

## PRAYING WITH BEADS

In the book of Exodus we read of the Israelites leaving Egypt. They were headed for the Promised Land, a land that God had set aside for them, a land filled with opportunity. The Israelites were full of hope.

But the hard and long journey lasted for forty years. As the people traveled across a desert, they experienced hunger, thirst, heat exhaustion, danger, and sometimes even death. Over time they became fearful and wondered whether God had abandoned them. In their anger and hopelessness they built false idols and began to break the commandments.

Seeing their desperation, God spoke to Moses and instructed the Israelites to take the fringe on their clothing and hold onto it. As they did, God encouraged them to remember the commandments they had been given. Doing so would make them holy and help them remain mindful of God's claim on their lives: "I am the LORD your God" (Num. 15:41).

Fringe. It doesn't seem like that would be much help. The Israelites wanted their journey to end. They were ready to reach their destination. What difference would it make to hold fringe?

God knew that at that time all garments were made with fringe. Every man, woman, and child would have had fringe on his or her clothing. And even though God had promised to be with the Isra-

elites—indeed God was leading them to the very land that held God’s promise—God understood their humanity. God realized that their overbearing focus on hunger and thirst and fear would cause them to forget God’s promise. God acknowledged the people’s need for a physical object to remind them of God’s presence. The fringe served as their call to remember that God remained as close to them as the strands hanging at their sides.

As you journey to your new destination, you may experience worry, fear, or discouragement. You may even wonder whether God is with you. Prayer beads can be your fringe. They can serve as a physical reminder of God’s presence with you. They can help you pray and remember God’s promise of deep love for you.

Since the early church, many Christians have found beads to be a wonderful aid to prayer. The beads can help in many ways:

1. Like the fringe for the Israelites, beads can help you feel connected to God. When you feel stressed or afraid you can hold them and know that God is with you.
2. If you struggle with prayer—if you don’t know what to say, for instance—you can use the beads to guide you in prayer. We have provided some sample prayers below.
3. If your mind begins to wander while you are in

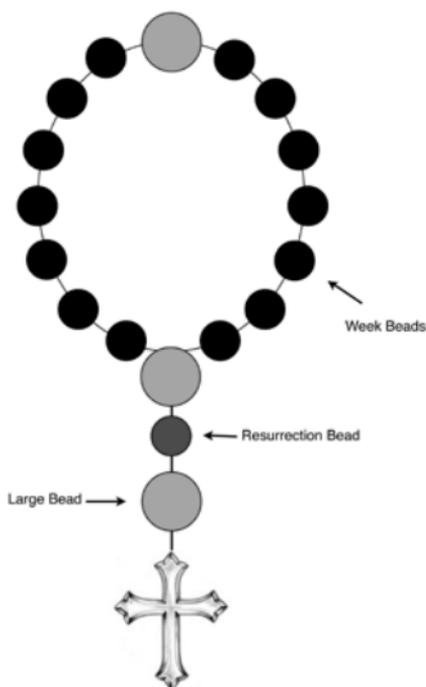
prayer, the feel of the beads between your fingers can help you refocus.

The prayer beads you have offer a great deal of symbolism and meaning:

- the Cross reminds us of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us, the ultimate display of God's great love for us;
- the Resurrection bead reminds us of God's gift of eternal life;
- the three large beads remind us of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; and
- the week beads remind us of God's presence with us every day, every week of our lives.

There is no wrong way to use beads in prayer. But the beads are designed to go in a circle. You can begin by holding the cross and beginning your prayer. Then move to each bead in order around the circle and come back around to end with the cross. Pause at each bead around the circle and pray as you feel moved.

On the next page are sample ways of using the beads to pray to God. As you become more comfortable with the beads, you may discover your own ways of praying with them. We hope these beads richly enhance your prayer life, reminding you of God's abiding presence in your life and on your journey.



## A PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

**Cross:** Dear God,

**First large bead:** as you guided the Israelites through the desert,

**Resurrection bead:** please guide me as well.

**Second large bead:** Help me to follow your path for me.

**Week beads, set 1:** Use each bead to ask God to reveal a path for you.

**Third large bead:** Help me to know you are always with me.

**Week beads, set 2:** Use each bead to feel God's presence with you.

**Resurrection bead:** I pray this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ,

**Invitatory bead:** my help and my guide.

**Cross:** Amen.

## A PRAYER FOR STRENGTH AND COURAGE

**Cross:** God our Father,

**First large bead:** in your mercy,

**Resurrection bead:** I pray that you will help me on this journey.

**Second large bead:** Lord, I am afraid [or tired or in pain, etc.]

**Week beads, set 1:** Use each bead to share your concerns with God.

**Third large bead:** Grant me courage and strength to make this journey.

**Week beads, set 2:** Use each bead to draw strength and courage from God.

**Resurrection bead:** Be with me each step of the way,

**Invitatory bead:** as you were for your son, Jesus.

**Cross:** Amen.

## USING YOUR PRAYER BEADS TO LISTEN TO GOD

Throughout your journey, there may be times when you want or need to hear words of comfort or strength from God. Prayer beads provide a wonderful tool to help you quiet your mind and listen to God.

The prayer below offers an example for doing that. It gives one simple phrase to repeat with each bead. You can close your eyes, relax, and repeat the phrase until you feel God's presence and hear God's voice. Feel free to use your own phrase or word or favorite line of scripture in place of the phrase provided.

**With each bead:** Lord, please comfort me.