

PRACTICES FOR UNDISTRACTED PRAYER

“Jesus went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.”

Matthew 14.23

An Evening Reflection - reviewing the day with God

1. **Still** your body and mind and remind yourself you are drawing near to God.
2. **Acknowledge** the presence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Ask** him to lead your thoughts and search your heart.
3. **Review the day** from the time you woke up until now. Notice how you reacted and behaved in different situations. **Pray** for a growth in patience, kindness, gentleness, joy. Ask for the strength to truly forgive where people have hurt you. Pray for forgiveness where you may have hurt others.
4. **Remember the people you have met.** Pray specifically for them or simply lift their name into the light of God’s presence. He knows their needs.
5. **Worship the Lord** and give thanks for his love. Pray for a refreshing sleep. If you are prone to periods of wakefulness pray that your mind will rest in him and know his protection through the watches of the night

Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That you, with steadfast love, would keep
Your watch around us while we sleep.

From evil dreams defend our sight,
From fears and terrors of the night;
Tread underfoot our deadly foe
That we no sinful thought may know.

Extended Retreat

O Father, that we ask be done
Through Jesus Christ, your only Son;
And Holy Spirit, by whose breath
Our souls are raised to life from death.

Time of Extended solitude

Find a place where you can be alone for a portion of the day. There are retreat centres locally which you can use. Occasionally, I have enjoyed a number of different places within a small area between which I could walk between at various points. Churches in the centre of Oxford that are open for private prayer for example.

Find the time.

If you have children perhaps arrange with a friend / spouse to do a swap. One cares for children or other responsibilities whilst the other takes some time out with God.

If you are retired you might think that it is easier to find the time. My guess is that it is just as difficult and will require planning and proactivity to take significant time out with God.

If you struggle to find time think about just one day a year to spend time with God in this way and set priorities for the year ahead. Perhaps ask God for one verse or idea that will sustain you throughout the year.

Structure your time. I have just included activities that can be stretched or reduced depending on the time available. It is a good idea, however, to write down roughly how long each element will take and then try to stick to it.

Take a walk. Exercise at the beginning of the day and a chance to still the heart and move away from your normal life routine.. Make sure you have switched off notifications, better still, leave the phone at home. We did survive without them once.

Say **Morning / Midday / Evening Prayer**. I find it helpful to use liturgy at regular times throughout the day or to bookend the day. The Church of England has an app for these services. Use the time of intercession to pray for people you are concerned for.

Take time to **Read and reflect on scripture**. Read a complete NT letter or a big chunk other portions of scripture. It is one of the few opportunities to get the big context and notice things you wouldn't otherwise notice. Be open to what God may want to be saying to you through what you read. Or just read. Perhaps take a large portion of a gospel and notice the kind of life that Jesus leads; the way he interacts with people, the things he teaches, the emotions he displays, how he responds to different situations. Some aspects of Jesus' life are linked to his unique role as Messiah but this shouldn't distract us from becoming 'imitators of Christ'. He related to his Father in heaven the same way we do for he was fully human.

Record your responses to what God might be saying to you, or thoughts that you have found helpful. You might write a poem or prose, others find it helpful to write journal entries. You could use art to process your thoughts. At the end of the time writing a letter to God may be a helpful way of addressing various things you have touched on during the day.

Eat, drink and exercise at various points during your time.

Perhaps use these times to notice things you rarely have the opportunity to notice when experiencing the pressures of everyday routine.

Nap. Sometimes this may be the most refreshing part of your day! Don't feel guilty or think this is a waste of time. Falling asleep in prayer or bible reading is a wonderful thing! You may want to plan a time to catch up on sleep during the day, particularly after lunch.

There are plenty of other ways and activities that people find useful in times of retreat. Do get in touch with ideas as in both St Peters and St Leonards there are very experienced in taking retreat time. Some go away for a weekend together and mix times of solitude and times of interaction. This is particularly helpful if solitude does not come naturally to you as it does for others. Sometimes its helpful to have others around to process what God may be saying.