

A photograph of a coastal scene at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue, with some clouds. The water is dark blue with white foam from the waves. In the foreground, there are rocks covered in green moss. The text "Soup+Story 2020" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font, and "Lenten Prayer Books" is written in a smaller, white, cursive font below it.

Soup+Story 2020

Lenten Prayer Books

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but a doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

—Mary Oliver

This Lenten season, we invite you to explore different forms of prayer. We have put together this booklet in hopes that it will guide you and your Soup + Story group as you attempt to get closer to the mystery of Easter.

This booklet is divided up by weeks, with each week offering a different form of prayer. In addition to the forms of prayer, we offer some readings and biographical information to inspire further reflection, study, and practice.

But first, to guide the entirety of this booklet, we start with Simone Weil:

“Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposed faith and love. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer. If we turn our mind towards the good, it is impossible that little by little the whole soul will not be attracted thereto in spite of itself.”

Week 1: Attention and Deep Listening

“And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour?’” —Matthew 26:40

Jenny Odell

“OK, what in this scene have I not noticed before?”



Jenny Odell is an Oakland-based artist and author. Of her own work she says it, “generally involves acts of close observation, whether it’s birdwatching, collecting screen shots, or trying to parse bizarre forms of e-commerce.[...] I am compelled by the ways in which attention (or lack thereof) leads to consequential shifts in perception at the level of the everyday.”ⁱⁱ She currently serves as Visiting and Adjunct Faculty at Stanford in their Department of Art & Art History, and in 2019 came out with a *New York Times* Bestseller, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*.

Practice This Week: Deep Listening

In Jenny Odell's book *How To Do Nothing*, she describes composer Pauline Oliveros' concept of "Deep Listening" as a form of paying attention: "Oliveros defines Deep Listening as 'listening in every possible way to every thing possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, of one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds.' She distinguished between listening and hearing: 'To hear is the physical means that enables perception. To listen is to give *attention* to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically.'"

For Jenny Odell, birdwatching is a form of Deep Listening: "...observing birds requires you quite literally do nothing. It's sort of the opposite of looking something up online. You can't really look for birds. You can't make a bird come out and identify itself to you. All you can do is walk and wait until you hear something, and then stand motionless under a tree trying to use your animal senses to figure out where and what it is. In my experience, time kind of stops [...] What amazed me about birdwatching was the way it changed the granularity of my perception, which was pretty 'low res' to begin with. At first, I just noticed birdsong more. Of course, it had been there all along, but now that I was paying attention to it, I realized that it was almost everywhere, all day, all the time."

Consider the difference between hearing and deep listening as described by Odell. Then, taken 5-10 minutes of your day (or more as the week goes on!) to practice this Deep Listening. Here are some suggestions of places to start: on your commute, on your lunch break, while having morning coffee, listening to your kids getting ready for school, and of course, while birdwatching.

"Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears."

—Pauline Oliveros

Week 2: The Examen

“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” —Matthew 6:9-13

St. Ignatius of Loyola

“All the things in this world are gifts of God, created for us, to be the means by which we can come to know him better, love him more surely, and serve him more faithfully. As a result, we ought to appreciate and use these gifts of God insofar as they help us toward our goal of loving service and union with God.

But insofar as any created things hinder our progress toward our goal, we ought to let them go.”



Ignatius of Loyola was a 16th century Spanish priest, theologian, and mystic. His early life was marked by desire for military exercises and fame, however, after getting hit in the leg with a cannonball while serving in the Spanish military, he was confined to bed to heal. There, in the hospital, with only religious books around, he discovered stories about Jesus and the saints. His conversion took many years, but slowly, he devoted his whole being to following Christ.

After leaving the hospital, he first walked to the northern part of Spain, called Catalonia, where he gave up his sword and military desires of fame, and instead dressed in sack clothes, became a beggar, and lived for some months in a cave where he is said to have prayed for seven hours a day. During this time he developed the basis of his Spiritual Exercises.

The Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices that Ignatius developed to help people deepen their relationship with God. The Exercises are “divided into four thematic ‘weeks’ of variable length, . . . and designed to be carried out over a period of 28 to 30 days. They were composed with the intention of helping participants in religious retreats to discern the will of God in their lives, leading to a personal commitment to follow Jesus whatever the cost.”ⁱⁱⁱ While these Exercises were made for a month-long retreat, we are going to use an adapted version to be used in this coming week.

Practice This Week: The Examen

The examen is a form of prayer found in the Spiritual Exercises designed to help people find God's presence in the details of their lives. Ignatius of Loyola believed emphatically in the transformative power of this prayer, and he used to say that even if Jesuits neglected all other forms of prayer, they should not neglect this one. There are many versions of the examen that exist today, and all of them incorporate the following steps:

Get in a comfortable position. Let your muscles relax and your mind quiet down. Take a few deep breaths and ask God to make God's presence known around and in you. Dwell here for some moments. Feel this presence and soak it in.

Gratitude: *Ask God to reveal all the gifts of the day.* Obvious things would include any good news, a tender moment with a spouse, finishing an important project at work. But also less-obvious things: the surprising sight of sunlight on the pavement in the middle of a bleak midwinter's day, the taste of a ham-and-cheese sandwich you had for lunch, satisfaction at the end of a tiring day spent caring for your children. For Ignatius many things—no matter how seemingly inconsequential—are occasions for gratitude. Recall these moments of gratitude for your day and really slow down and savor them.

Ask for Grace: *Ask God to be the leader of this prayer time,* rather than brooding or obsessing over your own sense of how your day went. Pray for the grace to see what God would like to reveal to you in this time of prayer.

Review the Day: *Going hour by hour, review your day.* "Think of it as a movie playing in your head," writes James Martin, S.J., in *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*. "Push the play button and run through your day, from start to finish, from your rising in the morning to preparing to go to bed at night. Notice what made you happy, what made you stressed, what confused you, what helped you be more loving. Recall everything: sights, sounds, feelings, tastes, textures, conversations. Thoughts, words, and deeds, as Ignatius says. Each moment offers a window to where God has been in your day."

Ask for God's Forgiveness: Continue to thank God for the gift you find in your day. Pause at any of the difficult moments of the day. Pay attention to any missed opportunities, when you could have acted in a certain way but didn't. *When you find moments in which you were not the person you are called to be, ask for God's forgiveness.* Try to sense God's healing mercy washing over you.

Look Towards Tomorrow: *Ask God to show you, concretely, how God wants you to respond or what God wants you to do tomorrow.* Ask God what kind of person God is calling you to be tomorrow, or where God is asking you to place more attention and care in your life.

Closing: Close with the Lord's Prayer or a gesture of reverence (a bow, the sign of the cross, etc.)

—Adapted from *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spiritual Guide to Everyday Life* by James Martin and the *Reimagining the Examen* App.

Week 3: A Collect

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”—Philippians 4:6

Anne Lamott

“My belief is that when you’re telling the truth, you’re close to God. If you say to God, ‘I am exhausted and depressed beyond words, and I don’t like You at all right now, and I recoil from most people who believe in You,’ that might be the most honest thing you’ve ever said. If you told me you had said to God, ‘it is all hopeless, and I don’t have a clue if You exist, but I could use a hand,’ it would almost bring tears to my eyes, tears of pride in you, for the courage it takes to get real-really real. It would make me want to sit next to you at the dinner table.

So prayer is our sometimes real selves trying to communicate with the Real, the Truth, with the Light. It is us reaching out to be heard, hoping to be found by a light and warmth in the world, instead of darkness and cold.”

“If I were going to begin practicing the presence of God for the first time today, it would help to begin by admitting the three most terrible truths of our existence: that we are so ruined, and so loved, and in charge of so little.”^v



Anne Lamott is a writer and a Christian living in our very own bay area. She is known for her candor and her largely autobiographical novels. She came to follow Jesus after years of exploring God through drugs and relationships. After a dark night of the soul—triggered by alcoholism, suicidal thoughts, and an abortion in her early 30s—she had a mystical experience with Jesus (wherein she likened Jesus to a little cat following her around, wanting to be picked up), which ultimately led to her conversion to Christianity (at which point she said to the “cat” who had been following her “F*ck it: I quit...You can come in”).

Practice This Week: Pray Your Own Collect

According to Lamott in her book *Help, Thanks, Wow* she says prayer is...“communication from one’s heart to God. Or if that is too triggering or ludicrous a concept for you, to the Good, the force that is beyond our comprehension but that in our *pain* or *supplication* or *relief* we don’t need to define or have proof of or any established contact with.” (emphasis mine)

And so, notice when you feel drawn outside of yourself—when you feel pain, the need to ask for help beyond yourself, or a feeling of relief—then stop what you’re doing and take a moment to compose a collection of your thoughts, feelings, noticings, and desires. Let it be a response to your moment, or, set aside a time at the beginning, middle, or end of your day when you will stop to collect yourself and your thoughts, feelings, noticings, and desires. Offer those in writing or in audible words to God.

Week 4: Centering Prayer

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. —Matthew 6:6

Richard Rohr

“Prayer is sitting in the silence until it silences us, choosing gratitude until we are grateful, and praising God until we ourselves are an act of praise.”^v

“This method [Centering Prayer] of prayer is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Him.”^{vi}



Richard Rohr is Franciscan friar, Catholic priest, and spiritual writer. He is one of the living teachers on Centering Prayer, having inherited the practice from three Trappist monks: Thomas Keating, William Meninger, and Basil Pennington who developed Centering Prayer (as we know it) in the 1970s. The monks claim that the practice is borrowed and/or adapted from early Christianity—“Desert Mothers and Fathers, Pseudo-Dionysius, early Christian monasticism, some early Franciscans like St. Bonaventure, the unknown author of the *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and the Carmelites (Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection, SS. John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila).”

“Centering Prayer is one good way to draw us into the silence that surrounds and holds us, but of which we are too often unaware. It helps us sink into the wordless reality of who God is and who we ourselves are.”^{vii}

Practice This Week: Centering Prayer

Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Sit with your back straight. You can sit on a cushion or on a chair. Set a timer, if you have one, for ten minutes. Allow your body to relax. Begin to notice your breath flowing in and out at its natural speed.

Choose a word of one or two syllables as the symbol of your intention to be open to God's presence. Choose any word with which you are comfortable to remind you to be present to God. Examples of a word: Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Holy, Glory, God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen, Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Rest, Let Go. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, silently begin to repeat the sacred word, which points you gently towards God's presence. When you are ready, you can let go of the word and simply rest in God.

When you notice that you have become engaged with your thoughts, gently disengage your thoughts and turn towards God's presence, returning to your word if necessary.

At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. This is an important transition time for bringing the prayer into daily life. If you would like, you can simply rest in silence, dedicate the period of prayer to a person or concern, silently say a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer, or visualize yourself in your daily life as a way of transitioning from the prayer into life.

As long as your intention is to be with God and let God act upon you, you can't do the prayer wrong. Let go of expectations for the time of prayer and don't worry about whether the period of prayer is "good" or "bad."^{viii}

SOURCES

ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/sep/27/jenny-odell-on-why-we-need-to-learn-to-do-nothing-its-a-reminder-that-youre-alive>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.jennyodell.com/about-news.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_Exercises_of_Ignatius_of_Loyola

^{iv} All quotes here taken from Lamott's book *Help, Thanks Wow*

^v <https://cac.org/heaven-weekly-summary-2017-12-23/>

^{vi} <https://cac.org/heaven-weekly-summary-2017-12-23/>

^{vii} Adapted from *A Spring Within Us: A Book of Daily Meditations* (published by CAC Publishing, 2016)

^{viii} Adapted from <https://www.lindsayboyer.com/centering-prayer>