

WITH JESUS

LEARNING TO PRAY THE PSALMS

LECTIO DIVINA PRAYER GUIDE



ABOUT THIS PRACTICE

Lectio divina — "sacred reading" — is not a Bible study technique. It is a way of listening. You are not reading about God; you are reading with him. The goal is not to extract information but to be addressed.

The Psalms are the prayer book Jesus himself used. He prayed these words — not as illustrations, but as his own conversation with the Father. When you read these psalms slowly and prayerfully, you are reading what he read, praying what he prayed. You are not alone in the text. You are joining a conversation already in motion.

These guides use the four classical movements of lectio divina:

Lectio — Read

Meditatio — Reflect

Oratio — Respond

Contemplatio — Rest

HOW TO USE THESE GUIDES

Each guide has two paths. Choose the one that fits your week — but don't choose the shorter one simply because it is easier.

The Short Path (10–15 minutes)

Move through Lectio, Meditatio, and Oratio. Read once, sit briefly, pray honestly.

The Extended Path (20–30 minutes)

Move through all four movements. Give each one unhurried space.

Keep a journal nearby.

A note if this feels difficult: if this practice feels forced, dry, or frustrating — that is normal, and it is not failure. Pete Greig of 24-7 Prayer reminds us that prayer is often less about feeling God's presence and more about showing up to the address. The practice is the faithfulness. Keep showing up.

WEEK 1 — THE GOD WORTH ADDRESSING

Practice: Praise + Gratitude

Passage: Psalm 100

Read Psalm 100 in full before beginning.

① LECTIO — Read (2–3 minutes)

Read Psalm 100 slowly, aloud if possible. Notice the movement of the psalm — it begins with a command (Shout for joy), draws you into motion (come before him), and anchors everything in a declaration about who God is (his love endures forever). Read it a second time. Even slower.

What single word or phrase catches your attention — not because it is interesting, but because it seems to press on something in you? Hold it.

With Jesus: Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts drawn from psalms like this one. The crowd was doing what this psalm commands — and they didn't fully know who they were praising. You do. Read it knowing who the praise is moving toward.

② MEDITATIO — Reflect (3–5 minutes)

Return to the word or phrase that caught your attention. Don't analyze it. Repeat it quietly. Let it settle. Then consider:

- **What does it mean to you today that his "love endures forever"? Is there any part of you that finds that hard to believe right now?**
- **The psalm commands: enter his gates with thanksgiving. What are you genuinely thankful for this week — not in general, but in your actual life?**
- **Psalm 103 adds texture: "Forget not all his benefits." What benefits have you been forgetting to notice?**

With Jesus: Jesus gave thanks before every meal, over bread and cup, before miracles. His gratitude was not politeness — it was the deep confidence of a Son who knew the Father gives good things. What would it mean to thank God from that same place of confidence?

③ ORATIO — Respond (3–5 minutes)

Pray Psalm 100 back to God in your own words. Begin with praise — even if it feels formal at first. Then move to gratitude: name two or three specific things from your actual life this week. Don't rush past them. Let them be the substance of your prayer, not a preamble to it.

With Jesus: You are not praying alone. You are joining a conversation already in motion. Offer your praise and gratitude through him, with him, in him.

④ CONTEMPLATIO — Rest (5–10 minutes | Extended Path only)

Set the psalm aside. Rest in the simplest truth of this psalm: he made us, and we are his. You don't need to produce anything further. If your thoughts wander, return gently to a single word from the psalm.

Before you close: write one sentence — a prayer, an impression, or a question you are carrying from this time. Not a summary. Just a marker of where you were with God today.

WEEK 2 — COMING CLEAN

Practice: Confession

Passage: Psalm 51

Read Psalm 51 in full before beginning.

A note before you begin: Psalm 51 is David's prayer after his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. It is one of the most honest prayers in all of Scripture. Come to it honestly. Don't perform contrition — bring whatever is actually true about you today.

① LECTIO — Read (2–3 minutes)

Read Psalm 51 slowly. Notice its movement: it begins with a cry for mercy, descends into brutal honesty about sin, and then ascends into longing — for a clean heart, a renewed spirit, the return of joy. Read it a second time.

What word or phrase presses on you? It may be a word of conviction. It may be a word of hope. Either is a gift. Hold it.

With Jesus: Jesus never confessed sin — but he bore ours. He who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). When David cries "Create in me a clean heart," he is asking for something only God can do — and in Christ, God has done it. Read this psalm knowing the answer to its deepest cry has already been given.

② MEDITATIO — Reflect (3–5 minutes)

Sit with your word or phrase. Let it do its quiet work. Then consider:

- **Where is the gap between who you are and who God made you to be most visible to you right now?**
- **David says, "Against you, you only, have I sinned" (v. 4). What does it mean that sin is ultimately an offense against God — and that God is also the one who forgives it?**
- **The psalm asks for joy and gladness to return (v. 8). Is there a joy you have lost that you would like God to restore?**

With Jesus: Confession is not self-punishment. It is agreement with God about what is true — and trust that his mercy is larger than your failure. This is what the cross means. You are not confessing to a judge waiting to condemn; you are confessing to a Father who has already paid the cost of forgiveness.

③ ORATIO — Respond (3–5 minutes)

Pray Psalm 51 slowly, section by section, in your own words. Let it be honest. You do not need to dress it up. Name what needs to be named. Receive the mercy the psalm offers.

If it helps, use verse 10 as your anchor: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

With Jesus: Bring your confession to the Father through Christ. He is not shocked by what you bring. He has already carried it.

④ CONTEMPLATIO — Rest (5–10 minutes | Extended Path only)

Rest in the mercy of God. Not in your effort at confession, but in his response to it. You have come clean. He has heard. Sit in the quiet that follows forgiveness.

Before you close: write one sentence — something you named before God today, or something you received. Just a marker of where you were with him.

WEEK 3 — THE PRAYER GOD CAN HANDLE

Practice: Lament

Passage: Psalm 22

Read Psalm 22 in full before beginning.

A note before you begin: Lament is not complaining. It is not faithlessness. It is faith under pressure — the decision to bring your pain to God rather than away from him. If you have been told that good Christians don't struggle, don't doubt, or don't grieve — this psalm has something important to say to you.

① LECTIO — Read (2–3 minutes)

Read Psalm 22 slowly. Feel the shape of it: it opens in desolation (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?), moves through memory and plea, descends deeper into suffering, and then — at verse 24 — turns. Read it a second time. Don't rush the dark section. Let it be what it is.

What word or phrase catches you — in the darkness or in the turn? Hold it.

With Jesus: These are the words Jesus prayed from the cross (Matthew 27:46). He didn't only quote this psalm — he prayed it. He took the full weight of human abandonment and still addressed it to the Father. He did not pray away from God in his suffering. He prayed toward him. This psalm is the sound of Jesus — and the invitation for us to follow him into that same honest, anguished, trusting prayer.

② MEDITATIO — Reflect (3–5 minutes)

Sit with your word or phrase. Then consider:

- **Where are you carrying grief, confusion, fear, or doubt right now that you have not yet brought to God?**
- **The psalmist says, "I cry out by day, but you do not answer" (v. 2). Have you ever felt that? What did you do with that silence?**
- **Notice verse 24: God "has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help." What does it mean to you that God does not turn away from suffering — including yours?**

With Jesus: Jesus was forsaken so that you would not be. The abandonment he experienced on the cross means that the worst thing you can say to God — the most honest, desperate, doubting cry — will never be met with God turning his back. He can handle what you bring.

③ ORATIO — Respond (3–5 minutes)

This week, your prayer may not feel tidy. That is appropriate. Lament is honest, not polished.

Bring to God whatever you have been holding back — the grief, the confusion, the unanswered question, the pain that doesn't resolve. You don't need a conclusion. You don't need to arrive somewhere by the end. Just bring it to him and keep your face toward him while you do.

If you don't know where to start, begin with verse 1 in your own words. Let the psalm give you language for what you haven't been able to say.

With Jesus: He prayed this before you. He is interceding for you even now (Romans 8:34). You are not praying alone in the dark.

④ CONTEMPLATIO — Rest (5–10 minutes | Extended Path only)

Don't resolve what isn't resolved. Simply stay. The goal of contemplation this week is not peace — it is presence. Remain with God in the unresolved place. That itself is an act of faith.

Before you close: write one sentence — what you brought to God today, or what you are still waiting for. Just a marker. You don't have to have an answer.

WEEK 4 — PRAYING FOR THE WORLD

Practice: Intercession

Passage: Psalm 72

Read Psalm 72 in full before beginning.

A note before you begin: Intercession is not wishful thinking. It is not a spiritual version of worrying about others. It is kingdom prayer — praying with the Son for what the Father has already promised. Psalm 72 is a royal psalm: a prayer for the king to reign with justice, defend the poor, and bless the nations. The New Testament writers read it as pointing toward Christ's kingdom. When we intercede, we are praying toward a future that is already secured.

① LECTIO — Read (2–3 minutes)

Read Psalm 72 slowly. Notice what the psalm asks the king to do: defend the afflicted, save the children of the needy, crush the oppressor, bring justice to the mountains and peace to the hills. This is not a modest prayer. Read it a second time.

What word or phrase catches you? It may name something you long to see in the world. It may name someone specific who comes to mind. Hold it.

With Jesus: This psalm is a prayer about a king — and Jesus is that king. When he taught us to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done," he was teaching us to pray Psalm 72. Intercession is not asking God to pay attention to the world's problems. It is joining him in what he is already doing.

② MEDITATIO — Reflect (3–5 minutes)

Sit with your word or phrase. Then consider:

- Who are the "afflicted" and "needy" in your specific orbit — your neighborhood, your city, your congregation?
- The psalm envisions a world where the poor are defended and the oppressor is broken. Where do you most long to see that become true? Let that longing become the substance of your intercession.
- Practicing the Way describes intercession as "praying with God for the world he loves." How does that framing change the way you approach prayer for others — from duty to partnership?

With Jesus: Jesus looks at the crowds and has compassion — because they are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Before you intercede for the world, ask: what does Jesus see when he looks at the people on your heart? Let his compassion shape your prayer.

③ ORATIO — Respond (3–5 minutes)

Name the people, places, and situations you are carrying. Don't make a list and move through it quickly. Choose two or three and stay with each one long enough to actually feel the weight of it before you pray. Pray specifically. Pray for what you actually want God to do.

Draw on what you've been building in prior weeks:

- What have you learned to notice (Week 1) that you can now pray for?
- What honesty (Week 2) have you brought to God that now frees you to pray for others?
- What grief or desolation (Week 3) can now be turned outward in prayer for those who suffer?

With Jesus: You are praying with the one who ever lives to intercede (Hebrews 7:25). Your intercession joins his.

④ CONTEMPLATIO — Rest (5–10 minutes | Extended Path only)

Rest in the confidence that the King reigns. You are not holding the world together by your prayers. You are entrusting it to the one who is. Set down the weight. Be still in the certainty of his kingdom.

Before you close: write one sentence — who or what you brought to God today, and what you asked him to do.

WEEK 5 — A LIFE OF PRAYER

Practice: Integration — the whole vocabulary, held together

Passage: Psalm 27

Read Psalm 27 in full before beginning.

A note before you begin: Psalm 27 is a remarkable psalm because it holds everything at once — confidence and fear, longing and trust, petition and praise, the experience of God's presence and the ache of his hiddenness. It does not resolve the tension neatly. It ends not with arrival but with waiting: "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." This is the sound of a mature prayer life. Not all answers, but all of the person brought to God.

① LECTIO — Read (2–3 minutes)

Read Psalm 27 slowly. Let yourself feel its range — the bold confidence of verse 1 (The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?), the deep longing of verse 4 (to gaze on the beauty of the Lord), the honest vulnerability of verse 9 (Do not hide your face from me), the act of will in verse 13 (I remain confident of this), and the discipline of verse 14 (Wait for the Lord). Read it a second time.

What word or phrase from anywhere in the psalm catches you today? Hold it.

With Jesus: In Gethsemane, Jesus brought fear, longing, petition, trust, and surrender to the Father in a single prayer — "Not my will, but yours be done." Psalm 27 is the sound of that kind of prayer. It does not perform peace it does not have. It brings everything, and it stays.

② MEDITATIO — Reflect (3–5 minutes)

Sit with your word or phrase. Then consider:

- **Look back over the five weeks.** Which of the prayer practices — praise, gratitude, confession, lament, intercession — has felt most natural to you? Which has felt most foreign or difficult?
- **Verse 4 expresses a singular desire:** "to gaze on the beauty of the Lord." What would it mean for that to be the organizing desire of your prayer life — not a list of requests, but a longing for God himself?

- Verse 14 ends with waiting. Where in your life right now are you being asked to wait on God? What does it mean to wait with strength rather than anxiety?

With Jesus: Practicing the Way describes contemplation as "receiving God's love pouring out toward you in Christ, and giving your love back in return." This week, let that be the frame: prayer is not primarily a transaction — it is a relationship. You have been learning a language. The language is for being with him.

③ ORATIO — Respond (5–8 minutes)

This week, let your prayer hold the whole vocabulary you have been building. Move through the practices as they arise naturally:

Begin with praise — even a single line of acknowledgment of who God is.

Move to gratitude — name something specific from your week.

Make space for confession — anything that needs to be brought clean.

If there is grief or pain or unresolved longing — bring it as lament. Don't skip past it.

Intercede — name the people and places you are carrying.

Then simply rest — in the presence of the one you have been addressing.

You don't need to hit every movement every time. But notice which ones you habitually skip. Those are often the ones you most need.

With Jesus: You are not praying alone now, and you will not be praying alone next week, or next year. Jesus ever lives to intercede (Hebrews 7:25). You are joining what he is already doing.

④ CONTEMPLATIO — Rest (5–10 minutes | Extended Path only)

This week, rest is the practice. You have been building and learning. Now simply be present. No agenda. No performance. Just the quiet company of God.

If your mind wanders, return to the single word or phrase you held in Lectio. Let it be an anchor.

Before you close: write two sentences — one about where you started five weeks ago, and one about where you are now. Not a tidy testimony. Just an honest marker.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

The prayer vocabulary you have been building — praise, gratitude, confession, lament, intercession — is not a six-week course. It is a language for a lifetime. The Psalms are not a text you finish; they are a prayer book you return to.

Here are three next steps for continuing the practice:

1. Keep praying the Psalms. Read one psalm slowly each week using these four movements. The Psalter has 150 psalms — enough for years of this kind of prayer.
2. Go deeper with these resources:
 - Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* — an accessible and honest invitation into a life of prayer, with particular depth on lament and contemplation.
 - *Practicing the Way, The Prayer Practice* — a structured course for building daily prayer rhythms, available at practicingtheway.org/prayer. Staton's book is the companion read for this course.
 - *24-7 Prayer, The Lectio Course* — a group-based course led by Pete Greig for learning to hear God through lectio divina, available at 24-7prayer.com.
3. Consider a rule of life. A rule of life is a simple, intentional rhythm for keeping prayer central rather than occasional. *Practicing the Way* has a free Rule of Life resource at practicingtheway.org to help you build one.

The invitation of this series has always been the same: not to pray better, but to be with Jesus. Keep showing up to that.