



# Shaped

A resource for establishing

a daily pattern

of prayer



## Introduction

This resource is designed to help us at an unprecedented time in history when many of us will find ourselves living differently. We may be on our own, or we may now be living in uncomfortably close quarters with others! We may feel adrift without familiar routines, or we may feel curious about exploring 'new possibilities'. Wherever we are and however we're feeling, it's important to establish rhythms and patterns that enable us to make the most of this time – especially in the absence of gathered Christian community.

## Shaped

In Matthew's Gospel – Chapter 4 – we read that Jesus was able to withstand a time of testing and temptation in the desert. He had been shaped by 30 years of prayer and worship (amongst other things), but his relationship with God (whom he called *Father*) **shaped** and formed his character and values so that he was able to live a life of service and sacrifice.

We have all been 'shaped' by various experiences and relationships over the course of our lives – for better or for worse! The habits we pick up also shape us – eating habits, sleeping habits, viewing habits – all shape how we live and who we become. ***Re-shaping* by God's Spirit is a process that happens with our cooperation** – it's something we are invited to *participate* in - by letting go of some habits and adopting new ones - 'new habits' which help to make us in to the people we're becoming. **We**

**are shaped and formed by the habits of corporate worship** but we are also encouraged to continue nurturing habits that help us to flourish as followers of Jesus in both isolation *and* rich communion.

This resource invites us to draw upon three prayer traditions at three times of the day:

**Morning** Psalm; **Midday** The Lord's Prayer; **Evening** Prayer of Examen

The goal is to establish a daily rhythm of **drawing close to God and allowing his Spirit to shape us.**

## One

### Morning

#### A psalm a day

Begin the day with a psalm. The psalms are ancient, raw, emotive songs. They are not always politically – or theologically – ‘correct’ (and not designed to be ‘teaching material’), rather, they are songs from ‘the heart’, that reflect the original songwriter’s real life experiences and concerns – **they give voice to the full range of human emotion**. They give us permission to ‘be real’ with both God and ourselves. They invite praise and lament; they inspire faith and allow for doubt.

There are **150** psalms to choose from. Certain phrases from the psalms stay in our brains like ‘ear worms’ that play on repeat:

*The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it...* **Psalm 24**

*From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I* **Psalm 61**

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* **Psalm 19**

*The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* **Psalm 34**

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. **Psalm 23***

As you read through the psalms, note the phrases, metaphors and imagery that captures your imagination and becomes particularly meaningful to you.

## Two

### Midday

#### The Lord's Prayer

Pause at midday (or thereabouts) to pray *The Lord's Prayer*. The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples centres us on God's will for the world and his provision for our lives.

First and foremost, the prayer reminds us of 'the big picture' of **God** (it doesn't get much 'bigger picture' than contemplating The One who stands outside of time and space and holds all things together!). Beginning with 'God' centres our perspective on 'things eternal' before we are brought back down to earth. Back 'on earth' we pray for the provision of our daily needs and for forgiveness – as we recognise the universal human propensity to **wound and be wounded** (it will be particularly important to remember this when living in isolation and close proximity with others for a prolonged period of time!).

Contrary to what a lot of people may think, Christianity is *earthly* (not just 'pie in the sky when you die'). We pray for God's kingdom (his loving rule) 'on earth as in heaven'. Essentially we are praying for the love and goodness of God to be made manifest right here, right now, in this place, in our hearts, through our actions.

- Over the coming weeks, why not break the prayer down in to 'chunks' and spend time reflecting on particular words and phrases – ask the Spirit to make this prayer 'come alive' and shape you.
- Note how you see God's kingdom coming 'on earth as in heaven' even in these disorientating times.

*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 let us not fall in to temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

*For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.*

## Three

### Evening

#### The Prayer of Examen

**The Prayer of Examen** is a daily spiritual exercise credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556], who encouraged fellow followers to engage in the practice for developing a deeper level of spiritual sensitivity and for recognizing and receiving the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The heart of the practice is about becoming increasingly aware of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's movement throughout your day.

**The Prayer of Examen** is primarily an exercise in *remembering*. We are invited, through four portions [presence, gratitude, review, and response], to concentrate on experiences and encounters from the past 24 hours. The beauty of the practice is its simplicity; it is more a guide than a prescription. If some portion feels especially important on a given day, feel the freedom to spend all or most of your time in that portion. The purpose is to increase **awareness and sensitivity**, not to finish or accomplish a task.

For this practice:

- A comfortable and relatively quiet location is best
- The experience doesn't need to be a certain length



- Feel free to spend more time on certain portions compared to others
- It might be helpful to journal what you noticed during your time of prayer
- Consider sharing your experiences: allow encouragement and insight from others to help you.

## **Presence**

Begin this practice by recognizing the presence of God. Remind yourself of God's presence with you and His desire to be with you.

**Consider praying for the Holy Spirit to help you be attentive to God's presence.** To become more focused, it might be helpful to repeat a simple phrase during this time, like "Be still and know that I am God" [Psalm 46 v10].

It's important to begin this practice in a calm and centred state. There may be days when you'll need the entire time to remember and focus on the nearness of God. Don't rush past this portion.

**Take the necessary time to wait and find comfort in God's presence.**

Take some time and focus on the *nearness* of God. Open yourself to His presence. "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." [Psalm 145 v18]

"The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O Lord; your saints will extol you." [Psalm 145 v9-10]

## Gratitude

Having spent time recognizing the presence of God, now begin 'counting your blessings'.

"If the only prayer you say in your entire life is 'Thank You,': wrote Meister Eckhart, "that would suffice." As you think about the past 24 hours, what causes you to be thankful? Look back over the past day, the big and small aspects of life, and recognize what reasons you have to be grateful. Focus on these experiences and encounters, helping your mind and spirit centre on the goodness and generosity of God.

If you're using a journal, consider capturing your thanks in writing, expressing words of gratitude and giving testimony to God's generosity and faithfulness. **Find encouragement and reminders of God's goodness, and be thankful.**

- Looking back over the past 24 hours, for what are you most grateful?
- What makes you feel thankful?

Using simple words, express your gratitude to God.

"Praise be to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens."

[Ephesians 1v3]

## Review

Now we move from 'gratitude' to reviewing our day. Over-packed lives can rob us of the opportunity to learn from the past, **to see how yesterday might inform today**. "Where did the time go?!" we ask ourselves, often struggling to remember what we did just a week ago.

Here we can benefit again from taking time to look back over the past 24 hours. By intentionally reviewing our interactions, responses, feelings and intentions, we can avoid letting days speed by. **We can pause to learn more about ourselves and about God's activity in our lives.**

Try to look back objectively as you review. Rather than interpreting, justifying, or rationalizing, the intent is to **observe and remember**. Allow your mind to wander the situations you've been in and to notice details. The questions in this exercise should help you bring specific experiences to mind.

- When or where in the past 24 hours were you cooperating most fully with God's action in your life?
- When were you most resisting God's action in your life?
- What habits and life patterns do you notice from the past day?

"Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul...Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground." [Psalm 143 v8b,10]

## Response

Having spent time remembering, it seems natural to want to respond in some way. Take time to journal or pray, expressing your thoughts on the actions, attitudes, feelings, and interactions you've remembered as a part of this exercise. You might need to seek forgiveness, ask for direction, share a concern, express gratitude, or resolve to make changes and move forward. Allow your observations to guide your responses.

- Beginning today, how do you want to live your life differently?
- What patterns do you want to keep living tomorrow?
- How is the Spirit leading and shaping you?

*Loving, ever-present God, help us to meet you in the Scriptures we read and the prayers we say; in the bread we break and the meals we share; in our daily work, leisure and rest; and in the neighbours and family we love and serve. May your Spirit comfort and challenge us. May your Spirit change us, and shape us to be more like you. Amen.*

“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

[Hebrews 13 v20-21]

Material based on: Mars Hill Bible Church [marshill.org/teaching/sp](http://marshill.org/teaching/sp)

## **Conclusions**

It is our prayer that we will encounter God – perhaps in a new and surprising ways - in the coming weeks of social distancing and unprecedented change. Please feel free to adapt these resources - find what works for you!

## **The Grace**

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all,  
now and evermore. **Amen.***

## **Blessing**

*The Lord bless you and keep you;*

*The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;*

*The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

*And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,*

*be among you and remain with you always.*

***Amen.***

*The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself;*

*the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service;*

*the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;*

*and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,*

*be among you and remain with you always.*

***Amen.***