

# Pathways of Prayer

## Explore further...

Two friends are out walking together.

They talk. They laugh. Occasionally they weep together.

Most of all they enjoy each other's company.

After a while the conversation stops and one friend becomes distracted by the many sites along the journey. Occasionally she stops, completely caught up in the sites and wonders that she sees off the beaten track.

Her companion however continues the journey and the two become separated.

But by now she has forgotten that she began this journey with a companion - enjoying instead all the tantalising sights along the way.

But then she feels alone, and she is sad, and she feels empty.

And then she remembers that she began this journey with a companion whose company was life in all its fullness and she longs to find the pathways that will bring her back into the presence of her beloved.

Such is the nature of our relationship with God - we long to take those pathways that will draw us closer to Him who is life in all its fullness.

Those pathways are prayer. And these are the pathways that we are exploring during this Lent.

Perhaps you are one of those identified by the research done by Tearfund - one of the 20 million people who pray in the UK.

And maybe the Sunday Worship and Daily Service on Radio 4 - or the items you may have heard on BBC Local Radio - have led you to thirst for more that will sustain you on your chosen pathway.

Let us offer you a helping hand...



# The path of holiness

week 1

*Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your Holy Name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Traditional**

## Setting off

We began with a parable about our relationship with God - a story of two friends on a journey and how one friend seeks to return to the joy of the presence of her companion.

In her yearning to find the path back to her companion we can imagine how she reflected upon the holiness of God and how she might journey towards more 'holy living'.

In the path of holiness we are thinking about the inward reformation of the human heart - the development of 'holy character'.

In the Bible we find that there is always the question the People of God ask of themselves - "how can we be a Holy People?" Quite often being 'holy' has a negative connotation - a religious person with a high view of their own virtue. But that is not what this is about. Being 'holy' is about something more subtle and transforming of the human spirit.

'Holiness' is to be found at the heart of the spirituality of Methodism, of the Salvation Army and the Nazarene Church. An important strand of this stream is hymnody. Charles Wesley's hymns remain central to the Methodist tradition and strongly echo this sense of 'inner reformation' as the path towards 'holiness'. An example of this is Wesley's famous hymn *Jesu, Lover of My Soul*.

As we can see from the words of this hymn, holiness is characterised by an awareness of sinfulness and the need of repentance, confession of sins and most of all the reliance on God's grace.

So we are thinking this week about confession and brokenness in front of God as a key to



prayer. The *Jesus Prayer* might be a good example. This comes from the Orthodox Churches and is a simple prayer that is repeated many times over:

*Lord Jesus Christ  
Son of God  
Have mercy on me a sinner.*

However the Holiness stream of Christian spirituality is far from introspective. Holiness of heart should flow into acts of love and grace - what the Nazarenes and Salvationists call "compassionate ministries" - this can be seen on the website of the Salvation Army.

It was this outpouring of a compassionate spirit that gave rise to many of the uniformed organisations for children and young people, charitable work with women and the 'Temperance Movement'. This will take us to next week's path down which we travel - the Path of Social Justice, where the action for social justice is manifestation of prayer and spirituality.

### Moving on

Consider the *Jesus Prayer* - try to find a moment in each day to say this simple prayer quietly many times. In some traditions prayer beads are used to aid this - you might find them a helpful tool.

But the Path of Holiness is not simply confessing individual sins, it is also a recognition of those things deep in the human heart which we cannot mend by ourselves alone. We need God's grace to help us. The following prayer might be helpful in this respect:

*Gracious God,  
We confess what seems always with us:  
Broken things within us that never seem to mend,  
Empty places within us that always seem to ache,  
Things like buds within us that never seem to flower.  
O God of love and grace,  
Help us to accept ourselves;  
Lead us to do those good and true things  
That are not compromised by anything within us.  
As much as can be,  
Mend us, fill us, make us bloom.  
For all these things, we will give you the glory;  
Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.  
Amen.*

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It might also be helpful to use Psalm 51 both as a passage on which to meditate and as a prayer.

### Further links

The Methodist Church's Website ([www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)) gives some of the background to the Holiness Path.

# The path of social justice

week 2

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me love.  
Where there is injury, pardon.  
Where there is discord, vision.  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
Where there is sadness, joy.  
O divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.*

**Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi**

## Setting off

So was the 'friend' in our opening parable distracted by her compassion for the poor, needy and oppressed?

Not necessarily.

Perhaps she recalled that when she walked and talked with her Friend she learnt of His sadness at human suffering and His anger at injustice.

And remembering that her Friend was restless for change, maybe she felt drawn to find the path of social change that would lead her back into a relationship with her Beloved.

Christianity is not just about 'inward spirituality'. Our faith in God made known in Jesus Christ compels us to work for a better world, for peace and for justice.

For some this is quietly working for those facing difficulty - poverty, sickness or sadness.

Others feel compelled to protest against what they see as injustice in their society or in the world - prayer and protest are very closely linked in the Bible, especially the Old Testament.

Organisations and movements such as the Iona Community and Faithworks movements have



given fresh impetus to a deep stream of Christian spirituality that includes figures like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa.

The example of Jesus in the Temple shows us how righteous anger and desire for change is part and parcel of our journey towards the Cross.

It is the sense of working 'against the grain' of prevailing social systems and attitudes that is the distinguishing feature of this strand of spirituality. And so we remember all the movements that have transformed our world.

- The Christian conviction that slavery was an abomination in the eyes of God led to the abolitionist movement.
- The horror of European Anti-Semitism led Archbishop William Temple and Rabbi Joseph Hertz to found the Council of Christians and Jews to work for better understanding between the two faiths.
- The conviction that South African Apartheid was blasphemy in the eyes of God led to its eventual demise. Other work for social justice, whilst not having the same profile, is still none the less a significant expression of that spirituality driven by the justice of God.

### Moving on

There are many ways in which action for social justice can be an expression of prayerfulness.

Many Christians who take action for social justice are not simply Christians who happen to be involved in political and social endeavours but see their activity as an outpouring of their Christian faith - an expression of prayer.

As we travel on this pathway, we make many friends who travel this route - maybe we can join with them as they pray and work for change in areas of:

- Racial Justice
- Inter Faith Relations
- Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- The homeless
- The poor of our world
- Those persecuted and imprisoned for their faith
- Those living with HIV/AIDS
- Those engaged in action against global warming

### Further links

Christian Solidarity Worldwide ([www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk))  
Christian Aid ([www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk))  
CAFOD ([www.cafod.org.uk](http://www.cafod.org.uk))  
Hope 2008 ([www.hope08.com](http://www.hope08.com))  
Church Action on Poverty ([www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk))  
Council of Christians and Jews ([www.ccj.org.uk](http://www.ccj.org.uk))  
Christian Muslim Forum ([www.christianmuslimforum.org](http://www.christianmuslimforum.org))

# The devotional path

## week 3

*Most gracious God,  
in whom alone dwells all fullness of light and wisdom:  
By your Holy Spirit, illuminate our minds,  
in true understanding of your Word.  
Give us grace that we may receive it  
with reverence and humility.  
May it lead us to put our trust in you alone;  
and so to serve and honour you,  
that we may glorify your holy name,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

**John Calvin (1509-1564)**

### Setting off

Let's return to our parable that we began with.

Did the story of two friends walking along and talking start a memory of another conversation with an inspirational companion?

At Easter-tide we read in Luke's Gospel of how two people walk and talk with a stranger they met on the road to a town called Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35) - and as they talked their "hearts burned within them" as Jesus expounded the scriptures to them.

This pathway takes us down the devotional road, where prayer and spirituality is firmly rooted in meditation on the Bible.



For those within the Evangelical tradition, prayer is rooted in Scripture, expounded in the Christian community and preached to the world. In our reading from John's Gospel, Jesus prays that the disciples will know God together through the Word and will proclaim him to the world.

The great hymn writer John Newton (1725-1807) wrote that prayer and meditation upon the Scriptures was an essential part of the Christian spiritual life: "secret prayer, and the good word, are the chief wells from whence we draw the water of salvation".

Another famous Evangelical, Charles Simeon (1759-1836) woke at 4am in order to pray and meditate on the scripture for no less than four hours, fining himself a guinea if he overslept!

However, this focus on a prayer life rooted in the Scriptures is by no means to be found only amongst Evangelicals. The medieval practice of *Lectio Divina* (or 'Holy Reading'), which began in the monastic orders, is one which reads passages of Scripture repeatedly, in a slow and meditative way, as a basis for prayer and spirituality. Father David Pennington in his book on *Lectio Divina*, calls it "the art of letting God, our Divine Friend, speak to us through his inspired Word."

### **Moving on**

Take a passage of scripture.

Read it through once.

Then read it again a number of times, this time slowly, meditating and reflecting upon the words and the meaning behind them.

Suggestions for Bible passages that lend themselves are: Psalm 43, Psalm 139, Isaiah 40, John 1.1-14 and John 17.1-8.

# The sacramental path

week 4

*Almighty God,  
For inasmuch as without you,  
we are not able to please you,  
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit,  
may in all things,  
direct and rule our hearts,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

**Adapted from “The Book of Common Prayer”**

## Setting off

When we were thinking about the Devotional Path we thought about the famous story from the Gospels when two disciples encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Somehow the deeply personal contact, whether human or divine, defies the logic of the mind. And at the end of the Gospel Story, Jesus is recognised by the two disciples as he breaks bread in their midst.

Come with us, then, to explore the Sacramental Path...

For many of the different Christian traditions (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed) the Sacraments bring us close in a tangible way, the idea of God’s saving grace to us.

Theologically we talk of sacrament as an outward sign of God’s grace and, particularly at the Eucharist, a visible manifestation of Christ the Word made Flesh.

In our Gospel passage we enter into the final evening that Jesus spent with his disciples, where he washed their feet to demonstrate how he is the suffering servant who dies for the sins of the world. This final evening culminates with the Last Supper which is remembered and celebrated through the Sacrament known variously as the Mass, the Eucharist, Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper.

In this Sacrament we are brought as close as we can be to the Grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In the ‘pathway’ we reach the culmination of the Christian life, where we are brought into the paschal mystery (the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) who sends us out into the world, which is why at the end of the liturgy the people are sent out with a Commission and a Blessing.

Language is crucial here – the liturgy is full of language that is not just poetic and beautiful but points us to the profound reality of the incarnate presence of God amongst us. The closeness of God to human life is where we began with our journeying companions.





This Sacramental Path recognises that when we draw close to God descriptive words are never sufficient, there needs to be something more - the visual, the tangible, the poetic.

This sense of imminence of God is explored powerfully in George Herbert's poem *Love Bade Me Welcome* (<http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/979.html>)

An important part of this path is the part played by *The Lord's Prayer*:

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your Kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.*

This prayer touches on all pathways but plays a particular significance in the sacramental which is very much at the centre, both of the sacramental liturgies and the daily offices of prayer.

### **Moving on**

Attend a Catholic Mass or a similar Eucharistic service - sit at the back and watch the liturgy, think about the place of word, sacrament and song.

Try meditating on the word of *The Lord's Prayer* or the poem by George Herbert.

# The contemplative path

## week 5

*Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,  
For all the benefits thou hast won for me,  
For all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.*

*O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,  
May I know thee more clearly,  
Love thee more dearly,  
And follow thee more nearly,  
Day by day. Amen.*

**Richard of Chichester (c.1197-1253)**

### Setting off

Our opening parable describes our relationship with God in terms of a journey.

Some journeys are exciting, with plenty of noise and activity.

But perhaps you prefer a quieter journey.

Although quieter isn't necessarily easier.

The Contemplative Path takes us through the rigours of contemplation.



Throughout the centuries, men and women have taken time out of their busy lives to think and reflect on God through silence and meditation. For a small number of individuals this has meant leaving their past lives behind and dedicating themselves to contemplation. For many more however, the Path of Contemplation is one that is woven into the business of daily life.

Contemplation is not just for the 'professionals' - monks and nuns - we can all benefit from the wisdom of the Desert Fathers, as the current renewal of interest in monastic spirituality would seem to suggest. In what follows we will reflect on the value of being still, with tips on meditation practice and information about retreats.

St Antony, popularly known as the first monk, was inspired by the story of the rich young man to sell all his possessions and withdraw from worldly life in order to live out the teachings of Jesus as fully as possible. Ever since the third century, a steady stream of men and women have turned their backs on the world in order to devote the whole of life to seeking God.

Although most people are unable (and probably unwilling) to make such radical sacrifices and

commitments, almost all of us are likely at some point to experience the desire to take time out from our busy schedules in order to think and reflect on our lives. In Christian terms this would be understood as a call to seek God, a call most clearly expressed in the lines of the psalm: "Be still and know that I am God." According to the monastic tradition, we come to this knowledge in the silence of our own hearts.

### Moving on

#### **Making Space at Home and at Work**

Finding the time and space for contemplative practice is easier said than done these days, especially with all the demands of work and the responsibilities of family life to attend to. Nevertheless, if one wishes to meditate, it is best to try and set aside a regular time - such as first thing in the morning or before bed - to sit quietly and think of God. There are a variety of techniques, most of which recommend concentration on the breath and/or repetition of a particular word or phrase, to help us cultivate attentive stillness. By being present - to ourselves and each other - we make ourselves present to what is, and ultimately therefore, to God. Time is a precious commodity, but even a few minutes a day will be time well spent.

#### **Making a retreat**

There are many different kinds of retreats from 'quiet days' that offer just a few hours of guided quiet and prayer, to rigorously guided retreats over many days. Some retreat houses offer imaginative ways to explore the Contemplative Path through art in the form of painting and prayer retreats. Other possibilities may include sculpture, poetry writing, music, drama and dance, as well as those focused on meditation techniques.

#### **Learning more**

There are an abundance of books on spirituality, many specifically focussing on the contemplative tradition. The following represents a small selection of recent titles:

- Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006.
- Benedicta Ward (Tr), *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, Penguin books, 2003.
- Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes: The wisdom of the desert*, Lion Books, 2003.
- Esther de Waal, *Living with Contradiction*, Canterbury Press, 2003.

*Into Great Silence* is a documentary feature film - now available on DVD - which focuses on the life of a Carthusian Monastery.

There are hundreds of retreat houses and religious communities, providing a range of options from short quiet days to longer guided retreats. The Retreat Association ([www.retreats.org.uk](http://www.retreats.org.uk)) publishes a comprehensive listing.

Explore 'Centering Prayer' ([www.centeringprayer.com/cntrgpryr.htm](http://www.centeringprayer.com/cntrgpryr.htm))

Contemplative Fire ([www.contemplativefire.org](http://www.contemplativefire.org))

Worth Abbey, featured in BBC2s *The Monastery* ([www.worthabbey.net](http://www.worthabbey.net))

# The charismatic path

week 6

*Lord you are great and greatly to be praised!  
awaken us to delight in your praises,  
for you made us for yourself,  
and our hearts are restless  
'till they find their rest in you.  
Amen.*

**St. Augustine (354-430)**

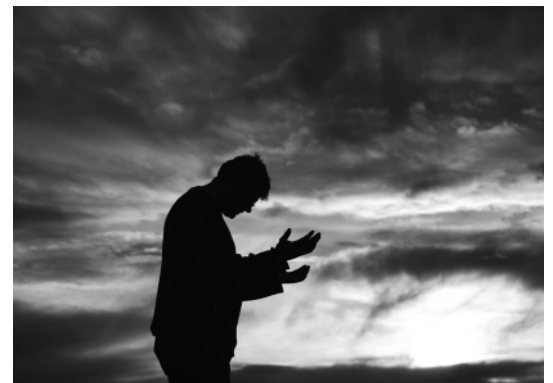
## Setting off

Our opening parable speaks to us of our need to reconnect with God and how different paths might take us closer to God. We have thought about the paths of Holiness, Social Justice, Devotion, Sacramental and Contemplative.

Our final path takes us along an exciting journey!

Perhaps you have 'fire in your belly' and yearn to journey to a closer relationship to God. This was the experience of the first Christians who met on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-21). The Pentecostal Tradition draws on this event and gives central importance to the 'Gifts of the Holy Spirit'.

The Charismatic Path carries us along a thrilling and exciting path; in fact we don't so much walk this path but dance it! So hang on tight!



This day in the Christian liturgical calendar is marked as 'Palm Sunday' (Matthew 21.1-11) when we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This provoked astonishing scenes in Jerusalem when the crowd exploded with shouts of Hosanna! In our complementary reading we hear of David overcome with joy for all that God had done for him and through him, that he danced with wild abandon!

Prayer of praise will be at the centre of this week's service on Radio 4. But 'praise' in the Pentecostal tradition is not merely the human response, but arises out of the spiritual gifts bestowed upon through God in Christ.

Today we praise God with shouts of Hosanna - yet our praise is not one that celebrates the entry of political victor, arriving in the city to claim his crown of power, but the arrival of the suffering servant, who comes to complete the drama of our salvation that will culminate in his own suffering and death that will crown him the Lord of All.

And we are invited to join Him in this drama - BBC 1's series *The Passion* begins on 17 March. This is a major BBC drama production which will take us through the final week of Jesus' life to the crucifixion on Good Friday and onto the resurrection appearances on Easter Sunday.

### **Moving on**

Tune into BBC 1 and watch the *The Passion*!

Re:Jesus ([www.rejesus.co.uk](http://www.rejesus.co.uk))