

## CREATIVE PRAYER

Sally Chambers

**“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for June 22–30, 2015.**

### MAKING THE CONNECTION

“Mother Teresa was asked the secret to life. She answered, ‘prayer.’ I remember that the first time I heard this; I was puzzled. Prayer was the secret to life—really? At the time, I thought, *Certainly not the way I pray, with my lists of petitions and thanksgivings.* Then began my journey of discovery with prayer. After a few years of searching, practicing, reading, listening, and writing, I realized, with Mother Teresa, that yes, the secret to life is prayer; but it’s prayer that is alive, creative, intentional, connecting—so much more than a list of petitions and thanksgivings.” —Sally

### MEET THE WRITER

**Sally Chambers** has been practicing youth ministry for nineteen years as part of her life with God and people; she is currently on sabbatical. By trade, she is a counselor and spiritual director. She is also a lover of art, photography, people, hosting, adventure, stories, a cup of tea, beauty, all things English, her niece and her Grandma, abbey ruins and cathedrals, creation in its grandeur and wildness, playlists, and her furry four-legged companion Doodlebug. Sally is a co-author of the leader’s guide to *The Way of Pilgrimage* and the creator of *The Pilgrim’s Way*, an approach to leading pilgrimage with teenagers and adults. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and is currently on staff and worshipping with St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church. She dreams of creating altars in the world where pilgrims may gather together, rest for a while, find renewed vision, be healed in body, heart, soul, and mind, and offer to the world the hope of God in Jesus Christ. Be sure to check out Sally’s blog at <https://justsally.wordpress.com>.

### STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- a candle
- lighter
- newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- pictures of a Jewish prayer shawl

## PLUGGED IN

The Internet is full of creative prayer ideas.

- + Lilly Lewin co-wrote a book called *Sacred Space: A Hands-On Guide to Creating Multisensory Worship Experiences for Youth Ministry* (<http://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Space-Hands-On-Multisensory-Experiences/dp/0310271118>). Her blog, *Lily's Pad* (<http://aidanslegacy.typepad.com>), includes all sorts of creative prayer ideas.
- + "12 Creative Prayer Ideas to Shake up Your Prayer Life!" at *Big Fat Toothbrush* (<http://bigfattoothbrush.com/2013/05/12-creative-prayer-ideas/>)
- + "How to Pray Creatively" at *24-7 Prayer* (<https://www.24-7prayer.com/prayer/howtopraycreatively>)
- + *Labyrinth* offers an online creative prayer journey at <http://www.labyrinth.org.uk/onlinelabyrinthpage1.html>.

## CHECKING IN

Bring the group together. Invite group members to say responsively:

*The Lord be with you.*

**And also with you.**

Have someone light a candle.

Invite group members to close their eyes, to take a deep breath, and to relax. Invite them to pay attention to their breathing. Suggest that as they exhale, they imagine breathing out the distractions that occupy space in their mind, body, and spirit. Suggest that as they inhale, they imagine breathing in the peace of God. Repeat the process for a minute or two in the quiet.

Ask each person to say his or her name and to answer these questions:

**If you spent an afternoon doing something creative, what would you do?**

**Would it be a pleasurable or a grueling task? Why?**

Introduce the session saying something like this: *"Today we are going to talk about prayer, focusing more specifically on praying creatively."*

Write at the top of a sheet of newsprint the word "prayer." Ask:

**What is prayer?**

Encourage group members to think creatively. Write down all the answers.

Then ask:

**Why is prayer important?**

**Why should prayer be something we do every day?**

Again, write down all the answers.

Sum up the group's answers, saying something like this: "*Prayer is more than talking to God. It is also listening to God, which means being quiet. Prayer could include praying with scripture, icons, or prayer beads. It could involve writing in a journal. We can pray alone or with other people. There are endless ways to pray.*"

Invite the group to think about praying creatively.

## **EXPLORING THE WORD**

**Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:5, Numbers 15: 37–41, Luke 10:27**

**Deuteronomy 6:5 (NRSV):** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

**Luke 10:27 (NIV):** He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind."

**Numbers 15:37-41 (*The Message*):** God spoke to Moses: "Speak to the People of Israel. Tell them that from now on they are to make tassels on the corners of their garments and to mark each corner tassel with a blue thread. When you look at these tassels you'll remember and keep all the commandments of God, and not get distracted by everything you feel or see that seduces you into infidelities. The tassels will signal remembrance and observance of all my commandments, to live a holy life to God. I am your God who rescued you from the land of Egypt to be your personal God. Yes, I am God, your God."

Distribute Bibles. If you do not have *The Message* version of the Bible from which to read, make copies of Numbers 15:37–41 above and distribute them to the group.

Invite one person to read aloud the verse from Deuteronomy and another to read aloud the verse from Luke. Ask the group to put the verses in context.

**What happens before and after each verse?**

Say: "*Several heroes of the Christian tradition say that prayer is simply turning the heart toward God.*"

**How do these two scripture verses connect with prayer?** (Loving God is another way of turning our hearts toward God. So we could say that loving God is a way of praying.)

**How do we love God—or in light of the conversation we are having, how do we pray?** (with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our strength/body, and with all of our mind)

**What does loving God with all you heart, soul, strength, and mind mean?** (with all of our faculties. Don't limit prayer or loving God to something you say or think; get creative: use your fingers, your feelings, your imagination, your passion, your gifts, your knowledge, your skill, your feet.)

Say: *“What matters is not so much what you do, but that you are loving God, that your heart is turned toward God in whatever you do.”*

Have someone read the selection from Numbers. Have a second person read it again. Then ask:

**What’s going on here? Why does God tell the people to put tassels and a blue thread on their garments?** (God knew they would get distracted and forget about being God’s people.)

Explain about the tallis, the Jewish prayer shawl: *“In Biblical times, men wore their prayer shawls everywhere. The word tallis actually means ‘little tent.’ God gave each person a little tent within which to meet with God. Even today many Jewish people wear a tallis over their heads, creating their own personal tent for prayer.”* (It might be helpful to have a picture of a tallis and how a Jew wears one during prayer.)

Say: *“God is creative with prayer. God says, ‘I know your minds are going wander; you are going to get distracted and forget, so let me help you. Let’s make something that helps you meet with me.’”*

**What are some creative ways to meet with God?**

**What helps you stay focused and not get distracted?**

**What helps you remember God?**

Say: *“God tells us to pray with all of our faculties, to be creative, and not to pray only with our mind and our mouth. Then God takes it one step further. God says that we are going to need creative, tactile ways of praying so that we are not distracted or bored.”*

Invite the group to brainstorm and to make a list of some creative ways to pray.

## **SHARING IN PRAYER**

Explain that you are going to lead the group in a body prayer. Then you will invite group members to take a five-minute walk. (Be sure to establish the boundaries of the walk.) During the five minutes, group members should pay attention to what they see, hear, smell, and touch as they walk quietly by themselves. Walking will be a prayer. After 5 minutes, you will call the group back together.

Begin by inviting the group to say responsively,

*The Lord be with you.*

**And also with you.**

Then say and do the following body prayer, having the group repeat each phrase after you.

Place both hands on your head and say, *“God be in my head and my understanding.”*

Place both hands on your ears and say, *“God be in my ears and in my hearing.”*

Place both hands on your mouth and say, *“God be in my mouth and in my speaking.”*

Place both hands on your eyes and say, *“God be in my eyes and in my seeing.”*

Place both hands on your heart and say, *“God be in my heart and in my knowing.”*

Repeat the prayer two more times. Then send the group members on a prayer walk.

After five minutes, call them back together to discuss these questions:

**What did you notice as you walked?**

**What feelings or thoughts did you experience?**

**What was it like to pray as you walked?**

Remind the group that there are many creative ways to pray.

Conclude the session with this prayer from the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*:

*“Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray you, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”*

### **TAKING IT FURTHER**

- Invite group members to choose a creative prayer to practice together during the week—for example, they might decide to write on their toothbrushes the names of three people they want to remember to pray for while they brush their teeth.
- At one of your next sessions, set up your space with four or five different stations, each teaching a different practice of creative prayer. Play soft meditative music in the background. Invite group members to move through the stations at their own pace. Conclude the time with some discussion about the experience. “Prayer Stations and Creative Prayer: Creative Ways to Pray to God” (<https://www.pinterest.com/elaynewerges/prayer-stations-and-creative-prayer/>) is one place to start looking for ideas.

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