



Prayer Exercises by Temperament

by Bill O'Byrne

This series of "Prayer Exercises by Temperament" is designed to order and balance our prayer life, so that we may offer ourselves more wholly to God through varied approaches to prayer. Our prayer life is a reflection and extension of both our spiritual growth and our temperament or personality type.

Many of us were taught to read and study the Bible through observation, implication and application. Once we have gained a familiarity with the Scriptures through this basic method, our hearts often begin to long for a more direct encounter with the God of the Scriptures. While providing many solid insights for the active growth of early discipleship, we need another method. As we described in the introduction to this series,¹ *Lectio Divina* forms the basic structure for this series of "Prayer Exercises by Temperament." *Lectio Divina* was designed to help us pray by grounding our thoughts in Scripture, and at the same time opening our hearts to listen to the Spirit through the Scriptures.

But even when we earnestly seek an new encounter with God, we continuously run up against the limitations of our own personalities that hinder us from entering the very relationship with God that we crave. Politely said, we are creatures of habit, but more theologically accurately we are finite, sinful creatures that can't tell what we are missing. We so often get caught up in our own thoughts in prayer that we end up simply carrying on a mental monologue with ourselves before God. All the while we are stuck in the rut of our own favorite topics and our habitual patterns of prayer, which quickly become stale, or which we have outgrown, but don't know how to transcend. By experimenting with these "Prayer Exercises by Temperament," we trust that you will be able to find an approach to prayer that particularly helps you connect with God in this season of your growth, and other approaches that also stretch you to know God in ways you would have never dreamed of trying.

After an opening prayer, each of these "Prayer Exercises by Temperament" includes a passage of Scripture chosen for its correspondence to the temperament being highlighted.² Then you will find a meditation and a number of questions designed to guide your thoughts outside of the normal pattern shaped by our personality. We will be inviting the Spirit to lead our meditation through a variety of different approaches that coincide with the preferences of the temperaments, in order to lead us to a deeper

¹ Bill O'Byrne, "The Practice of Lectio Divina by Temperament" (*Imago Christi*, 2010).

² The texts for these exercises are based on the Prayer Suggestions from: Michael, Chester P. and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament*. (Charlottesville, VA: The Open Door Inc., 1991), pp. 65, 88-89, 53, 75-78).

experience of God in the text. You will then be led through the ACTS acrostic through introductory prayers that express the heart of that temperament type as they interact with the themes of the text.

While knowledge of your temperament type is not a necessary prerequisite to engage in these exercises, those that know their Myer-Briggs type will more quickly see which prayer exercise fits their personality, and which ones fill in the blindspots and balances out the preferences inherent in our own approach to relating to God. The NF type values personal relationship, while the NT type pursues truth; the SJ type emphasizes obedience, while SP personalities express their freedom in worship – each as a natural and often unbalanced manifestation of who they are.

Each of these temperaments and their approaches has something to teach us about ourselves, how we read Scripture, and how we relate to God. A greater knowledge of ourselves helps us relate to God and others more as whole people. When linked with *Lectio Divina*, each of these contribute to developing a full-orbed relationship with God, and provide an entry point into deeper intimacy with God in Christ, through the Spirit, in the context of His Word.

NF Prayer type example, «Lectio Divina»

1. Silence: Lord, prepare my heart in silence to be spiritually receptive to Your Word. While resting in You, let me open my heart to You and consciously surrender control to You and dedicate myself and this prayer to You alone. [1 min.]

2. Reading: Lord, help me receive Your Word and its message for me personally and for my world:

[Isaiah 43:1-5]

1 But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

2 When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

3 For I am the LORD, your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush [a] and Seba in your stead.

4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight,
and because I love you,
I will give men in exchange for you,
and people in exchange for your life.

5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.

Leave 15 seconds between the two readings. Then during the second reading insert your name after the word «you» in the text, so that it becomes the Lord's Word addressed personally to you.

3. Meditation: Flames and water, fire and flood remain great dangers for people in our day and age:

- What did the Lord speak to you about, when He told you, «fear not»?
- What sort of waters are you going through at the present moment?
- We all have fears, things that we try to avoid with all our heart and soul. What sort of fears concern or consume you?
- Further the Lord expresses His care and love for Israel and promises that He will soon deliver them from exile. What is it that you would like the Lord to deliver you from?
- The Lord is telling you here, «Fear not; I am with you; you will not be harmed.» What does this mean for you today?
- Imagine that the Lord personally tells you: «You are precious to Me; I love you.» To what extent are you able to experience the reality of His love in as you hear these words.
- How much would you like to experience His love in those words.

4. Response: Lord, thank You for leading my thoughts in this meditation on Your Word, and for helping me hear Your word to me in it. Now help me open my heart to express to You my soul's response to that Word, praising Your qualities revealed in it, admitting how I fail to live out its truth, thanking You for all You've done and given me in that regard, and admitting my need of Your help to act on the decisions made in this scriptural prayer exercise.

Adoration: Lord I want to praise You for Who You are and for Who You are revealed to be in Your Word. You are the great and holy God, high above all the concerns and problems of this world, but You are a caring, loving God, Who is not indifferent to me, but address me personally through Your Word and Your Spirit in my soul. [Continue with your own prayer of Adoration.]

Confession: Forgive me, Lord! You call me by name, but I don't always call on Your name. You are always ready to comfort me, since You are always with me, but I don't always run to You, or seek Your presence. Lord, forgive me for not feeling worthy to belong to You, for not depending on Your care and protection in fearful, dangerous situations. Forgive me, especially for neglecting Your love, and taking it for granted, instead of responding to You in love. I love You, Lord, forgive me, a sinner. [Continue with your own prayer of Confession.]

Thanksgiving: Yet I thank You, Lord for the way You have redeemed me and pursue me, and constantly call me closer to You. You care for me

personally. Thank You for the many ways You have protected me, probably more than I even know. Thank You for Your everlasting and undeserved love. Thank You that You are always with me. [Continue with your own prayer of Thanksgiving.]

Supplication: Now, Lord help me be listening to hear Your call to me. Help me trust You, even when I am afraid, and not only when the danger is past. Help me be with You always. [Continue with your own prayer of Supplication.]

5. Contemplation: - (After the following introductory prayer pause for at least 5 min. of silence.) Lord, I want to be with You always, just as You are always with me. Help me concentrate on You in this silence, so that I might be more open to Your activity in the depths of my soul. [5-15 min. silence]

6. Incarnation: - I praise You, Lord, for this prayerful reading of Your Word under the guidance of Your Spirit. Help me, Lord know Your presence and trust in Your love in the concrete situations of my life, for Your glory and the expansion of Your Kingdom in and through me.

Blessing: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

NT Prayer type, using «Lectio Divina»

1. Silence: Lord, prepare my heart in silence to be spiritually receptive to Your Word. While resting in You, let me open my heart to You and consciously surrender control to You and dedicate myself and this prayer to You alone. [1 min.]

2. Reading: Lord, help me see the truth of Your Word, so that in striving for that truth, I might come to know You more:

[Matthew 11:28-30]

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

[Note: Pause briefly between readings. During the second reading emphasize the **nouns and pronouns**, and in the third reading emphasize the verbs and adjectives.]

"Come to **me**, all **you** who are weary and burdened, and **I** will give **you** **rest**. Take **my yoke** upon **you** and learn from **me**, for **I** am gentle and humble in **heart**, and **you** will find **rest** for **your souls**. For **my yoke** is easy and **my burden** is light."

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

3. Meditation: In this passage, Jesus presents us with a paradox, or a seeming contradiction: relief by means of a yoke, rest under a burden. Ask yourself these questions in order to discover God's truth for you in His Word.

- What is the "yoke" in this passage? How would you define "The Lord's yoke"? What does Jesus compare it to?
- It is no coincidence that Jewish rabbis called their teaching "a yoke," such that "to take up a yoke" could mean "become someone's disciple" or "to be guided by the teaching of a certain rabbi." How does "the Lord's yoke" differ from the teachings of the rabbis?

- Whom does Jesus call to take up His yoke upon themselves? What sort of people are they according to the passage? How would they be distinct from the rabbi's disciples?
- What should they do, in order to "take My yoke upon you"?
- On whom does a "yoked disciple" focus his attention?
- A disciple should imitate his rabbi. What qualities will characterize Christ's disciples when they imitate Him?
- What is result of taking on such a yoke?

4. Response: Lord, thank You for leading my thoughts in this meditation on Your Word, and for helping me hear Your word to me in it. Now help me open my heart to express to You my soul's response to that Word, praising Your qualities revealed in it, admitting how I fail to live out its truth, thanking You for all You've done and given me in that regard, and admitting my need of Your help to act on the decisions made in this scriptural prayer exercise.

Adoration: Lord I want to praise You for Who You are and for Who You are revealed to be in Your Word. You are the Great Rabbi; You are the Teacher extraordinaire; You are above all human teachers, because You are humble and meek of heart. I praise You, the God-Man, the Son of God for Your heart, and for Your meekness and humility. You do not need to prove Yourself, and You never force us to do Your will, but You desire to bless us with Your divine rest. You are the Physician of my soul; You alone are my peace. [Continue with your own prayer of Adoration.]

Confession: Forgive me, Lord, You are always inviting me to come to You, but I often look for my rest in labor, and in a variety of burdens, or by listening to other teachers. You are always ready to comfort and calm me, but I am not always ready to trust in the goodness of Your yoke, or in the lightness of Your burden. Lord, forgive me for being such a poor student of Your meekness and humility. My heart is either proud and looking down on everyone, or so humiliated that I cannot see my own worth. More than anything forgive me for rejecting Your good and freeing yoke, and for refusing to know You in it. But I love You, Lord; forgive me, a sinner. [Continue with your own prayer of Confession.]

Thanksgiving: But I thank You, Lord, that You nevertheless continue to call me to follow after You, to learn from You, and to find rest in You. Your yoke never humiliates, never pushes me down. Your yoke is good, because it gives rest. Your burden is light, because You bore it and carried it Yourself. Thank You, Lord, for the way that Your incredible meekness and incomparable humility purchased eternal peace for me on the cross. I thank You, Lord, that I can trust You, the Great Physician of

my soul. Thank You that I can know rest in submission to You, my Teacher. [Continue with your own prayer of Thanksgiving.]

Supplication: Now, Lord, help me voluntarily submit to Your meekness and authentically imitate Your humility, and eagerly trust in Your goodness. Help me always to seek Your rest and come willingly under Your yoke. [Continue with your own prayer of Supplication.]

5. Contemplation: - (After the following introductory prayer pause for at least 5 min. of silence.) Lord, I want to be where You are, and be open to all that You have for me. Help me focus on Your truth, and turn the entire attention of my soul to You, and concentrate on You in a wordless silence.

6. Incarnation: - I give You glory, Lord, for this prayerful reading of Your Word under the direction of Your Spirit. Help me sense Your presence and trust Your love in the concrete situations of my life, for Your glory and the expansion of Your Kingdom in and through me.

Blessing: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The SJ type and an example from the Ignatian Exercises.

Three introductory steps:

1. Invocation: «Lord God, bless me now, so that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart would be acceptable to You, so that all of my intentions, feelings and actions would be solely and exclusively dedicated to the service and praise of Your Divine Greatness».
2. Description of place: During your first reading of the passage, imagine the setting where the events of the passage take place. In this case imagine the road from the northern gate of Jerusalem to Golgotha. Where do you find yourself in the scene?
3. The prayer for grace: **Lord, let me experience an encounter with you that would make you the Strongest Attachment of my life.**

Three meditations on the text: these differ from one another in focus and emphasis. Pause after each reading, in order to consider the questions:

1. «Look» - meaning «look with your mind's eye.» In this first meditation imagine yourself in the biblical scene: what do you see as you look around? What do the people look like? the soldiers? Simon of Cyrene? Jesus? What impresses you about their facial expressions? Then consider what you have seen: what might it mean in context of the passage?

[Luke 23:26-33]

As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then 'they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' 'For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'"

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

2. «Listen» - What are the sounds that surround you in this setting? This will help you enter deeper into the scene. Listen to the people, who is speaking,

and with what tone of voice? What sounded so very strange to them, and why? Consider the events and dialogue from a number of different perspectives, taking on the role of different characters. Meditate on the meaning of the words. What might God be trying to tell you?

[Luke 23:26-33]

3. «Observe» Pay attention to the text, its details, emphases and structure. What is revealed in them? What surprises happen? What did you hear that was unexpected? What other senses (smell, touch, taste) play an important part in these events? What did you experience by imagining yourself in one of the character's roles? What else do you notice through your observation? What sort of picture of God or Jesus emerges from this scene?

[Luke 23:26-33]

Your narrative: write your account of the passage from the perspective of one of the characters (example: as Simon of Cyrene):

I was just coming into Jerusalem and I met up with another executioner's procession. It turns my stomach in every way, the Roman guards, the on-lookers either eager for blood, or pitying someone for getting what they deserve. "Wait, no, I didn't do anything! I don't want to get involved! Why should I carry this cross? Why should I have to stoop to this? I am a righteous man; I don't deserve this!" Obviously, he can't do this on his own. And if I don't do it someone else will be roped into it. I hate these brutal oppressors and their vile ways. I hoist the cross up on my shoulder and the despicable Roman entourage gets us moving. I follow behind the stumbling figure. I don't want to be associated with this criminal! I don't want to have any part of this.

They are just hurling abuse on him, spitting at him. Uck! And for thanks I get some of the spray. Look at Him with a crown of thorns, stumbling. Some rebel I suppose. Oh, no, he's gone down again. Ah, the whip catches my shoulder, as it's raised to thrash him. This can't be real. I feel defiled and disgraced. I can't be walking this gauntlet with these criminals. Every aspect of this is repulsive to every aspect of my being. "If you'd stop beating him, he'd be able to get up and keep moving!" Who is this guy? Whoever he is, he's going to die today, or tomorrow on this very beam I'm carrying. He doesn't look like a slave or a murder. No, as he's getting up, he is talking to his mourners, teaching them, pitying *them!* He is talking as if his suffering will bring in the kingdom of heaven. They are calling him 'rabbi'? What did this guy do?

We're finally moving again. I stop trying to resist the abuse and submit to it. It'll be over soon, if he just keeps moving. *You can do it. Just keep going.* His scorn has become mine. We reach the hill. Someone knocks the cross off my shoulder, taking a

piece of my shirt with it before it slams to the ground. That man is going to be nailed to my cross. He will die with the threads of my shirt dangling by his head. I have contributed to his death. I have participated in this man's execution as much as any of these soldiers. And just like that I'm cast aside, free to drift back into the anonymity of the crowd. How can I just forget this and walk away! This will mark me for life. I am tied to this man.

Anyone else in my place would have now been stripped, laid out on that cross and nailed to it. Somehow it seems more like He was taking my place. Whatever He's done, He can't deserve this anymore than I do. He is not embittered against his revilers. Neither is He just beaten into submission. He has none of the spite and self-righteousness that's in me. He is all grace and compassion in injustice, determination in suffering and faith in God! And for a while I stood in his place, and walked the path of his suffering.

Three concluding steps:

1. Journal the insights gained from your meditations. Try to analyze your own feelings and impressions that you experienced, and discern their meaning for your life or spiritual growth.
What difference might this experience in prayer make in my life today?
 - What was the range of emotion that you experienced in this exercise?
 - What was it like to "participate in the sufferings of Christ"?
 - What was it like to identify with Jesus in that way?What concrete, practical decision can I make based on this exercise?
2. Conversational prayer. What do you want to tell the Lord in connection with your meditation and experience of the passage? (Perhaps based on the «Response» and «Contemplation» from *Lectio Divina*)
3. Closing prayer – The Lord's Prayer.

Meet with a spiritual director. It is suggested to meet regularly with a spiritual mentor or friend, to share your spiritual experiences and decisions with a mature and trustworthy Christian, who has known you over a period of time, and who knows your spiritual journey, your weaknesses and temptations, so that they can encourage and advise you. In preparation for that it is also recommended to finish journaling your insights and encounters with God that you experienced during the Conversational Prayer, so that you can remember and share them.

The SP type, «Prayer in Action» based on Lectio Divina

1. Silence: Lord, prepare my heart in silence to be spiritually receptive to Your Word. While resting in You, let me open my heart to You and consciously surrender control to You and dedicate myself and this prayer to You alone. [1 min.]

2. Reading: Lord, help me receive Your Word and understand how to enact it in Your praise and for Your glory:

[choose one of the texts below for your reading and meditation:]

3. Meditation: Consider how you might enact, and therefore enter and experience the reality of these biblical truths?

- Read Psalm 1:3. “a tree planted beside streams of water.” Any object in nature can represent our place or posture before God and our dependence on God in some way. Take a walk in the woods; choose a tree, a leaf, a flower that somehow symbolizes or represents your spiritual condition.
- Psalm 19:1. “the heavens declare the glory of God.” Go out and look at the skies, a sunrise, the moon, the stars, the clouds, etc. How does the creation praise its Creator? How might you join in with the praise, as the crown of creation?
- Read John 13:12-17, 34-35. “Jesus now showed them (enacted) the full extent of His love (and told them: “so also you should love one another”). What is the equivalent of footwashing that you could do for someone else, that would require you to humble yourself in order to demonstrate the extent of your love?
- Read Colossians 3:15-17. “teach and admonish one another, as you sing hymns and spiritual songs.” Whom you might encourage by sharing a song with them (whether you play it yourself or a CD)?

4. Incarnating a “prayer in action”: The Incarnation step is moved up to here, so that prayer of Response can be in response to your prayerful action. Having decided what you will do, now “just do it.” Be sure that you are truly enacting the passage in prayerful manner, doing what you do in the praise of God and for his glory.

5. Response: Lord, thank You for leading my thoughts in this meditation on Your Word, and guiding my actions in the incarnation of Your word to me in it. Now help me open my heart to complete this «prayer in action» by expressing to You my soul's response in words, praising Your qualities, admitting how I fail to live this «prayer in action,» thanking You for giving me this prayer, and admitting my need of Your help to live out this scriptural «prayer in action». (The following example is based on Ps 19:1 and viewing a sunrise):

Adoration: Lord, light of the world, light of my eyes, light fo my heart. I praise You, and am warmed and delight in Your light. Your light, the light of Your presence allows us to see the beauty of this world. Without You we wouldn't even know where we are. In Your gentle light You reveal all the fine hues of creation; we see everything in a new light. But we cannot look directly at You, and we wouldn't understand what we saw, if we did. You are above and beyond all that we can see with our eyes. Yet in the brilliance of Your light we see every thing clearly, as it is. Even the shadows are clearly defined and we see where something might be hiding from You. [Continue with your own prayer of Adoration.]

Confession: So, Lord, forgive me, for taking Your light for granted, for thinking that I know everything. I know that it is not true, but I often act like the captain of my fate, but without You I am blind. Sometimes I claim to understand You, but it is far from the case. Forgive me for limiting You by my perceptions and claims to know Who You ought to be. I love You, Lord; forgive me, a sinner. [Continue with your own prayer of Confession.]

Thanksgiving: But I thank You, Lord, for the light of Your truth that truly comforts and enlightens me, as well as warns me of the darkness and keeps me from evil. Thank You for the blessings of warmth and beauty and nourishment that Your light provides. Thank You for Your eternal and undeserved love. [Continue with your own prayer of Thanksgiving.]

Supplication: Now, Lord, allow me to live in a continual expectation of Your dawning, of Your illumination of my heart. Help me to avoid dark places. Help me to expect, to seek and to appreciate the manifestations of Your light. No matter how beautiful this world is, or how wonderful life is in the light of Your truth, I want to know You, to see You, but I am unable. Help me turn to You and even with eyes shut tight, let me know as much of the warmth and delight of Your presence as I can bear. This in anticipation of the day, when You give me new eyes in a new body, and I will be able to see You face to face, as You are in the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. [Continue with your own prayer of Supplication.]

6. Contemplation: - (After the following prayer pause for at least 5 min. of silence.) Lord, I want to «be still and know that You are God.» Help me to concentrate on You, and be more open to Your activity in the depths of my soul.

Blessing: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

[Repeat these exercises, choosing Scripture passages that correspond to the preferences and approach of each temperament type. Consider continuing on to the “Prayer Exercises by Temperament based on Luke 17:11-19,” in order to strengthen your facility with these Exercises, and to see how each temperament experiences the same exact passage differently.]