

that in God "we live and move and have our being." The Prayer of the Heart is a way of simply being in God's presence and drawing by faith on the wellspring of God's love.

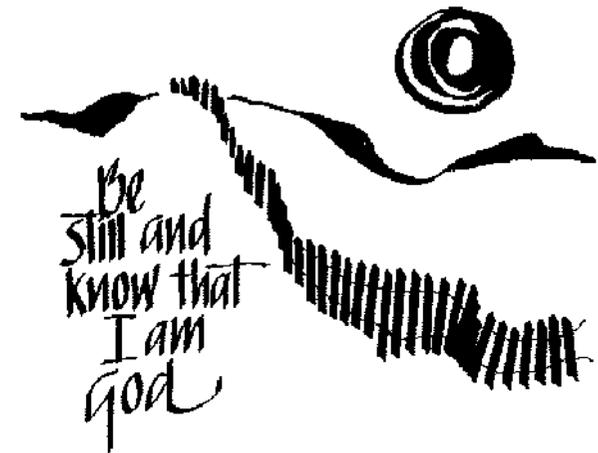
6. If you find yourself distracted, or your thoughts wander, gently choose to bring your focus back to your prayer. As someone has said, even if you have to return a hundred times from distractions to prayer, that represents a hundred decisions for God!
7. If complete silence is very difficult you could try having some quiet, non-intrusive music playing. It is best to use music without lyrics, as the words might tend to become the focus of your praying, rather than allowing that to emerge naturally from within you.



*Feel free to reproduce these guidelines for your own use or to give to others*

# Prayer of the Heart

an ancient way  
to pray



## PRAYER OF THE HEART

The Desert Fathers of the early centuries of the church, and the Eastern Orthodox Church which draws on that heritage, have a lot to teach us about prayer. In particular, they practiced what is known as "Prayer of the Heart."

The aim is to spend time in quiet meditation and prayer until our prayer deepens into our hearts and stays with us as we go into the activity of our day. (This is a bit like what happens when you hear a song playing on a CD or the radio in the morning and then later in the day find that this same song is playing quietly inside you, without you deliberately thinking about it!)

Being the busy, noisy people we are, this kind of silent prayer can be hard to get used to at first. But with a bit of practice, and trying it in small doses at first, it can be a very helpful balance to our distracted, fragmented lives.

Here are some simple guidelines for practicing the Prayer of the Heart:

1. Relax and still your body. Let your breathing settle into a normal, steady rhythm.

As you breathe in, be aware that you are breathing in and receiving the love of God for you.

As you breathe out, allow yourself to breathe out your tension, fears, hurts, sin, etc, letting them go to God.

2. Choose a short phrase which expresses the prayer of your heart right now. Take time to let a phrase develop within you.

It is best to let it be something simple like . . .

*"Come Lord Jesus"*

*"Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me"*

*"Thank you Lord"*

An ancient prayer used by Orthodox Christians is the "Jesus Prayer":

*"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
have mercy on me, a sinner".*

This prayer can be used in rhythm with your breathing ...

<i>Lord Jesus Christ</i>	[breathe in - the presence of Christ]
<i>Son of God</i>	[breathe out - your declaration]
<i>have mercy on me</i>	[breathe in - the mercy of God]
<i>a sinner</i>	[breathe out - your confession]

3. Repeat your short prayer phrase slowly, either softly aloud or inwardly. Allow the source of your praying to deepen steadily from your head to your heart. It may help to let the rhythm of your prayer match the rhythm of your breathing, as suggested above.
4. Continue this loving repetition of the prayer during your time of silent prayer. Before you start, decide how long you will spend and then stick to it. At first you could try this way of praying for about five minutes. Then, as you get used to being in silent prayer, increase the time gradually.
5. You may not feel especially aware of God's presence, or that anything is "happening." Don't worry about that. In this tradition of prayer the emphasis is not on what you do or feel, but on the quiet work of God's Spirit within you. Remember