



## **All is Calm Practices Guide**

### **Week Two:**

Text: Malachi 3:1-4

Practice: Prayer

*“But here is the great and inescapable truth – taught in Scripture, modeled by Christ, and advocated without exception by all the heroes of our faith: You cannot grow in prayer without some measure of effort and discomfort, self-discipline and self-denial. Just as you cannot get physically fit without regular exercise and a healthy diet, so your spiritual growth will be determined, to a very significant extent, by the prayer exercises you choose (or do not choose) to establish and sustain.”*

-Pete Greig, *How to Pray*

This month, Kamloops Alliance is intentionally providing a different environment in our weekend services. We recognize that our world, and often our church, can be busy and frenetic.

How can we experience the peace, tranquility, and calm of Jesus in a hurried, burdened, and chaotic season like Christmas?

Considering this, we are entitling our Advent series *All is Calm*. This series focuses on the Old Testament writers and their whispers and longings for a new and better world, ushered in by the coming Messiah.

*Advent* is a word steeped in church history that simply means, “coming” or “arrival”. Regarding Christmas, Advent is the celebration and arrival of Jesus Christ, the one in whom the Old Testament writers longed for.

As Christians today, we look back knowing what the Old Testament writers prophesied of. We experience what they were uncertain of. We know what they did not: Jesus Christ was the answer to their hopes and longings.

Throughout this month, we want to focus on these Old Testament writings, and through their insight, attach a Christian practice (or discipline) we can employ as a congregation. In these practices, we encounter Jesus, who brings the peace and calm we desire throughout this month.

Last week we looked at the practice of Scripture reading and study, and this week we introduce you to the practice of prayer. While this guide is just a brief introduction to this practice that has guided Christians for millennia, we want to offer this as another growth opportunity.

This guide will introduce prayer and lead you through two exercises that give shape and form to your prayer time.

### **The Practice of Prayer**

To pray is to be human. It is instinctual to reach out to something other than us. Pete Greig notes:

I am based in England, considered to be one of the more secular nations in Western Europe, but even here, one quarter of those who describe themselves as “non-religious” admit that they “take part in some spiritual activity each month, typically prayer.”<sup>1</sup>

As Christians we pray to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Our prayers take on a Trinitarian shape. We are welcomed into the relationship of the Trinity through prayer. “Prayer is a word that describes a relationship,” as Adele Calhoun rightly observes.<sup>2</sup>

So how does a relationship work? It works through communication. Often, we conflate and confuse prayer. We make it too complex and therefore find it intimidating to do it. We hear others pray and wish we sounded more articulate, or more put together. Or perhaps based on negative visions of God through previous church experience or tradition, we are hesitant to reach out in prayer. Or maybe you are new to Christianity, and you have no idea where to start, and so you feel stuck.

The invitation and offering to pray stands for us, and one that we must engage in as we desire closeness with God. The Scriptures implore us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). This can be seen as daunting, but rather it is simply an invitation to relationship with God.

The hope is that through this devotional, and throughout this week, we will look at prayer through the lens of relationship. Think of prayer as conversing with God, in an unending conversation.

When we see prayer as performance, we shrink back. But when we view it through the lens of relationship, we engage with authenticity and regularity.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Letters to Malcolm* reassures our frail attempts at prayer when he says:

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<sup>1</sup> Pete Greig, *How to Pray: A simple guide for Normal People* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2019), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 231.

“What seem our worst prayers may really be, in God’s eyes, our best. Those, I mean, which are least supported by devotional feeling ... These, perhaps ... come from a deeper level than feeling ... God sometimes seems to speak to us most intimately when he catches us, as it were, off our guard.”

The encouragement is that this week, you will set aside both formal times of prayer, where you are able to talk and listen, as well as “pray without ceasing” as you go about your day.

This week we will include two different prayer practices. The first one is a devotional working through the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus has given us this outline to pray, which has guided the church in her corporate prayer life for millennia. It is our hope that this will help you speak to God in prayer, and that this prayer will shape your prayer life.

The second prayer practice is a guide to listening prayer. Instead of experiencing prayer just as a monologue, this practice will help you set aside time to hear God’s voice.

### **Practicing Prayer – The Lord’s Prayer**

There was curiosity among the disciples about how to pray. They asked Jesus, and he responded with the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew chapter six. Before we go there, posture yourself in a quiet area, with your Bible open, and a notepad or journal next to you. Allot 20 minutes to do this exercise.

Follow this devotional, moving in and out of prayer, and opening space for stillness and quiet to hear from the Word of God, and the Spirit of God.

1. Start with 3 minutes of silence before God. This may feel awkward and counterproductive, but it is this time of silence, where we try to be still before God, recognizing our scattered mind, that prepares us to meet with Him.
2. With your Bible open to Matthew 6:9-13, read the prayer through slowly three times. Notice the shape of the prayer, the words that Jesus uses, and the different directions it takes.
3. Let’s work through the prayer with its two movements:
  - a. The first movement is about God, containing three petitions. This first movement forces us out of our own myopic experience and gets us focused on the Almighty God. Choose one or two of these petitions and respond (through prayer or writing out a response in your journal) to the prompting question:
    - i. Petition 1: *Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name...*
      - What does it mean for God to be your “Father”?
      - How can you hallow, or revere His name today?
    - ii. Petition 2: *Your kingdom come...*
      - What does it look like for God’s kingdom to arrive in your life today?
    - iii. Petition 3: *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*
      - Christmas is a dark time for many people. How can you be a light and kingdom bringer to someone you know today?

- b. The second movement is about us, also containing three petitions. The Lord's prayer is immensely practical as it addresses the human experience. Choose one or two of these petitions and respond (through prayer or writing out a response in your journal) to the prompting question:
  - i. Petition 1: *Give us today our daily bread...*
    - What are your needs today, both physical, relational, and spiritual? How can you rely on God for these?
  - ii. Petition 2: *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors....*
    - Where have you recently experienced God's forgiveness in your life? How can you extend this grace to others today?
  - iii. Petition 3: *And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one...*
    - What are some potential areas of temptation that you may face today? How can you be active in resisting and repelling them?
4. To conclude, as you sit with the Lord's Prayer, what is the one or two main themes to take away from this time with God?

### **Practicing Prayer - Listening Prayer<sup>3</sup>**

Most of us picture prayer sort of like a monologue: We talk to God, sharing our heartfelt thanks and offering up our petitions and requests. But prayer is more like a dialogue, where we speak with God and the Lord speaks to us.

Listening prayer centers around a clear request for God's guidance. In making our request, we give God's guidance authority over the other voices we hear throughout our daily lives. Then we hit the pause button. We wait on God in a time of silence, giving the Lord opportunity to speak to us. We focus our time of prayer on intentional, purposeful listening and let God do the talking.

It is important to note that this practice is heavily distinguished from any type of New Age spirituality. An author compiled this helpful chart to distinguish a Christian practice of listening prayer, with any type of New Age practice. This is vital to understand the difference:

	<b>Historical Christianity</b>	<b>New Age Spirituality</b>
<b>Authority</b>	The Triune God and The Church	Individual Practitioner
<b>Spirituality</b>	Defined through the Scriptures that we follow	We define it for ourselves
<b>Object of Worship</b>	God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit	Our own experience or enlightenment

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<sup>3</sup> This practice has been heavily shaped, although redacted, and edited in places, from Jim Harrison and his article *Spiritual Practice – Listening Prayer*. You can see the original article here: <https://www.faithward.org/listening-prayer-hear-god/>

<b>Path To God</b>	One way – To the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit	Unlimited
<b>Truth</b>	Knowable and Constant, discovered outside of ourselves in the Scriptures and through the Holy Spirit	Constantly changing, growing and adapting
<b>Voice</b>	The Holy Spirit	Our own internal voice

It is clear to see that this practice is different from any type of eastern, pantheistic practice. Christians have been practicing listening prayer for centuries, as we have been guided by the Holy Spirit.

Listening prayer can be an enormous gift as we search for God's best and wisdom in our lives. We can also see this practice modelled and given to us through Scriptural witness.

### **What the Bible says about listening to God in prayer**

#### **God is the source of all wisdom**

The Book of James invites us to make a request to God for the wisdom we need. "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5, NIV). God wants us to ask for his wisdom and will generously give it to us.

In Psalm 100, the psalmist reminds us that the Lord himself is our shepherd and that we are his people, the sheep of his pasture (Psalm 100:3). In the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

#### **God's sheep recognize God's voice**

According to Jesus, we are his sheep, the flock of his pasture. John 10 expands on this wonderful theme. As Jesus's sheep, we should be able to listen to his voice and follow him because we clearly recognize his voice. Jesus can lead us precisely because we hear his voice and follow after him. "The gatekeeper opens the gate for [Jesus], and the sheep *listen to his voice*. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep *follow him because they know his voice*" (John 10:3-4, emphasis mine).

In the next verse, Jesus makes the point that we should not follow any other voice. "But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice" (John 10:5). Later Jesus alludes to the gentiles who will also hear his voice and follow him. "I have *other sheep* that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will *listen to my voice*, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16, emphasis mine).

Our Lord Jesus is very happy to lead us as his disciples and those who follow him should be able to hear his voice and receive the guidance we need. It is part of our birthright when we are

born again by the Holy Spirit and become followers of Jesus. But what about those other voices? How can we be sure we are hearing only from our Lord?

### **Tuning out the other voices around us**

In the book *Daring to Live on the Edge*, Youth With a Mission (YWAM) founder Loren Cunningham points out that impressions on our spirit will come from one of four sources: (1) your own mind; (2) the mind of others (e.g., the world); (3) the mind of Satan (e.g., demons); and (4) the mind of God.

God has given us authority in Christ to silence the other sources and clear the way to hear God's voice and be confident that it is God speaking.

Just before ascending into heaven, the Risen Lord Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:18-19). Earlier, when Jesus commissioned his disciples, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, sending them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke 9:1-2).

After this Jesus sent out 72 others to do the same (Luke 10:1). They returned with joy and said to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. *I have given you authority* to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:17-20). We know that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. And Jesus gives us his authority to silence the enemy.

### **Submitting our own thoughts to God**

But what about our voices? How can we be sure we are not hearing our own thoughts? In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul suggests that we can also take authority over our own thoughts to make them obedient to Christ.

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and *we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*"  
(2 Corinthians 10:3-5, emphasis mine).

### **How to practice listening prayer**

I have personally found that the best way to do listening prayer is with a small group of people, as opposed to trying it alone. This is especially so if we are new to it. Later, as we gain confidence in the process and become more sensitive to hearing God's voice, we can also do

listening prayer on our own. Here's an outline you can follow as you join together with your prayer partners in a listening prayer.

### **1. Come to God with your request for guidance**

Share with God your specific request for guidance in prayer. And by the power of Christ, give God's voice authority over the voices of others and our own voices.

#### **Listening prayer template**

*"Father, I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ, your son, and according to James 1:5. I am seeking wisdom for (insert item here).*

*In the name of Jesus, according to Matthew 28:18 and Luke 10:19-20, I take authority over Satan and his fallen angels and command that they be rendered deaf, mute, and blind to my prayers, and removed from my presence.*

*I submit my own voice to the shed blood of Jesus and command that my own thoughts be taken captive to the obedience of Christ, according to 2 Corinthians 10:5.*

*I ask, Father, that only your Holy Spirit will speak to me now as I wait on you for wisdom, insight, and direction. And whatever you show me or direct me to do, I pray that I will quickly obey.*

*In Jesus's mighty name, amen."*

### **2. Wait in silence for God to speak for 10-12 minutes**

Listen to what God is saying to you. What themes emerge? What becomes clear about God's plan for you as you listen? It is helpful to write impressions or thoughts down on paper as you listen and pray.

### **3. Jot down any Scripture, songs, impressions, or pictures God gives you**

My wife and I have done listening prayer with our children, and it's wonderful to see how the Lord chooses to speak. One may receive a verse from Scripture, another a song. Sometimes a member of our family gets one word, or a particular phrase. Another sees a picture. Often the Lord gives us one piece of the message, and it only seems to make sense after everyone has had the chance to share what they received.

### **4. Share how God spoke to you with your prayer partners and follow God's will**

Whatever the Lord speaks to us, the most important thing is that we obey his voice. If you are unsure or need more confirmation, then ask the Lord for this. But if you hear and receive clear direction from God, strive to respond with full obedience, being confident that God is the one guiding you by the Holy Spirit. There is great comfort and security when we hear and obey.

It is important to share this with other friends who follow Jesus. They may be able to clarify, edit, or affirm what you have sensed from the Lord.

For further study:

*How to Pray* by Pete Greig. A great book for all people trying to grow in prayer.

*The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard – a book about Spiritual Practices/Disciplines

*Preparing for Jesus* – Walter Wangerin – a great Advent devotional to guide you through this season