

A PATTERN OF DAILY PRAYER

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*"To Thee our morning song of praise,
To Thee our evening prayers we raise...."*

Ambrose

*"And in the morning, a great while before
day, he rose and went out to a lonely place,
and there he prayed."*

Mark 1:35 (KJV)

"Thine is the day, thine also the night."

Psalm 74:16 (KJV)

*"Preach the Universal and Everlasting Gospel of Boundless,
Universal Love for the entire human race, without
exception....Proclaim and publish to all the people of the
world a Universal Gospel that shall restore, in time, all
the human species....The inner Spirit makes us feel that
behind every appearance of diversity there is an
interdependent unity of all things."*

George de Benneville (1703-1793)

*"We must not look for religion in creeds or formularies of
human invention. We must look for it in the honest, the
pious, the devotional heart; in the heart which truly loves
God, loves its [sister and] brother also. The principle of love
to God and goodwill is true religion."*

Hosea Ballou (1771-1852)

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¶ *Begin by bringing yourself to silence (lighting a candle if you wish).† Then, either using traditional or modern language, say:*

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Mark 12:29-31; Matthew 22:40 (NRSV)

Or:

The most important rule is, 'Listen, people of Israel. There is only one God. Love God with everything you have — your feelings, your intelligence, your physical strength.' The next most important rule is, 'Love the person next to you as you love yourself.' These are the most important rules. Everything else the rule books and God's speakers have to say is simply a working out of those two rules.

Mark 12:29-31; Matthew 22:40 (Henson)

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6a, 8 (NRSV)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Or:

Loving God, here and everywhere, help us proclaim your values and bring in your New World. Supply us our day to day needs. Forgive us for wounding you, while we forgive those who wound us. Give us courage to meet life's trials and deal with evil's power. Amen.

(Henson)

¶ *Reading/s. Here you may use the readings found in Part Two.*

¶ *A period of silent, meditative prayer on a verse or a word from your reading. Here you may also wish to use the daily prayers in Part Two.*

¶ *Prayer (praying as the Spirit moves you) but particularly on*

Sunday: for all peoples and creation

Monday: for family and friends

Tuesday: for your church community

Wednesday: for your village, town or city

Thursday: for your country

Friday: for the Church Invisible & Universal

Saturday: for yourself

¶ *In the morning pray the Benedictus:*

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our

God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:68-79 (NRSV)

Or:

What a wonderful God, the God of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel! This God has come to help us and set us free. The world will be healed by the power of love, by a descendent of David and Bathsheba. Those who spoke God's promises were right: the days of hate and having enemies are passing. God was generous to our ancestors, a loyal and reliable friend. God promised Abraham and Sarah an end to hostility and fear. Freedom to worship and serve. You, little baby, will speak for God; You will go in front of God's Chosen Leader and roll out the carpet. You'll tell the people their problems are over, free from guilt at last. God is kind and gentle; God will turn darkness into daylight, so we can make our way in peace.

Luke 1:68-79 (Henson)

¶ *In the evening pray the Magnificat:*

Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Luke 1:46-55 (NRSV)

Or:

Mary said: I sense the greatness of God who makes my joy complete. God smiled at me and asked my help, and everyone will dance with glee at the wonderful thing happening to me. What a God! In every age God aids the good, upsetting the plans of the arrogant: See how the powerful fall off their perches! Honour for the modest, a banquet for the hungry; the rich get nothing and slink away! God keeps promises to friends and companions — Abraham, Sarah, and their like today.

Luke 1:46-55 (Henson)

¶ *In the morning pray the following or another prayer consecrating yourself to a life of faith as a disciple of Jesus Christ:*

Eternal God, who has committed to me the swift and solemn trust of life; since I know not what a day may bring forth, but only that the hour for serving You is always present, may I wake to the instant claims of Your holy will; not waiting for tomorrow, but yielding to-day. Lay to rest, by the persuasion of Your Spirit, the resistance of my passion, idleness, and fear. Consecrate with Your presence the way my feet may go; and the humblest work will shine, and the roughest places be made plain. Lift me above unrighteous anger and mistrust into faith and hope and love, by a simple and steadfast reliance on Your sure will: and so may I be modest in my time of wealth, patient under disappointment, ready for danger, serene in death. In all things, draw me to the mind of Christ, that Your lost image may be traced again, and You may own me as at one with him and You. Amen.

¶ *In the evening pray the following or another prayer:*

O Lord, our God, I come to You, the refuge of my soul, and in the quiet of this evening hour would rest under the shelter of Your love. Here, in communion

with You, I would gain strength for the labours, patience for the trials, light for the perplexities and difficulties; and remembering my past failures, weakness and sin, humbly seek again the support and guidance which I have never yet trusted as I ought. I ask for Your forgiveness; and may I, in a holier spirit and with a more steadfast will, renounce the evil I lament and press forward in the way that leads to life and light. Amen.

¶ *In the morning conclude with the doxology from 1 Timothy or the Grace from 2 Corinthians:*

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:17 (NRSV)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.

2 Corinthians 13:14 (composite)

Or:

May we know first-hand the beautiful character of our Leader, Jesus, God's Chosen, and the Love of God, and the special being together God's Spirit brings. Amen.

2 Corinthians 13:14 (Henson)

¶ *In the evening conclude with the Nunc Dimittus:*

Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. Amen.

Luke 2:29-32 (NRSV)

Or:

Your helper, God, moves on content, your plans my eyes have seen; a new day dawns for every land, beyond your people's dream. Amen.

Luke 2:29-32 (Henson)

¶ *End by resting in silence once more (and extinguishing the candle if you lit one).*



A PRAYER AT BATH

Loving God, this pure water, which refreshes, restores and cleans my body, is a special manifestation of Your love and care. It is a symbol of Your saving grace which purifies and strengthens the soul and so I give thanks for this most valued gift of Yours. As this water daily refreshes, restores and cleans my body so, too, may my soul be hallowed and strengthened by constant communion with You. I ask this in the spirit of Jesus, Amen.



A PRAYER BEFORE THE START OF WORK

Loving God, You are within and without me and, through my daily tasks and duties, You call me to loving service. May I always feel Your presence in the work I am going to begin. May Your wisdom enlighten and Your inspiration strengthen me and, when my energy and patience flag, may Your touch refresh and encourage me. Whenever I feel tempted to neglect my work or act carelessly, may I feel Your presence and be restored and steadied. Enable me to treat with kindness and compassion all with whom I may come into contact in the course of the day. Cure

me of all selfish and ambitious desires, of the love of human applause, and enable me to seek only Your glory in all that I do. May my work, instead of separating my soul from You, draw me ever nearer and nearer to You and help my everlasting union with You. I ask this in the spirit of Jesus, Amen.



A GRACE AT MEALS

Eternal God, sustainer of all, I acknowledge that Your love and care is present in the food and drink before me and in every moment of its growth and preparation. With heartfelt gratitude I give thanks for this manifestation of Your love. May I always remember this with thankfulness, and use in Your service the health and strength gained through these Your gifts. I ask this in the spirit of Jesus, Amen.



A PRAYER BEFORE GOING TO BED

Loving God, after the labours of the day You have given me rest and invite me to resign all my thoughts and anxieties and fall asleep in the everlasting embrace of Your loving arms. I feel now Your love and my entire dependence upon You. Through sleep and waking, rest and labour, You fulfil Your holy will in my life and lead me on to my goal. After the blessed sleep You mercifully grant me, may I wake to a deepened consciousness of Your presence within and without me. I ask this in the spirit of Jesus, Amen.

† A few words on the lighting of a candle before prayer. If you choose to do it the authors encourage you to do this with intention, holding in your mind the flame as a symbol of the divine light that has come into the world and which no darkness can ever overcome (cf. John 1:5).

An almost forgotten radical, liberal Christian text which speaks profoundly of the symbolism of the candle was written by the Dutch Collegiant and advocate of Spinoza's philosophy, Peter Balling, entitled *The Light upon the Candlestick* (1663). The following short extracts from his pamphlet offer some powerful ideas upon which to meditate:

We direct thee then to within thyself, that is, that thou oughtest to turn into, to mind and have regard unto that which is within thee, to wit, The *Light* of Truth, the true *Light* which enlighten every man that cometh into the world. Here 'tis that thou must be, and not without thee....We say then, That we exhort every one to turn into the *Light*, that's in him (*We give it rather the appellation of Light, than any thing else, otherwise it's all one to us whether ye call it, Christ, the Spirit, the Word, &c. seeing these all denote but one and the same thing*): Yet the word *Light* being in all its natural signification somewhat else then that which we intend thereby, we shall therefore in brief endeavour clearly to express what we intend under this denomination. *The Light* (then we say) *is a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man, by which he is so convinced of the Being and Quality of things, that he cannot possibly doubt thereof.* From this definition which is here given of the *Light*, 'tis clear, that it must needs comprehend in it the principal effect of showing us, and giving us the knowledge of what's Truth and Falsehood, what's good and evil: which verily is a matter of so great concernment, that without it men must needs swerve up and down in continual darkness, opinion and sin, neither knowing truth at all, nor doing any good, but gropingly, by haphazard without any certainty. *This Light then, Christ the Truth, &c. is that which makes manifest and reproves sin in man, shewing him how he has strayed from God, accuseth him of the evil which he doth and hath committed; yea this is it which judgeth and condemmeth him: Again, This is the preaching to every Creature under Heaven, though they have never read or heard of the Scripture. This is it which leads man into truth, into the way to God, which excuseth him in well-doing, giving him peace in his Conscience, yea, brings him into union with God, wherein all happiness and salvation doth consist....The Light is also the first Principle of Religion.* For seeing there can be no true Religion without the knowledge of God, and no knowledge of God without this *Light*, Religion must necessarily have this *Light* for its first Principle.

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The passages of scripture printed in smaller type in the
first part of this book are taken from John Henson's
Good as New – A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures (O
Books, 2005). The text can also be found online at:
www.one4god.org/GANhome.htm

The two prayers on pages 4 and 5 are adapted from
originals by James Martineau. The prayers on pages 6
and 7 were inspired by originals used by the Brahma
Samaj in *A Manual of Brahma Rituals & Devotions*
(Sadharan Brahma Samaj, Calcutta, 1924 & 1971).

We have much of value to learn from them.

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the group is made aware of the source of the material.

This book is offered as an encouragement daily to use some of the texts our liberal Christian tradition has thought indispensable. It is offered up in the form of a first person prayer book envisaging that it will, in the first instance, primarily be used by individuals. But there is no reason why it should not form the basis for some form of daily collective prayer.

The underlying inspiration for this prayer book has been the Socinian/Unitarian, Universalist, Anabaptist, Mystical and Pietist traditions of the Radical Reformation which were the wellsprings from which sprang our own group of churches in both Great Britain and the U.S.A. However, four of the prayers have been adapted from the *Brahmo Samaj* (Society of God) – a liberal Hindu reform movement which still maintains a tradition of daily personal piety. We can learn much from their commitment to a daily devotional practice.

But lying at the heart of it all is an encounter with Scripture which formed and shaped our forebears in every way imaginable. We should meditate upon it and then, like them, take the lessons we discover there to heart and live them. It is important to understand that in our daily devotional reading we need not agree with every word of Scripture for it is there as much to provoke us to critical thought as it is to calm and satisfy us. Like Jacob's struggle with God by the river Jabbok (Gen. 32), we need to wrestle with the text bringing to it our personal experiences and reason as well as the gentle but powerful insights of our liberal Christian tradition.