

BUILDING UP A FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

An enormous number of people say that they believe in God and do very little about it.

Christians should be committed to building up a friendship with him and, naturally, talking to God in prayer is essential for those of us who can think and act for ourselves and want God to be central to our lives.

But to describe prayer as *talking* to God is only part of the story. There are other ways of praying. The best description I have ever heard of prayer is "a movement of the heart towards God."

People pray in all sorts of places, and at all sorts of times. When is the best regular time for you?

Try and set aside the same time(s) each day so that your praying becomes a natural part of what you do.

Whether you choose to pray in Church or in your House or elsewhere, on these pages you will find some written prayers and, also, some other ideas to help build a friendship with God. Please use it. May your efforts bring you closer to God.

PRAYERS TO START THE DAY

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing me, safely, to the beginning of this day. Fill me with your grace and help me to do your will in the way that I think, speak and act.

I ask this for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Father, let your blessing be with me and with all those whom I love and care for.

(Think for a moment of particular people).

Forgive the times I fail you and help me to act with kindness to those I find it difficult to like.

(Think for a moment of particular people).

Send your Holy Spirit to comfort all those who are sick or in any trouble. Give, to those who have died, a place in heaven.

I ask all this for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Father...

Other, familiar, prayers may be said.

✘ The Lord bless us, and keep us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

PRAYERS TO END THE DAY

✘ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Heavenly Father, thank you for being with me today. Forgive the times that I have forgotten your presence. Be with me throughout the night to keep me and my family and friends in safety.

I ask this for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.
Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.
Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.
There is room in my heart for thee.

Our Father...

Other, familiar, prayers may be said.

✘ The Lord grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. Amen.

Rules for Living

Sometimes the Christian 'Way' is mistakenly thought of as just a series of rules beginning with the

words 'You must not...' But to understand Christianity in this negative way is not to understand it at all. Christians should be people who are full of joy and who enjoy life to the full.

But what Christianity does do is to say that past human experience suggests that there are things which hurt our sense of purpose and our real enjoyment of life. These are things that spoil lives and are best avoided if we want the world to be a happy place.

Chief among the codes that should be known and adopted by Christians are the Ten Commandments (often called the decalogue) and the Summary of the Law.

The Ten Commandments:

God said:

You shall have no other gods but me.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

Honour your father and mother.

You shall not commit murder.

You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not be a false witness.
You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbour.

The Summary of the Law

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.

Conscience

As Christians who place God at the centre of our lives there will often be times when we need to take an objective look at ourselves. We need to know whether we are being true in our discipleship.

What follows may help you in an honest self-assessment:

LOVE OF GOD

Do I remember to make space for God each day?
Do I say my prayers regularly?

Do I read my bible?
Do I try to understand what God wants for and from me?
Do I trust God and what the Church teaches?
Do I trust God to give me strength?
Do I want to receive his grace in the sacraments?

LOVE OF SELF

Do I believe that God creates me and therefore loves me?
Do I believe that I am worthy of God's love?
Do I believe that my sins can be forgiven?
Do I believe that with God there is always the chance of a new start?
Do I believe that my gifts and talents are God-given?
Do I believe that God wants *my* help to build his kingdom?
Do I believe that I have real value as an individual?

LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR

Do I believe that God asks me to treat other people with a loving care?
Am I honest in my dealings with my neighbour?
Do I always tell the truth?
Do I steal?
Do I trust those around me?
Do I forgive those who sin against me?

Do I remember that my neighbour is created and loved by God?

There are many other questions that could be asked as we take stock of ourselves, but these are good ones to begin with.

The Sacrament of Confession

Christians begin their sacramental life by being “initiated”. The two sacraments of initiation are Baptism and Confirmation. What these sacraments do is to establish a two-way relationship between ourselves and God. In Baptism water reminds us, among other things, of the washing away of the sins that destroy our relationship with God.

If only things were so simple! Humans learn very quickly that, in spite of their best intentions, they do tend towards sin. In Baptism the strangle-hold of this tendency (sometimes called original sin), is broken and we have the chance to draw on God's strength to overcome it. But, being easily blown off course, we often fail to turn towards God when we most need his strength and his love. We kid ourselves that we can cope; that we can manage; that we are strong enough. We play games as we decide that certain sins are entirely acceptable or unimportant. Just when we need God's strength we shut him out.

So, we are sinners; each and every one of us. This is the reality of our lives. The power of sin is very strong and often subtle.

A few years ago I would have told you that sin was the work of the devil. I am still prepared to talk about external temptation and the power of the devil, but am increasingly convinced that each of us needs to take more responsibility for our sins. In the end it is us who sin. In the end it is our decision to do wrong. Let us not be like the young child who avoids taking the blame. You know what I mean don't you? “He made me do it”. “It broke”. Sin is, more often than not, down to us. It is we who harm our relationship with God.

God never puts up barriers between himself and us. We are the ones who build the barriers of sin.

Many sins start off quite innocuously and, before we have really faced them, they have exerted a really strong hold over us. Sometimes we find ourselves with sins that have trends that are identifiable. Perhaps we tell lots of lies. Perhaps we steal (even the company pencil or the fiddled tax return fall into this category). Perhaps we are lazy in our following of the way of the cross.

There is an old Anglican saying about Confession which goes like this:

All may.
None must.
Some should.

There is some truth in it but I believe that far too many people hide behind the absence of compulsion. You may argue that at every service we have a penitential section and words of forgiveness are spoken. True, but that argument is born out of the mentality which regards the act of personal and individual confession as an intrusive and unwelcome activity. We should actually be thanking God for the chance to put right our relationship with him. We should be thanking God for the opportunity to have advice to help us sort out the confusions of our lives. We should be thanking God that forgiveness and renewal are costly and painful because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. Is there a single person who does not need to confess and be forgiven in order to grow in love for God? If I seem to be labouring this point it is simply because I think we reject God's offers too often and then blame him when our lives are more tangled than they ought to be.

Confession (or, to be more precise the absolution which follows it) restores our Baptismal state. It is as though we have just been Baptised. We are clean again. Our sins have

been put to death. We have new life in the resurrection.

There may be some who avoid confession because they think it is a strictly Roman Catholic practice. This is not the case; it is encouraged in the Book of Common Prayer.

There may be one or two people who avoid confession because they fear telling a priest whom they know that they are as frail as he is. Priests are bound to keep confessions absolutely secret. It won't affect your relationship with him. There's very little that a priest hasn't heard a hundred times before.

There may be one or two people who avoid confession because they don't know what is involved. Let me tell you. It involves preparing for the sacrament by careful self-examination. It involves a determination not to sin again (even if this eventually proves impossible). It involves a preparedness to acknowledge your responsibility in the sin.

The form of service is very simple. You just read the words on the card that say you admit to having sinned and then (perhaps using a list you might have written) you say what your sins are and ask for God's forgiveness. The Priest will probably give you some advice and will then pronounce God's forgiveness (absolution), usually

setting a penance - a token prayer or similar - and will send you off in peace. If you need help in finding your way through the service the Priest will assist you.

The primary function of this sacrament is to restore your Baptismal state - to put right your relationship with God. That must be a concern of all God's people.

Remember, in St. John's gospel the accounts of the gift of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection says this:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came in and stood among them and said to them "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:19-23)

A FORM OF CONFESSION

¶ When you have knelt down you say:

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

¶ The Priest gives you a blessing. You then say:

I confess to almighty God,
and before the whole company of
heaven,
that I have sinned through my own
fault
in my thoughts and in my words
in what I have done,
and in what I have failed to do. . .

*¶ Say what sins you have to confess
and then add:*

For these and all my other sins that
I cannot now remember I am truly
sorry and ask pardon of God and
of you, Father, advice, penance and
absolution.

*¶ Listen to any advice that the Priest
gives and remember the penance that
he sets for you. The Priest then
pronounces God's forgiveness for your
sins.*

FAMILIAR PRAYERS

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

[For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.] Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now
and ever shall be: world without
end. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is
with thee. Blessed art thou among
women, and blessed is the fruit of
thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary,
Mother of God, pray for us sinners
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

Christ be with me,
Christ within me,
Christ behind me,
Christ before me,
Christ beside me,
Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above
me,
Christ in quiet,
Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts
of all who love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and
stranger.

PRAYERS BEFORE THE EUCHARIST

*The Eucharist is the service that Jesus
commanded us to have. It is the most
important kind of prayer that we can
offer because it is Jesus's prayer and
not just ours.*

✠ In the name of the Father, and of
the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

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.

Jesu, my Lord, I thee adore. O
make me love thee more and more.
Jesu, my Lord, I thee adore. O
make me love thee more and more.
Jesu, my Lord, I thee adore. O
make me love thee more and more.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.
There is room in my heart for thee.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.
There is room in my heart for thee.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.
There is room in my heart for thee.

O God, who in a wonderful
sacrament has left, to us, the
memorial of thy passion; grant us,
we beseech thee, so to worship the
sacred mysteries of thy Body and
Blood, that we may evermore
perceive within ourselves the fruit
of thy redemption; who lives and
reigns, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Soul of my Saviour, sanctify my
breast,
Body of Christ, be thou my saving
guest,
Blood of my Saviour, bathe me in
thy tide,
Wash me with water flowing from
thy side.

Strength and protection may thy
passion be,
O blessed Jesu, hear and answer
me;
Deep in thy wounds, Lord, hide
and shelter me,
So shall I never, never part from
thee.

Guard and defend me from the foe
malign,
In death's dread moments make me
only thine;
Call me and bid me come to thee
on high
Where I may praise thee with thy
saints for ay.