



THE SEVEN CIRCLES OF PRAYER

1. Silence. We are constantly surrounded by noise and activity. The first circle expresses our need for silence. In silence, we can more easily focus our minds on God and hear Him speak to us.
2. Space. The need to give time to prayer; this means finding a place where I can pray and be alone with God.
3. Seeing. Prayer enables us to see things that we might have missed before. We see things about ourself and about other people. Things are put in better perspective and we are made more aware of the needs of others.
4. Suffering. Once our relationship with God has deepened more is required of us and our journey brings us to a darker place. Most suffering is hidden, lonely, silent. We are brought to share in the suffering of others.
5. Touching. Prayer is making contact with God; it is his touch. We must allow ourselves to be touched by Him, so that we in turn can touch others.
6. Listening. By ourselves there is so little we can learn about God but he has made himself known to us in the Word of God, and so we must read the Scriptures and listen in prayer.
7. Face to face. Finally, in the Sacraments we can meet God “face to face” and in the Eucharist all seven circles of prayer come together.



PRAYER



An old man said: Constant prayer quickly straightens out our thoughts.

*As he was dying, Abba Benjamin taught his sons this:
“Do this, and you’ll be saved: Rejoice always, pray
Constantly and in all circumstances, give thanks.”*

PRAYER: HOW TO START?

Let's be practical! If we say, "Oh, I'll pray some time during the day", the chances are we won't. We are creatures of habit and routine. So first step is: **Chose a time and stick to it.** It might be that it's always noisy in your house and that the only time you can get to yourself is if you get up a bit earlier in the morning. Maybe you find prayer easier at night. Then before you start, decide how long you will spend in prayer. Begin with at least ten minutes and, even if your mind is wandering, don't leave until that ten minutes is up. We can become very critical of our own prayer, yet just offering up that time is in itself a prayer: - let God be the judge of its value.

This is a very important start. We have chosen some time in every day in which we say to God: "This time is just for you". We can all pray when we are working, washing up etc and that is good. However, when someone stops everything just to talk to me, it makes me feel important. When we stop everything just to talk to God, it shows that he is important in our lives. So remember, this is the biggest step, some time in prayer each day, then we can build on this.

Where to pray?

It is not necessary that this time should be spent in Church. It might not be possible if your Church is locked. Also, it is a good thing to make our own homes into places of prayer; God is there too!

The next point is again practical – what position should we be in? The answer is whatever position we can most easily concentrate. This excludes lying down in bed, where the prayers can so easily turn into snores. This basically leaves us either sitting or kneeling. Just a tip: it's easier to concentrate if you keep a straight back. You might have noticed that when the great mystics/holy men and women of different religions sit cross-legged on the floor their backs are always erect. Slouching on the settee makes it much more difficult. **Position is important.**

Where To Begin?

There are many definitions of prayer. Essentially, it is the chief way of getting to know and love God. It is different for each person, because prayer is always personal.

In human relationships, if you see someone in the street or at a party, and you feel – "I'd like to know him/her, the first thing is somehow to say "Hello"; after

that, conversation begins, however haltingly. Prayer is much the same. You must begin saying "Hello" to God. How? Abbot Chapman, a great Benedictine spiritual guide said: "Pray as you can, not as you can't." So begin your prayer in any way you can – with a prayer you already know, or one you make up. It could be "Help, tell me if you are there!"

Whatever happens (or doesn't happen) don't be discouraged. Even the Saints did not find prayer easy and went through difficult patches. They were rewarded for their persistence, and so will we be rewarded.

Different Ways



There are, of course, many different ways of praying. You may find it helpful to have some soft music (maybe not Meatloaf!) or a candle in a dimly lit room or you might like to sing a hymn yourself. There are other things which suit some but not others, which can create an atmosphere/mood in which prayer becomes easier.

At the beginning of any relationship, some of us are inclined to talk a lot. This can happen in prayer and as time goes on you may find yourself saying less. This is good because many words are not necessary with God. He already knows. One line might be enough, repeated over and over: "Lord Jesus have mercy on me a sinner. Lord Jesus, have" In time, we may feel comfortable just spending time praying very simply like this.

Another good aid to prayer is the scriptures. This involves reading a short passage of scripture and then thanking and praising God for what he has done. This helps to concentrate our minds which can so easily be distracted.

Traditional Prayer

Nor must we forget those prayers that have stood the test of time. Perhaps high on this list should come the Rosary. For centuries the Rosary has been a sort of "mantra" – a prayer-chant enabling those saying it to meditate on certain parts of the life of Christ. It is also a great way of praying while we work or travel.

