



## INTERCESSORY PRAYER

This meditation focuses on intercessory prayer using the Lord's Prayer.

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## OVERVIEW

Praying for others is an essential part of our prayer life. As Mother Teresa displays for us, all active service is grounded in prayer.

## MATERIALS

Paper, pens

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## Scripture

### JAMES 5:13-18

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

### JOHN 15:12-13

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

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## Quotations

The apostles devoted themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Their example teaches us that the more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life. Therefore, on the streets, in the slums, at work, in the home, we should pray with our whole heart and soul. We must keep that silence which Jesus kept for thirty years at Nazareth. Even now, he keeps it in the tabernacle, silently making intercession for us.

— *Mother Teresa*

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

— *Mother Teresa*

## Introducing the Practice

Mother Teresa (1910-1997) was an Albanian-Indian Catholic nun who dedicated her life to serving the poor in India. In 2016 she was canonized by Pope Francis and is now known in the Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa was already a nun and a teacher in India when she experienced her “call within a call” and decided to move into the slums to live and work alongside the poorest of the poor. In 1948 Mother Teresa founded the Order of the Missionaries of Charity, a religious order of nuns dedicated to serving the poorest and sickest people in India. Mother Teresa gave herself to others in active service throughout her life, and all of her service was grounded in a deep prayer life. For Mother Teresa, prayer was the foundation of all good work. While Mother Teresa is an extraordinary exemplar of Christian love for others, her journals and letters revealed that she often experienced times of spiritual darkness in which she felt that God was absent. Mother Teresa reminds us that we do not pray to God or serve God in order to receive positive, pleasant benefits from God. Rather, we pray because we love God and we love others. Prayer does not give us a peaceful escape from the world, but it draws us into deeper engagement with the world. As Thomas Merton says, “Prayer does not blind us to the world, but it transforms our vision of the world and makes us see it...in the light of God.” Today we will embody this attitude by practicing intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is the practice of praying for others. It is not necessarily an attempt to change God’s mind or to magically bring about the real world outcome that we want. Intentional, heartfelt intercessory prayer is the opening of our hearts in compassion to the experiences of others in a way that has real power to transform lives. Intercessory prayer brings us into closer relationship with God and with others. It brings us into deeper awareness of God’s presence and healing power in the world, and it invites God’s presence and healing power into the lives of others. We pray for others because we love them – the same reason that Jesus prayed for others and the same reason that the New Testament writers continuously encourage praying for others.

Our intercessory prayer practice today is based on the style of a Buddhist mettā meditation. While there are many varieties of this practice in different Buddhist traditions, the main intention of this practice is to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion for others.

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## Preparing for the Practice

Give everyone a piece of paper and have them write out the version of the Lord’s Prayer that your tradition uses. Go through this together if there are some people who do not have the prayer memorized. Then have everyone spread out with their papers to sit and pray in silence.

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## The Spiritual Practice

As we enter this time of prayer, slow your breathing and quietly center yourself in the comforts of the silence that surrounds you and resides within you. Open your mind to an understanding that you are not praying for your own benefit but for the benefit of all creation – the creation of which you are an integral part. Know that any transformation

you experience benefits the whole of creation.

Begin by focusing on the aspect of creation most intimate to you – your own life. Open your heart to God praying, “May I be peaceful and happy.” Pray in this way for a little while. (3 minutes of silence)

Now turn your attention to another child of God. Choose someone who is dear to you. Someone you love. Maybe a close friend or a family member. Pray to God for this person saying, “May (this person) be peaceful and happy.” Continue praying for this person. (3 minutes of silence)

Turn your attention to another child of God. Now choose someone who is neutral to you. Maybe it is someone you pass in the hall every day. Maybe it is your bus driver. Maybe the crossing guard, the lunch server, or the janitor. Pray to God for this person saying, “May (this person) be peaceful and happy.” Continue praying for this person. (3 minutes of silence)

Now turn your attention to another child of God. This time, choose someone who you do not especially like or get along with. Maybe even someone you dislike. Maybe someone who has wronged you or with whom you have had disagreements. Recognize that this person too is a child of God who desires peace and happiness. Pray to God for them saying, “May (this person) be peaceful and happy.” Continue praying for this person. (3 minutes of silence)

Finally, turn your attention to all of God’s created order. Think of each person you have already prayed for; think of all the people you encounter each day, and all the people who you have never met. All of them desire peace and happiness. Pray to God for His people, saying “May all people be peaceful and happy.” (3 minutes of silence)

Amen.

*Duration: 15-20 minutes*

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## Discussion Questions

1. How was praying for others in this way different than how you have prayed for people in the past?
2. Was it harder or easier to pray for some people than others?