

pilgrum

CHURCH & KINGDOM
A COURSE FOR THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY



Church Publishing
NEW YORK

SESSION ONE:
PRAYING THROUGH LIFE

pilgrim

In this session we look at the importance of prayer, particularly daily prayer as foundational for the Christian life.

Opening Prayers

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,

The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

LUKE 1:46-55

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Loving God,
shine the light of your gospel
in and through my life each day;
help me to live as a disciple of Christ,
an ambassador for peace,
and a sign of your loving presence in the world.
Amen.

Conversation

Of the different names that the Bible gives to describe following Jesus—follower, disciple, apostle, Christian—which one makes most sense to you? What ingredients make up a good Christian life?

Reflecting on Scripture

Reading

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.

²He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.

⁴Happy are those who make the LORD their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods.

⁵You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted.

⁶Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

⁷Then I said, “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

⁸I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

PSALM 40:1-8

Explanatory note

The word “happy” used in this passage is translated sometimes as “blessed.” Blessed has a much richer meaning than just “happy” and suggests that our joy will come from being blessed by God.

“Sacrifice” refers to the primary form of Old Testament worship, which involved bringing animals to the Temple to offer to God. Burnt offerings (or holocausts) and sin offerings were different aspects of this kind of worship. Even then, however, people recognized that sacrifice was not entirely what God wanted—delighting in God’s word was far more important.

- Read the passage through once.
- Keep a few moments’ silence.
- Read the passage a second time with different voices.
- Invite everyone to say aloud a word or phrase that strikes them.
- Read the passage a third time.
- Share together what this word or phrase might mean and what questions it raises.

Reflection

STEPHEN COTTRELL

A Monday morning faith

What the Church does on Monday morning is just as important as what the Church does on Sunday morning. On Sunday morning it is obvious we are the Church. We are gathered together to worship God and to enjoy community together. A disciplined commitment to this aspect of our Christian life is vital. We should not leave it to chance or whim.

But on Monday morning we are still the Church. Now we are dispersed to our homes, our neighborhoods, our places of work and leisure. It is here that we are called to be the presence of Jesus, ministering in and for his world today. The Church isn’t the building we gather in. The Church is the people of God. The Bible even says we are the body of Christ, each with a part to play in God’s ministry and mission. Therefore we also need some sort of disciplined commitment to what it means to live as a Christian in today’s world. This will affect our family life and all our relationships. It will affect our priorities and how we use our available resources of time, talents, and money. It will change

The Church isn’t the building we gather in.

and shape our attitude to work and leisure, and also to the big issues of justice and peace that affect our world. You can't be a Christian for part of your life. Christian faith cannot exist in a compartment. It is either about the whole of life or it is not really about life at all.

To be sure, it takes a lifetime to allow God to so reveal God's presence within us that the whole of our life is lived to God's praise and glory and for the building of the kingdom. But by happy coincidence, a lifetime is precisely what each of us has been given. The aim of the Christian life is to live this lifetime as a member of God's Church—that is, the community of men and women centered around Jesus and being his presence in the world—and living and witnessing for the values and aspirations of God's kingdom as we have been shown them by Jesus, particularly in his teaching on the kingdom in the Beatitudes that is explored in another *Pilgrim* module.

In short

What we do on Monday morning is as important as what we do on Sunday morning. How we live as Christians affects the whole of our lives.

For discussion

- How does your church on Sunday help and equip you for your Christian life on Monday? What more could be done?
- What have you found the hardest part of living the Christian life Monday to Friday?

Discipline and desire

At the heart of this living out of the Christian vocation each day is prayer. There are many different ways of praying, and this is also explored in another *Pilgrim* module, but prayer is essential and foundational for every aspect of the Christian life. Just as a flower opens its petals to the sun on a new day, so the Christian opens herself to God in prayer. Just as the flower receives energy from the sun's heat, so the Christian is sustained and nourished by God.

We therefore need to pray each day. Just as we would not last long if we stopped eating, so the Christian life cannot be sustained for long without praying. When we pray we are in communion with God. And the art of joyful, Christian living is to find that way of praying that is right for us—which may change as we change and develop—and then weave the disciplines of prayer into daily life. For some this will mean time set aside for prayer. For others, rather than carving out a special time, the rhythms and routines of an existing daily schedule will present natural opportunities of prayer.

We need to pray each day.

So pray as you walk the dog, wait on the platform for the train, or as you take your morning shower. For some, prayer will be silent and watchful. For others, it will be conversational. For others, it will be prayers from the Book of Common Prayer or books of well-loved prayers. It should always be rooted in the meditation of Scripture, and we hope the way we have reflected on the Bible at the beginning of each *Pilgrim* session will have already helped you to pray this way. And if you are absolutely stuck and don't know where to start, say grace before meals. This simple thanksgiving for God's provision will begin to weave prayer into daily life.

But all this does need discipline. There will be times when we have a great desire for God and a great desire for prayer. But there will also be dark and barren times when God feels absent. It is the discipline of daily prayer that will sustain us through a lifetime of Christian living. Like the psalmist, we will be able to sing God's praises even in the midst of trouble. This putting together of a discipline about our spiritual life and other aspects of our Christian vocation is sometimes called a rule of life. In this module we are encouraged to think what this might look like for us.

In short

Living out our daily lives as Christians involves setting aside time to spend in God's presence through prayer.

For discussion

- What ways of praying work best for you?
- How has your prayer changed and developed as you have taken part in the *Pilgrim* course?
- What elements do you think should be included in a rule of life, and how would a daily discipline about some of these things help you in your Christian vocation?

Journeying On

During this next week, think about your daily pattern of prayer and Bible reading. Make a note of when you pray and what works for you. Try out different things. Be ready to report back next time.

Concluding Prayers

Jesus, Lord of time,
hold us in your eternity.

Jesus, image of God,
travel with us the life of faith.

Jesus, friend of sinners,
heal the brokenness of our world.

Jesus, Lord of tomorrow,
draw us into your future.

**God of our pilgrimage,
you have led us to the living water:
refresh and sustain us
as we go forward on our journey,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Wisdom for the Journey

Loud people end up shouting noisily at God.

CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE (C. 200–258)

It was not enough for God to make his Son our guide to the way; he made him the way itself that we might travel with him as leader, and by him as the way.

AUGUSTINE (354–430)

All things appear yellow to someone suffering from jaundice. Rash judgement is a spiritual jaundice which makes everything appear evil.

FRANCIS DE SALES (1567–1622)

I have come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. It is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. You must completely abandon any attempt to make something of yourself and instead throw yourself completely into the arms of God.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (1906–45)

Jesus's parables make it clear that life in the kingdom is the normal life that is open to humanity where men and women are found in Jesus's true relation to God—the Abba-relationship.

JOHN V. TAYLOR (1914–2001)

Detachment from things does not mean setting up a contradiction between “things” and “God” as if God were another “thing” and as if his creatures were his rivals. We do not detach ourselves from things in order to attach ourselves to God, but rather we become detached *from ourselves* in order to see and use all things in and for God.

THOMAS MERTON (1915–68)

There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried.

ÓSCAR ROMERO (1917–1980)