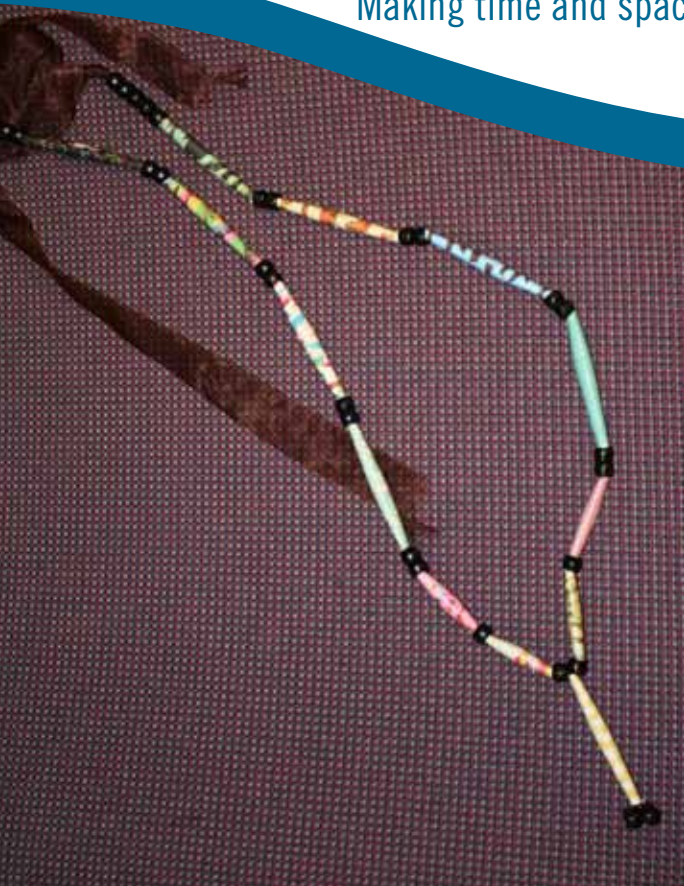


A Thoughtful Prayer Life

Making time and space for what matters



**Prayer is everything the
soul does in God's word.**
—*Martin Luther*

What is a thoughtful prayer life? Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer had a few things to say about that. Prayer is a very personal experience and a heartfelt discussion can generate new insights or stir powerful memories for those participating. After discussing prayer through the lens of the Luther and Bonhoeffer readings, you'll encounter a peaceful way to digest the readings in this resource and your discussions, making important connections as prayerful individuals, by creating prayer beads.

Opening prayer

Creator God,

As we gather together today, let our hearts be opened to receive and share our innermost thoughts about prayer. Draw us into your loving arms, allowing us to revel in the assurance that when we speak our heart in prayer, we are whispering in your ear. Let our minds be free of earthly distraction. In our busy days, or when our journey seems long, or when we feel too tired to come to you in prayer, encourage us, Lord, to find a place of stillness, a place where we can discover anew that you are always with us. In your son's name, amen.

Consider the following questions silently for a few moments before launching into a group discussion.

- How do you think about your prayer life?
- Do you actively participate in prayer or have you fallen into some habits or patterns?
- When was the last time you were able to give the idea of prayer much thought?

Martin Luther

Martin Luther's short guide to prayer, *A Simple Way to Pray*, was written in response to a question from his barber about how he should pray.

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, "Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that." Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.

It may well be that you may have some tasks which are as good or better than prayer, especially in an

emergency. There is a saying ascribed to St. Jerome that everything a believer does is prayer and a proverb, "He who works faithfully prays twice." This can be said because a believer fears and honors God in his work and remembers the commandment not to wrong anyone, or to try to steal, defraud, or cheat. Such thoughts and such faith undoubtedly transform his work into prayer and a sacrifice of praise.

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How to Use This Resource

This resource is written for use with a group. Depending on how many people are participating, allow up to an hour for the group study (two readings and the related discussion questions). Allow another hour for the prayer bead activity. You may wish to divide your space into two areas—one for the discussion and another for the bead-making activity.

Materials Needed

For the group study: Each participant will need a pen and a copy of this resource.

For the bead-making activity: You will need a good supply of triangular paper strips (that can be made from magazines, newspapers, plain paper, wrapping paper, scrapbooking paper, etc.); toothpicks, plastic coffee stirrers or thin wooden skewers; glue sticks; and string, hemp, leather cord or yarn for stringing together. If you want the participants to cut their own strips, you will need plenty of scissors. Rotary cutters can be used with cutting mats and plastic rulers (the kind used in quilting) to cut triangles too.

Varnishing the beads is optional. If you would like to varnish the beads, you will need to have clear nail polish or decoupage glue and small brushes available.

When the discussion has ended, make a transition to the bead-making activity. If you have the space to set up the materials beforehand, that is recommended.

If you do not have the space or time does not allow, take a moment to review what materials are on hand with those present. Make sure copies of the instructions are on the work area.

Discuss

1. Do you pray in the morning? In the evening?
2. What are the “deluding ideas” that keep you from prayer?
3. What are some of the “emergencies” which could be considered “as good or better” than prayer?
4. Are there times when you are at work that you feel particularly prayerful? What sort of work makes you feel as if you are praising God?
5. As you review this reading, does anything else resonate with you? How might this piece impact how you think about creating a time and space to pray?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The following is from a letter Bonhoeffer wrote to his friend Eberhard Bethge while in prison.

January 29th and 30th, 1944

When I think of you every morning and evening, I have to try very hard not to let all my thoughts dwell on the many cares and anxieties that beset you, instead of praying for you properly. In that connection I must talk to you some time about prayer in time of trouble; it's a difficult matter, and yet our misgivings about it may not be good. Psalm 50 says quite clearly, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.' The whole history of the children of Israel consists of such cries for help. And I must say that the last two nights have made me face this problem again in a quite elementary way. While the bombs are falling like that all round the building, I cannot help thinking of God, his judgment, his hand stretched out and his anger not turned away (Isa. 5:25 and 9:11-10:4), and of my own unpreparedness. I feel how men can make vows, and then I think of you all and say, 'better me than one of them' – and that

makes me realize how attached I am to you all. I won't say anything more about it – it will have to be by word of mouth; but when all is said and done, it's true that it needs trouble to shake us up and drive us to prayer, though I feel every time that it is something to be ashamed of, as indeed it is. That may be because I haven't so far been able to say a Christian word to the others at such a moment. As we were again lying on the floor last night, and someone exclaimed 'O God, O God' (he is normally a very flippant type), I couldn't bring myself to offer him any Christian encouragement or comfort; all I did was look at my watch and say, 'It won't last more than ten minutes now.' There was nothing premeditated about it; it came quite automatically, and perhaps I felt that it was wrong to force religion down his throat just then. (Incidentally, Jesus didn't try to convert the two thieves on the cross; one of them just turned to him!)

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Discuss

1. **When you pray are you sometimes led by your anxieties? What do you do to refocus your thoughts on prayer?**

2. **We have all experienced how times of trouble drive us to prayer. Do you also feel, like Bonhoeffer, that this is something to be ashamed of? Why or why not?**

3. **Have you ever been in a situation in which you felt that you should speak to someone about your faith, but found yourself unable to? Did you learn anything from the experience?**

4. **As you review this reading, does anything else resonate with you? How might this piece impact how you think about creating a time and space to pray?**

Prayer Beads

Making and using prayer beads allows us to share a tangible reminder of our time together and the prayerful issues we have as individuals and as a community. Follow these simple instructions.

1. Use pre-cut paper (long triangular strips) or cut strips from the paper supplied. Vary the size of the triangle. The wider the strip the longer the bead will be. Try creating triangles from rectangles cut in these sizes: 1" by 4", 1 1/2" by 6" or 2 1/2" by 8".
You may wish to make your own design if using plain paper. A detailed pattern will appear more intricate on the finished product, but simple beads are beautiful, too.
2. On one side of the triangular strip, write a prayer, reflection, poem or a few words. As you consider what to write, bear in mind the earlier discussions.
3. Meditating on what you have written, prepare to roll the strip into a bead. You will need the strip, glue and a toothpick or wooden skewer (or even a plastic coffee stirrer) for this process. Starting at the wide edge, apply a thin line of glue to the side of the triangular strip that you do not want to be visible.



- Starting at the wide end, begin rolling the paper around the toothpick or skewer. The paper will wrap around itself, making an elongated bead. Continue to roll until the entire strip is wrapped into the bead. Slide it off the toothpick or skewer and set aside to dry. Repeat steps 1 – 4 as many times as you wish. The more you make, the easier it becomes.

OPTIONAL step: The beads do not need to be sealed, but can be coated in decoupage glue or another type of varnish. If you want to seal them it is easy to also experiment with different inks and glitter. Drying time will differ depending on the type of varnish used, but is usually around 10 minutes.

- If you wish, share beads with one another before stringing them together.
- To string the beads into a necklace, bracelet or a prayer rope, first cut a piece of string or yarn to the desired length. Hemp or leather cord could also be used. The size of the bead will determine the thickness of the string, yarn, hemp or leather cord. Make a knot about an inch away from one end. (The knot will need to be larger than the center of your first bead.) Slide on the first bead. Depending how long your string is and how many beads you have, you can knot the string along the way in between the beads. Tying a good end knot, leave about an inch at this end of the string as well. If you desire, you can later add a cross or other item at the end of your prayer rope.
- When you pray, you may wish to hold the prayer beads and remember the notes you and the others tucked inside each one. This purposeful action can help you remember to pray for those who may be out of sight or about things that may be out of mind.

However you use your beads, thank God for the time

to be thoughtful about your prayer life and for the wonderful gift of prayer.

Online resources for additional bead-making and stringing help

Step-by-step instructions for tying and knotting prayer ropes can be found at

<http://nathanielandsarah.wikidot.com/main:how-to-beads>

Here are two resource for praying with prayer ropes :

<http://www.giftsoffaith.com/Files/ChristianPrayerBeads.pdf>

http://www.ctepiscopal.org/Content/Prayer_Beads.asp

Here are two links to videos that demonstrate how to make paper beads:

<http://gomakesomething.com/ht/recycled/paper-beads/>

<http://www.5min.com/Video/How-to-Make-a-Colorful-Paper-Beads-Necklace-315050943>

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A Thoughtful Prayer Life was written by Mary Button.

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