease: As if I were lying in your arms, O God, so protected and so sheltered and so steeped in eternity. As if every breath I take were filled with it, and as if my smallest acts and words had a deeper source and a deeper meaning.

What need have you and I of a soul shelter?
How will we build it and keep it?

It is a place within where, whatever is happening, we can remain at home with God.

It is also a hospitable space where others can enter and find shelter.

This is space to 'be'.

This is also space to 'become', for here we are open to God who goes on creating us. There is room for all our experience to rest, joyful and troubling, resolved and unresolved.

The shelter is a gift of God, and is also built by human hands. Our intent to be open to God is needed, as are regular practices that express that intent.

In being generous in giving God space within our daily rhythm of life we discover how generous God is in giving us room.

For Etty Hillesum meditation, reflective writing and the guidance of one she trusted helped form her soul shelter. The practices that build and maintain such space for us may not be identical, but we cannot take its presence for granted. It needs to be built 'stone by stone' and then cared for day by day.

Etty Hillesum wrote how she hoped to defend God's dwelling place inside her to the last; before anything and everything she knew this was essential. Only then was there room for other people, room for love, room to be 'Etty', room to house God.

Etty Hillesum's letters and diaries are published by Persephone Books as:
An Interrupted Life: the Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941-43.

Tools for Prayer

Making a Choice

These suggestions for ways in which we might prayerfully make a choice are adapted from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. Their foundation is the principle that 'the eye of our intention is single': that is that in every choice we seek to discern what leads us towards the 'end for which we are created': which might be summed up as a fully human life, lived generously for others through relationship with God. The first step in making a choice is always to direct ourselves towards this end. Throughout the process of discernment we seek to be open to the guidance of the Spirit in prayer.

Method 1 *This method will probably feel familiar to us as the weighing up of 'pros' and 'cons'. There are some important additions though: making the choice within the context of prayerfully seeking what God desires, and seeking to be genuinely open to be led this way or that, rather than predetermining what the answer probably is.*

- Put before your mind the choice to be made
- Keep before you the end for which you are created
- Rather than being inclined one way or another, seek the freedom to be equally willing to say 'yes' or 'no' to the options that are before you:
'I should find myself in the middle, like the pointer of a balance, in order to be ready to follow that which I perceive to be more to the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul'
- Ask God to 'be pleased to move my will and to put into my mind what I ought to do in the matter proposed'
- Consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different options before you, given you are seeking 'the end for which you are created'.
- Listen carefully to what reason says and make a decision accordingly
- Bring the choice you have made to God in prayer, asking him 'to receive and confirm it, provided it is conducive to his greater service and praise'.

Method 2 *Sometimes we become stuck in a particular way of looking at a situation. We are too close to the action to be able to find the distance to make a good choice. These suggestions are about changing our perspective, and so gaining greater freedom to discern what the good and life-giving thing to do is.*

- Imagine a person whom you have never seen or known; what would you advise this person to do if they had a similar choice to the one before you?
- Imagine you are at the point of death: what choice would you have wished to make in this matter from this perspective?
- Imagine yourself before God on the day of judgement – what choice would you have wished to make in this matter?
- What course of action do you now sense is the right one?

Both methods will take time, and talking things through with someone wise and sufficiently outside the situation not to take sides will also help.

Reflection – Noise and silence, turmoil and peace.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. [John 14:27]

He did not say; you will not be troubled, you will not be laboured, you will not be disquieted; but he said: ‘You will not be overcome.’ [Julian of Norwich]

Where can we find true silence? Isn't there always noise? And where can we find peace of heart? Isn't there always something to disturb us?

Yes.

But the nature of the quest is not to find a place where noise is entirely absent but stillness *within* the normal sounds of life.

And in the same way we find peace *amidst* challenges and disturbances – not in their absence – for there will almost always be something to concern us.

One way to welcome noise and so begin find stillness is to give it our attention rather than try and fight it. So today as I sit in my office I hear a radio playing somewhere, the mechanical whirring of a cooling fan, the photocopier, snatches of conversation. I step out of my thoughts for a while to give all my attention to these sounds, seeking to be present to them. I breathe slowly and deeply, staying with the simple act of listening. As I do so, stillness slowly begins to enter me. Or is it that I enter the stillness that is *always* there, around and within the sounds I hear? As I become present to this moment and to the texture of its soundscape, I become present to God who is here in this place with me.

But how do I begin to find peace within troubles?

I am here in the company of my anxieties and concerns. Sometimes I feel they overwhelm me. I haven't the time to do what I need to do. I remember a conversation that just happened where I didn't put across what I wanted to say. I carry with me the frustration of something I've been giving my time to that hasn't worked out as I hope.

Now I stop to hear my worries and hurts. I let them come one by one in their turn.

Rather than let them carry me away with their momentum, I let each one flow by me as if carried by a stream, giving each one space to tell its tale but then allowing it to move past me. I slowly become aware of the space between and around my worries – the stream that carries them to and from me. I am more than these things that trouble me. God is the 'more' that fills and surrounds me. I rest in this presence.

When we move from a place of stillness and peace we might again begin to be afflicted by noise and crave silence, or feel any peace within slip from us as concerns rise to the fore. But the point is that the stillness and the peace *never* leave us...We can step into their presence once more...into awareness of God who *is* our stillness and our peace.

Tools for Prayer

Lifelines

Lifeline: definition: *A rope or line used for life-saving, typically one thrown to rescue someone in water or one used by sailors to secure themselves to a boat.*

When we are tired and feel we are sinking under the waves of daily pressures we need a lifeline. My lifelines to God are short, often single line quotes from the bible, from hymns or from poetry that I have committed to my memory and come back to me when I need them. Here are some examples:

Do not be afraid, I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, you are mine. [Isaiah 43:1]

I can do all things through him who strengthens me [[Philippians 4:13]

At night there are tears but joy comes with the morning [Psalm 30.5]

Some of my lifelines remind me that I meet God in the midst of daily life and I experience his goodness in many forms:

I greet him the days I meet him,
and bless when I understand
[Gerard Manley Hopkins]

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.
[William Blake]

Each of these lifelines connects in some way with my story and experience – or rather God's story in me. They connect me back into God's generous and faithful care.

Some come back to me unbidden as I walk along, especially the lines of hymns or of psalms I have sung in the past.

What are your lifelines?

What words from the bible, from a hymn or psalm or poem have become important to you, reminding you of God's presence within your story? Ask God to help bring them to mind.



Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light for my path

Psalm 119:105

These lifelines express the Gospel of Christ's work in your life, the Creed that arises from your personal experience.

Commit these lifelines to your memory so that you carry them around with you to surface when you most need them.

You may find it helpful to take one lifeline with you into your day – to recall it and say it aloud to yourself as you enter into the business and busyness of your day. Say the lifeline quietly to yourself at different points of the day – allow it to lead you back in that moment into awareness of God's presence and care.

If you have a prayer space in your home you might want to have some lifelines visibly there as reminders. Leave space for more to be added as your story moves on and as another 'word' becomes important for you.

Tools for Prayer

Thanksgiving

*Bless the Lord O my soul
And do not forget all his benefits*

Psalm 103.2

Each day brings its gifts: –a kindness shown to us, a sight or sound that lifts our spirits, no matter how small.

Life is sometimes difficult, painful and challenging. It can at first seem there's little to give thanks for on days like these. But God chooses to be alongside us in life just as it is – in sorrow and in joy - and gratitude awakes us to this presence.

Thanksgiving reminds us that all that we have flows from God, who gives freely and gladly.

The practice of thanksgiving begins to root and establish our lives in love.

Gratitude becomes the seedbed of a generously lived life.

Towards the end of the day find a few minutes to recall the gifts you have received. It might be on your walk home from the train station after work or in the moments before you go to sleep. Here are some questions to help you remember:

- Who showed me care and consideration today?
- What did I enjoy?
- How were my senses touched by beauty?
- What did I see, hear, read or sense that gladdened my heart, even for a moment?
- What new understanding was given to me today?
- How in all these things have I met you Lord?

*Bless the Lord O my soul
And do not forget all his benefits*

Pauses

Many of us find an unbroken and regular block of time to set aside for prayer elusive. But even when life is demanding and unpredictable there are pauses, and these can become rich moments of encounter with God.

- The quiet moments when we are absorbed in a task that leaves our mind free
- The 5 minutes we take to wander around the garden and see what has come up
- The walk with the dog around the local park
- The time between pushing the 'on' button on your computer and it becoming fully functional.
- The train journey into work
- Washing the dishes and gazing out of the window
- The ten minutes we take in a lunch-break to get out of the office and away from the phone

There are daily tasks when we are naturally more at ease and self-forgetful – what are these for you? They may also be times to rest in the presence of God.

One early Christian teacher put it this way: *I will show you how I do not cease praying, simply by going on with my work. I am sitting there in God's presence. And when I put my little leaves to soak and when I start to weave a rope I say, 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love' [Psalm 51.3] Is that not a prayer?'*

'I am sitting there in God's presence'...
Prayer can be as simple as that.

Turn your heart towards God who is with you in this place.

Use words if you want to or simply 'be there'.

Turn aside from the drivenness of 'things to do' for a moment by simply being present to what is around you – What you can see, hear and sense? God is in these things.

Pause... in God's presence...

Reflection

**And so
faith, hope and love abide –
these three,
and the greatest of these
is love.**

[1 Corinthians 13: 13]

The beginning, despite the word order of Paul's sentence, is love.
The beginning is God.

Your faith journey begins with God.
It is God who creates you, and goes on drawing you into being.
It is God who in Christ the Word comes to seek you, to call you by name, to invite you into relationship.



It is the Spirit of God, gifted to you out of love, who enables you to hear this invitation and to respond.

Love comes first, and from this we learn that God gives freely, generously, unconditionally.
Our value lies in God's beholding rather than in anything we achieve.

All notions that you or I have to earn our worth to be loved by God fall away.

Love is God's name, and God's only activity. The pattern never changes.

If we begin with faith and hope we might forget that the beginning is always in God.

Our prayer, no matter how focused and attentive, doesn't make God present. God is already there.

Our good works do not earn God's favour.

God gives favour without ever considering if we deserve it or whether it is wise to give so much.

The real question is whether we will choose to align our lives with this Love that God is. Will you and I turn our lives towards Love? Will we respond when Love invites? Will our relationship with the God who loves first become the foundation of all we do and are?

The choice is faith,
the fruit is the active hope through which we begin to express the love in which is all beginning.

**And so faith, hope and love
abide – these three,
and the greatest of these is love.**

Reflection

Living Easter Day by Day

Easter Day comes. The awful desolation of Good Friday is over. We can move over decisively into joy with alleluia as our song.

Except it is often not like that. The difficult in our lives remains. We are not delivered forever from fear and doubt, even if we recognise that Christ's rising has set us free from death and made all things new. We may have had our alleluia moments in the past when Christ's presence felt tangible and hope abounded in the heart. But we are not guaranteed to feel that way when Easter Day comes. We may still be awaiting our own resurrection in an unresolved area of our life.



We can take heart that it was so for the first disciples too. We see Mary Magdalene weeping in the garden where Jesus was laid. Peter and his companions try to put out of their minds the trauma of the death of their friend by returning to their fishing. Two

companions take the long road home to Emmaus, mourning the loss of their dream. Recognition of a new reality comes in a moment – the calling of a name, an unexpected haul of fish, the familiar movement of a stranger breaking bread. The risen Jesus meets them, and meets us, at the unanticipated moment and within the dark as well as the light of our days. We greet him not so much in the removal of our troubles but as he breaks bread with us within them.

And then the moment is gone. Mary Magdala cannot hold on to Jesus and we cannot grasp this Easter Day experience or make it happen again at our will.

But also the moment is not gone; it dwells in the storehouse of our memory. We can ponder it, returning to that time when difficulty envelops us and we can no longer see our way. Hope has found a home within, and if we search deeply enough it will find us again.

There are surprises too in the account of Jesus' death. Amidst the desolation the author of John's Gospel sees water flowing from Jesus' side [John 19:34]. I think of Ezekiel's vision of a life-giving stream of water flowing from the Temple [Ezekiel 47]. Wherever the river flows, life teems; the salt water becomes fresh; the trees that grow on its bank are for the healing of the nations. This Good Friday is also Easter Day.

Perhaps we too might experience resurrection not after our difficulties and struggles are resolved but in their very midst. Because it is in their very midst that Christ is, and life-giving water is ever flowing from his side.