

WEEK 10 How do I keep my prayer life fresh?



As we wrap up our Methodist Way of Life series on Prayer, we want to take everything we have thought out and look to the future. So our aim this week is to challenge people to explore new and diverse ways to pray to keep our spiritual lives fresh and vibrant.



This week's main reading is the Cleansing of the Temple episode from Matthew 21.12-17, as we see how Jesus disrupted the status quo that existed in the devotional life in the Temple in his day.

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the money changers' tables and the benches of those selling doves.

"It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of robbers."

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

"'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?"

And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Possible supplementary readings are 1 Timothy 2.1-6 (the purpose of prayer for the believers) or Nehemiah 1.4-11 (a heartfelt prayer for a new beginning for the people.)

The Psalms also contain lots of potential material.



Key Themes and Lessons

Jesus has just entered Jerusalem, and the temple is the first place He visits. The temple symbolises the spiritual centre of the nation.

As Jesus entered the temple courts, specifically the Court of the Gentiles (the outer part of the temple), he noticed that people were buying and selling animals for sacrifices, and money changers were present.

The temple, meant for worship, has become a marketplace. In a familiar scene that we can all imagine, Jesus drives out the buying and selling, overturning tables and seats.

He quotes from the Scriptures: "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." His actions are intentional and purposeful, not a loss of self-control.

In doing this, Jesus demonstrates how to exercise leadership and authority. He challenges the misuse of the temple space. The temple should be a place of true worship, not mere ritual. By extension, the principle can be applied to our contemporary places of worship, prayer gatherings, small groups, and even our individual lives. Remember that St Paul referred to us as "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 3.16, 2 Corinthians 6.16, Ephesians 2.22)

Practical Application

Here are some ways we can apply the message from Matthew 21:12-17 to our daily lives:

1. Prioritise Authentic Spirituality

Like the temple, our lives should be places of authentic worship.

Action: Prioritise spending time in prayer, meditation, and connecting with God daily. Avoid mere religious routines without genuine heart engagement.

2. Holiness in Our Spaces

Just as Jesus cleansed the temple, we should maintain the holiness of our physical and mental spaces.

Action: We should regularly evaluate our physical and digital surroundings and remove anything distracting from our spiritual growth.

3. Leadership with Purpose

Jesus demonstrated righteous leadership by challenging the misuse of the temple.

Action: We should lead purposefully in our roles (whether at work, home or in the community). We should stand up against injustice and uphold what is right.

4. Anger Directed Toward Injustice

Jesus' anger was directed at the misuse of the temple, not personal grievances.

Action: We channel our anger toward positive change when encountering injustice or wrongdoing. We advocate for justice and compassion.

5. Church as a House of Prayer

The temple was meant to be a house of prayer.

Action: Actively pray, seeking God's guidance, wisdom, and comfort. Encourage others to do the same.

6. Transform Rituals into Meaningful Encounters

Rituals can become empty if devoid of true connection with God.

Action: Approach rituals (such as attending church, reading Scripture, or partaking in communion) with intentionality. Seek to encounter God rather than going through the motions.

Remember that applying these principles involves intentional effort. Let's encourage our people to create sacred spaces both within ourselves AND our communities where worship, authenticity, and purpose thrive.



Infusing creativity into our prayers can deepen our connection with God and make our devotional life more vibrant. There is a plethora of material online to help our people break out of the “prayer rut” and find freshness in their prayer lives.

Here are a few creative ways to pray—feel free to incorporate one or more of these ideas into your teaching around this theme.

1. ACTS or PRAY Method:

- Adoration: Begin by praising and worshipping God. Express your love and awe for His greatness.
- Confession: Confess your sins openly to God. Seek forgiveness and cleansing.
- Thanksgiving: Thank God for His past and future blessings in your life.
- Supplication: Share your prayer requests for yourself and others.

2. Nature Walks:

Pray while walking in nature. Observe God's creation—the trees, flowers, birds, and sky. Let the beauty around you inspire your prayers.

3. Artistic Expression

Express your prayers through drawing, painting, or other art forms. Let your creativity flow as you communicate visually with God.

4. Prayer Jar

Write down your prayers on slips of paper and place them in a jar. Later, reflect on these prayers. It's a tangible way to remember your requests and God's faithfulness.

5. Music

Use worship music or songwriting to guide your prayers. Sing your prayers, or let the lyrics inspire your conversation with God.

6. Prayer Objects:

Look around your environment. Is there an object you can use to symbolise your prayers? For example, you could Light a candle to symbolise your prayers rising to God.

7. Stones or Pebbles

Hold a stone and pray for someone or something associated with it.

8. Photos

Pray for people in your life as you look at their photos.

9. Pray with Your Hands

Assign each finger a specific prayer focus:

- Thumb: Pray for those closest to you (family and friends).
- Index finger: Pray for those who teach (teachers, mentors, leaders).
- Middle finger: Pray for those in authority (government, leaders).
- Ring finger: Pray for those who are weak or in need.
- Pinky finger: Pray for yourself and your personal needs.

10. Visual Prayer Journal:

Create a visual journal that combines images, drawings, and written prayers. Capture moments, emotions, and reflections.

11. Pray Through Scripture

Choose a Bible verse or passage and pray through it. Let God's Word guide your prayers.

12. Silent Prayer

Sometimes, silence speaks louder than words. Sit quietly in God's presence, listening for His voice.

Remember that creativity in prayer is about expressing our hearts to God. Experimenting with different methods and allowing your creativity to draw you closer to Him is good.

Online resources

Here are some websites that offer a range of spiritual resources, ideas and creative inspiration for helping people break out of a dry or arid spiritual prayer life.

Creative Prayer: <https://www.creativeprayer.co.uk/>

24/7 Prayer: https://www.24-7prayer.com/prayer_guide/pray-creatively/

Jesus Prayer Ministry: <https://jesusprayerministry.com/inspirational-prayer-activities/>

80 Reflective Prayer Ideas <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/stories/creative-prayer>

How to get started with contemplative prayer: <https://guidedchristianmeditation.com/2515/meditation/what-is-contemplative-prayer-and-how-to-do-a-contemplative-prayer-practice/>

Blog posts about bringing new life to our prayers

12 ways to revive a dying prayer life <https://olufemibabalola.substack.com/p/12-ways-to-quickly-revive-a-dead-dying>

When you need to revive your prayer life: <https://faithspillingover.com/2019/04/09/revive-prayer-life/>

Ten ways to boost your prayer life: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/ways-to-amp-up-your-prayer-life.html>



Quotes you can use

“Humility—coming before God with a proper understanding of His greatness—is the key to improving one’s prayer life and developing a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.” — Francis Chan

“Work, work, from morning until late at night. I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer.” —Martin Luther.

“Any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be made into a burden.” —Corrie Ten Boom.

“Don’t worry about having the right words; worry more about having the right heart. It’s not eloquence he seeks, just honesty.” —Max Lucado.

“If you only pray when you feel like it, Satan will make sure you never feel like it.” —Rick Warren.

Prayer is not a hard requirement - it is the natural duty of a creature to its creator, the simplest homage that human need can pay to divine liberality. — Charles Spurgeon.

“I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.— Abraham Lincoln.

“Prayer means that, in some unique way, we believe we're invited into a relationship with someone who hears us when we speak in silence.” – Anne Lamott.



Here’s a possible outline for a sermon that encourages people to clear out the spiritual clutter and make a fresh start with their prayer lives.

Introduction:

Start with a relatable story or anecdote about feeling stuck in a rut with prayer. Highlight the importance of prayer in our spiritual lives and the frustration that can come when it feels stagnant.

Introduce the concept of clearing out spiritual clutter to make room for a deeper connection with God.

The Cleansing of the Temple (Matthew 21:12-17)

Discuss the story of Jesus cleansing the temple, emphasising the significance of clearing out what doesn't belong.

Draw parallels between the physical temple and our spiritual lives, highlighting the need to clear out distractions and obstacles to prayer.

Encourage listeners to reflect on what spiritual clutter might hinder their prayer lives.

Three Creative Ideas:

a. **Prayer Journaling:** Encourage people to start a prayer journal where they can write down their thoughts, prayers, and reflections daily. Suggest prompts like gratitude lists, prayers for others, and reflections on Scripture.

b. **Prayer Walks:** Encourage people to take prayer walks in nature or around their neighbourhood. Encourage them to use this time to talk to God, listen to His voice, and pray for the community's needs.

c. **Prayer Partner** Encourage people to find a prayer partner with whom they can regularly pray and hold each other accountable. Encourage them to share prayer requests and encourage each other in their prayer lives. This can provide support and accountability as they seek to revitalise their prayer lives together.

Challenge

Challenge listeners to choose ONE of the creative ideas presented and commit to trying it in the next week.

Emphasise the importance of stepping out of their comfort zones and trying something new to revitalise their prayer lives.

Offer support and encouragement for those who may find it challenging, reminding them that God is always present and eager to deepen His relationship with them through prayer.

Recap the sermon's main points, emphasising the importance of clearing out spiritual clutter to make room for a deeper prayer life.

Offer a closing prayer, asking for God's guidance and blessing as listeners revitalise their prayer lives.



Suggested Hymns and Songs

STF H&P

692	784	Thy hand, O God, has guided
409		Let us build a house where love can dwell
106	29	Thou whose Almighty Word
781		Take O take me as I am
34	505	O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness
83	13	Praise my soul, the king of heaven
462		Come with me, come wander
99	329	All creatures of our God and king
88	16	Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Call to Worship

Leader: As we gather in this sacred space today, let us come with open hearts and minds, ready to encounter the presence of our loving Creator.

Response: We come, seeking renewal and revitalisation in our prayer lives.

Leader: Just as Jesus cleansed the temple, clearing out what did not belong, let us also clear out the clutter in our hearts and minds, making room for a deeper connection with God.

Response: May our worship today be a sanctuary where we encounter the divine, free from distractions and hindrances.

Leader: Together, let us lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving, knowing that God hears our prayers and delights in our worship.

Response: Amen. Let our worship begin.

Prayer of Approach

Gracious and Loving God, as we gather in your presence today, we come before you, acknowledging the clutter that often fills our lives and hinders our connection with you.

Like Jesus, who cleansed the temple, we ask for your help clearing the distractions and obstacles that keep us from fully experiencing your presence. Grant us the courage to let go of anything that hinders our relationship with you, whether it be busyness, worry, doubt, or sin.

Lord, help us embrace creativity in our prayer lives and explore new ways of communicating with you. Open our eyes to see the beauty of your creation, our ears to hear the whispers of your Spirit, and our hearts to feel the depths of your love.

May this time of worship be a sanctuary where we encounter you in fresh and meaningful ways. Fill us with your peace, joy, and presence as we lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

Penitence

Leader: Let us now come before our God, acknowledging the clutter that fills our hearts and minds and hinders our relationship with Him. As we confess our shortcomings, let us seek His cleansing and renewal.

Response: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy.

Leader: For the times when our lives are overwhelmed with busyness and distractions, preventing us from spending time in prayer and communion with God,

Response: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy.

Leader: For the times when our souls are burdened with sin and wrongdoing, separating us from the presence of our holy God,

Response: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy.

Leader: May the God of all mercy forgive us, cleanse us, and renew us so that we may be free from the clutter that binds us and fully embrace His love and grace.

Response: Amen.

Collect

Eternal God, in the busyness of our lives,
we often lose sight of your presence
and forget to make space for you in our hearts.
Grant us the courage to clear away all that distracts us,
so that we may fully experience your love and grace.
Renew our spirits, O Lord,
and guide us in the ways of prayer and devotion,
that we may draw closer to you each day.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen.

Intercessions

1. For the Church:

Let us pray for the Church that it may continually seek new streams of living water to quench the thirst of souls and renew its mission to spread the gospel. May it be a beacon of hope and inspiration, drawing people closer to God through vibrant worship, fervent prayer, and acts of compassion. May leaders and members alike be filled with wisdom and discernment, seeking innovative ways to engage with the community and share the love of Christ. Lord, guide your Church in the path of renewal and revival and know that it may be a source of life and transformation for all who seek you.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our Prayer

2. For the World:

Let us pray for the world that it may find new streams of living water amidst the parched landscapes of despair and strife. May nations unite and cooperate to address the pressing issues of our time, including poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation. May your Spirit inspire leaders to work for peace and reconciliation, and may individuals be empowered to make a positive difference in their communities. Lord, pour your living water upon the earth, refreshing and renewing all creation with your grace and mercy.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our Prayer

3. For Our Loved Ones:

Let us pray for our loved ones so they may find fresh impetus in their prayers and experience the richness of your presence in their lives. May those struggling find comfort and strength in your love, and may those searching encounter you in new and profound ways. Grant healing to the sick, comfort to the grieving, and guidance to those facing difficult decisions. Lord, surround our loved ones with your grace and mercy and lead them to deeper intimacy with you.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our Prayer

4. For Ourselves:

Let us pray for ourselves that we may be open to the movement of your Spirit and find new streams of living water to quench our spiritual thirst. May we be willing to let go of old habits and patterns that hinder our relationship with you, and may we be receptive to the fresh impetus you offer us in our prayers. Grant us the courage to step out in faith, trusting that you will lead us to abundant life. Lord, refresh us with your living water and renew us with your presence each day.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our Prayer

5. For Personal Renewal:

Let us pray for personal renewal in our prayer lives so that we may find fresh impetus to seek you with all our hearts. Help us overcome distractions and busyness, carving out sacred space for communion with you. May we be inspired by your Word and led by your Spirit as we pray and meditate. Grant us a deeper understanding of your love and a greater passion for your kingdom. Lord, revive us with your living water and empower us to live as faithful disciples in the world.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our Prayer

Prayers of Sending Out or Blessing

Gracious God, we thank you for the time we have shared together in worship and prayer. As we go forth from this place, may we carry with us the light of your love and the warmth of your presence. Grant us the courage to be your hands and feet in the world, reaching out to those in need and sharing the good news of your grace. Bless our efforts, O Lord, and guide us in the path of mission and service. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

or

Heavenly Father, as we depart from this time of prayer and reflection, we ask for your guidance and direction in all we do. Lead us by your Spirit so that we may walk in truth and righteousness. Grant us wisdom to discern your will and courage to follow where you lead. May your presence go with us, O Lord, and may your peace dwell within us always. In Jesus' name, we pray.
Amen.

or

Loving God, we thank you for our fellowship in this sacred space. As we leave this place, may the bonds of friendship and community strengthened today continue to grow and flourish. Bless us with hearts of compassion and minds of understanding so that we may support and encourage one another on our journey of faith. May the peace of Christ be with us always, guiding and sustaining us in every moment.
Amen.



Prayer Activity

As we consider keeping our prayer life fresh this week, it seems appropriate to push ourselves from our "comfort zone" and try something different.

Here are a few options to offer people. Different people will connect with different forms of this kind of prayer, so be sure to offer lots of options.

- Create a small altar outdoors using natural elements like stones, flowers, or branches, and use it as a sacred space for prayer and reflection.
- Pray with a set of prayer beads or a rosary, moving from one bead to the next with each prayer or meditation.
- Spend time tending to a garden or houseplants, using the act of nurturing living things as a form of prayer and connection to the divine.
- Use art supplies like paint, markers, or clay to create visual expressions of your prayers, letting your creativity serve as a form of worship.
- Take a contemplative walk in nature, focusing on the beauty around you as a way to connect with the divine. Notice the details of plants, animals, and the landscape, and offer prayers of gratitude or reflection as you observe.
- Listen to sacred music or chant mantras that resonate with you. Allow the melodies and rhythms to guide your thoughts and emotions toward prayerful reflection.
- Spend a few hours or a day in silent retreat, disconnecting from distractions and intentionally focusing on prayer, meditation, and listening for spiritual guidance.
- Dedicate time to volunteer or perform acts of kindness for others. Let your service be a prayer in action, expressing your faith through compassionate deeds.

Each of these activities encourages a deepening of spiritual connection through different senses and modes of expression. Feel free to adapt and combine them based on what resonates most deeply with your own spiritual journey.

NOTE: Since we are looking at keeping our prayer lives fresh in this session, it would be appropriate to use activities such as the one's above in the small group setting this week.

For the sake of completeness, I have provided ice breakers and group discussion questions, which you are free to use - but please to do use creative prayer activities with the group (there are links to many more in this week's resources)

Ice Breaker Questions

"If You Were to Design Your Perfect Prayer Space, What Would It Look Like?" *Share your ideal settings, considering aspects like location, ambiance, and any symbolic elements.*

or

"If Jesus Came to Cleanse a Metaphorical 'Temple' in Your Life, What Do You Think He Would Focus On?"

or

"What Is One Type of 'Clutter' in Your Life You Think You Need to Clear Out to Improve Your Prayer Time?"

Discussion Questions

1. What emotions do you think Jesus felt when he saw the activities in the temple? Why do you think he reacted so strongly?
2. How does the scene in the temple reflect on our modern worship practices? Are there 'money changers' in our lives today?
3. In what ways can our prayer lives become 'cluttered'? How can we identify and clear this clutter?
4. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7, saying his house should be a 'house of prayer.' What does this mean for us as individuals and as a community?
5. Reflect on the reaction of the chief priests and teachers of the law. Why were they indignant? What can we learn from their response?
6. Jesus healed the blind and the lame in the temple. How does this contrast with the actions of the money changers? What does it teach us about the true purpose of the temple?
7. Children praised Jesus, calling him the 'Son of David.' Why is the innocence and spontaneity of their praise significant? How can we foster such authentic worship?
8. What role do you think tradition played in the temple practices that Jesus condemned? How can we balance tradition with genuine spirituality?
9. Jesus cleansed the temple as a form of renewal. How can we experience a 'cleansing' in our own spiritual lives? What practical steps can we take?
10. How can we create 'sacred spaces' in our everyday lives where we can encounter God more deeply? What are some practical ideas?