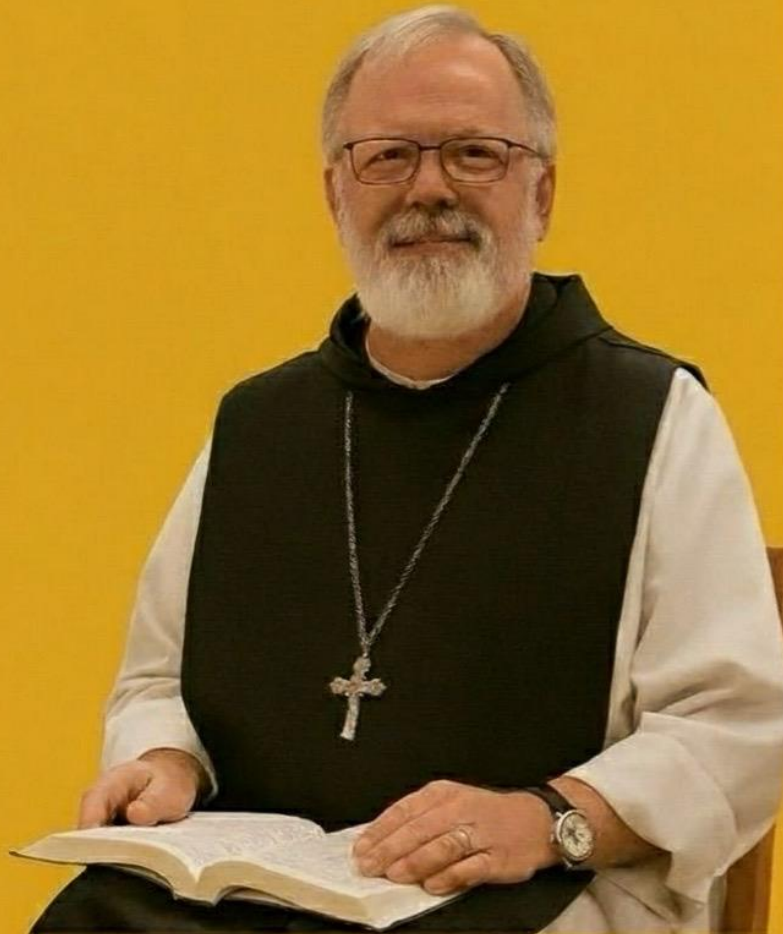
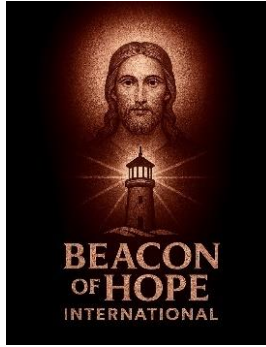


Beating Temptations **PRAYER**



**Brother Oscar Joseph, OCCO
contemplative monk
abbotoscarjoseph.com**



Beacon of Hope International

Statement of Purpose & Mission

At *Beacon of Hope International*, we are devoted to guiding souls into deeper communion with God through the sacred journey of trust. We believe that learning to trust God is not merely a spiritual discipline—it is a transformative pilgrimage. It begins in surrender and unfolds through prayer, silence, and service. Trust is not passive; it is a courageous act of faith, a deliberate resting in divine providence even when the path ahead is veiled in mystery.

As we yield to God's rhythm, trust becomes the gateway to grace. It anchors us in peace, liberates us from captivity, and draws us into union with the Eternal. In this surrender, we become vessels of hope—living icons who reflect the light of Christ to a world longing for sacred presence.

We affirm that:

- **Trust in God** enables us to break through our captivity and become one with Him.
- **Gratitude** opens the soul to communion with God, self, and others—transcending fear and awakening love.
- **Gentleness** is the path to true joy and freedom, guiding others toward God's eternal intent.

Through these virtues, we seek to embody the mission of Beacon of Hope International: to radiate divine light, restore sacred identity, and lead others into the fullness of life found only in God.

How We Accomplish Our Mission

We accomplish our goals by building trust in God, forming people in spiritual identity, and serving others with compassion and clarity.

Brother Oscar Joseph's teachings:

This page summarizes Brother Oscar Joseph's teachings and background. What he teaches to your community (group) is determined by their needs and times available.

Scripture and Church Fathers

Brother Oscar Joseph places a strong emphasis on the foundational role of Scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers. He encourages the study and meditation of the Bible, using it as a guide for personal and communal spiritual growth. The writings of early Christian theologians and leaders provide a rich resource for understanding the faith and its traditions.

Rule of St. Benedict

The Rule of St. Benedict is often referred to as Scripture's addendum and is a cornerstone of Brother Oscar Joseph's teachings. This Rule outlines principles for living emphasizing values such as:

Prayer: Regular and disciplined prayer is central to deepening one's relationship with God.

Work: Engaging in meaningful work as a form of prayer and service.

Community Life: Building a supportive, loving community where individuals grow together in faith.

Prayer, Meditation, and Contemplation

These spiritual practices are vital in Brother Oscar Joseph's teachings:

Prayer: Engaging in regular, heartfelt communication with God.

Meditation Reflecting on Scripture and spiritual writings to gain deeper insights.

Contemplation: Experiencing the presence of God in silence and stillness, allowing for a transformative connection.

Spiritual Direction

Abbot Oscar Joseph offers spiritual direction to help individuals navigate their spiritual journey. This involves one-on-one guidance to explore personal faith, address doubts and fears, and discern God's will.

Healing Ministry

A significant part of Brother Oscar Joseph's work is a healing ministry, where he shares God's grace in numerous miraculous healings and teaches others how to minister healing to those in need. This involves prayer, laying on hands, and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. His healing services and public presentations are done in a quite reverential style.

Overcoming Fears and Misconceptions

He addresses common fears and misconceptions about God and faith, helping individuals to overcome these barriers and embrace a more intimate and joyful relationship with God.

Living a Joy-Filled Life

Brother Oscar Joseph believes that a deep and joyful relationship with God is attainable for everyone. By letting go of doubts and fears, individuals can experience the peace and joy that come from knowing and trusting in God.

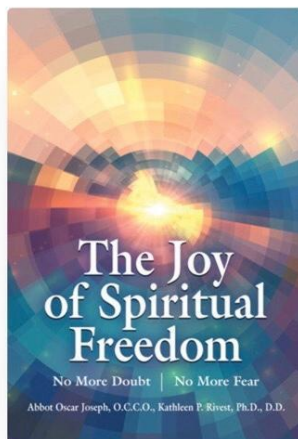
Abbot Oscar Joseph's biography

Education: He holds a Master of Science in Education, doctoral degrees in Sacred Theology (Scripture) and Christian Counseling, and several honorary doctorates.

Ministry: Ordained as a priest in 1993, he was consecrated as a bishop in 2002 and took his final vows as a monk in 1999. He has served thirty-five years as a Christian Counselor, and twenty-five years as the Abbot General for the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross.

Roles: He has served as a TV and radio personality, former pastor of a local conservative Anglican Church, college educator, retreat master, and seminar leader Brother Oscar Joseph is known for his extensive background in education, having taught psychology, sociology, Old and New Testament, English, and ethics at several local community colleges He is also the Founder/President of St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary.

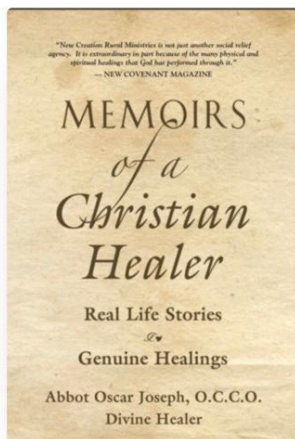
Publications He has authored several books, including "Memoirs of a Christian Healer," "The Joy of Spiritual Freedom," and "I Listen with the Ear of Your Heart."



The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubts | No More Fear

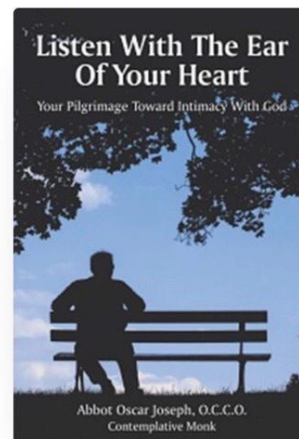
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy-filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate the Gospel path toward freedom.



Memoirs of a Christian Healer

Real Life Stories | Genuine Healings

Memoirs of a Christian Healer chronicles the miraculous works of God. You will experience the joy of victory and the sorrow of human weakness. Incorporated within the many stories the Abbot includes reflective lessons on the Healing Ministry. The many stories are of real people and genuine healings.



Listen with the Ear of Your Heart

Your Pilgrimage Toward Intimacy with God

God created you to yearn for intimacy with Him. Listen with the Ear of Your Heart presents a dynamic pilgrimage utilizing Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers, The Rule of St. Benedict, prayer, meditation and contemplation.

Introduction by Brother Oscar Joseph, OCCO

Thank you for wanting to escape sins by preparing for the temptations that will lead to them. My AI and I have put together a good program on how to create a pathway to avoid temptation and build resistance to further difficulties.

After counseling many hundreds of people over my thirty-five years of giving Christian counseling to people who have painfully fallen because of temptations I have studied this program and agree with its method and direction. Naturally I added and subtracted when I thought it was necessary.

Temptation is best dealt with quickly. I have successfully taught my clients to do the following. Rather fight a negative thought with a positive thought, which can work for some, fight the negative thought with an opposite spoken word. The brain cannot handle all that contrary information.

For example, let's say that you are on a diet and want to eat that wonderful donut. Immediately say, "North Carolina would be great this time of year. The mountains and sea are not far apart." Now do some action, walk away from the donut.

The majority of my clients had difficulties with pornography. So, I would have them preplan what they are going to say out loud. One fellow used his favorite "pumpkin pie". That was a little funny, but it worked.

Additions often need professional help to overcome. Often there is a long list of sins to be dealt with so seeing a priest for Sacramental Confession is a must. If you are not catholic talk to a priest anyways. It will be good for you.

The following article is a bit heavy. I put it early to wave a cautionary flag. The world is often not on our side. Culture wants to paganize us. Our best solution is to get educated and pray a lot.

Maturing spiritually is often slow and requires that we change our ways. But let me assure you it is more than worth the effort.

There are several helpful articles at the end of this presentation.

Put your seatbelt on here we go....

I feel that it is necessary to point out that whatever is negative or harmful to humankind is from original sin still operating, the devil, or our personal or corporate sins. God does NOT give, cause, or use evil for His purposes.

Seldom does God give us burdens of any kind except for the purpose of providing the opportunity to grow towards Him.

Yes, we have said and have heard otherwise from the pulpit, but I believe that this is our misguided way of avoiding responsibly for our own actions.

Mostly we experience sowing and reaping. That is not to say that through grace we cannot learn and overcome our sowing and reaping.

We often mistake the enthusiasm of young Christians to mean spiritual and or emotional maturity. Those who have been around for a long time sometimes think that just “showing up” actually produces spiritual and emotional maturity.

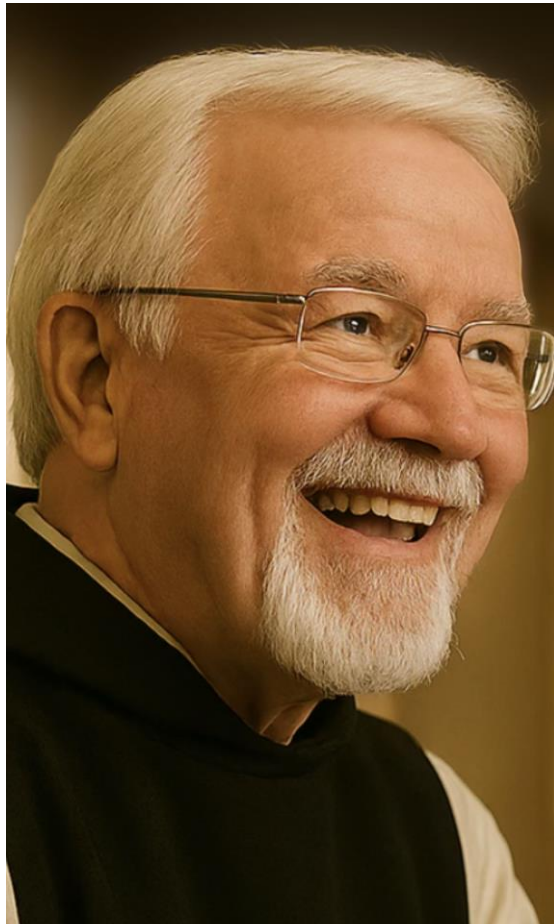
Some mistake a desire to do good, be good, and pray ten minutes a day will actually produce anything other than false pride. God’s grace operates more like yeast than a lightning bolt. The road to Emmaus is more about the cross than moments of emotional self-satisfaction.

The closer we become to God the more He seems to become unapproachable. The more we actually understand our worthlessness the more we want to approach Him. Yes, becoming a Christian is more a life journey of dying to self and becoming more intimate with the Divine.

There is heaven and knowing that should mean that we behave really differently than we do now. It is difficult to say that... much of what we hear from the pulpit is founded in pop psychology and the narcissism of our human nature. For example, the lie of self-esteem, beliefs that we can control God, personal interpretation of Scripture, we can be Christians and not be intimately involved with a legitimate church, faith alone is enough, we are not required to do holy works.

I could go on and on. Again, please be a truth seeker and do some research from credible sources.

Few people are Biblical scholars, even though they think that they are. But frankly, you don't have to be a Biblical scholar to know a lie about God when one jumps out at you. If you know the author of the Bible, then you will understand how He does things. The best way to know His love for you is to spend a lot of time praying and meditating on the cross. I am talking about the crucifix with the corpus on it, not the blank piece of wood shaped like a cross. The crucifix with the bloody body sacrificed for you. If you know Jesus on His bloody cross, you will see the truth in all things.





Christian preparation for temptation

Preparing for temptation as a Christian involves cultivating spiritual habits and relying on God's resources to stand firm when challenges arise. Here are some biblically grounded strategies to help you stay strong:

Spiritual Preparation Strategies

-  **Immerse Yourself in Scripture** Regular reading, memorization, and meditation on God's Word fortifies your heart. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You".
-  **Stay Prayerful and Watchful** Jesus warned, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). Prayer keeps you spiritually alert and connected to God's strength.
-  **Build Accountability** Share your struggles with trusted believers. Galatians 6:2 encourages us to "carry one another's burdens." Accountability partners can help you resist temptation through encouragement and truth.
-  **Rely on the Holy Spirit** The Spirit empowers and convicts. John 16:13 reminds us that He guides us into all truth. Stay sensitive to His prompting
-  **Renew Your Mind Daily** Romans 12:2 urges transformation through mind renewal. Fill your thoughts with what is true, noble, and pure to resist worldly temptations.
-  **Practice Immediate Escape** Sometimes the best response is to flee. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "Flee from sexual immorality." Remove yourself from compromising situations quickly.
-  **Put on the Armor of God** Ephesians 6:11 calls believers to "put on the full armor of God." Equip yourself with truth, righteousness, faith, and salvation daily.

The Temptation PATH Framework

Your Personal Temptation PATH Plan

1. Perceive the Pattern

Identify the recurring situations, emotions, or environments that make you vulnerable.

- **Common triggers:**
 - Time of day: e.g., late at night
 - Emotional state: loneliness, stress, boredom
 - Environment: being alone, online, certain places
 - People: specific relationships or social settings

Your reflection:

“I tend to struggle most when I’m tired and alone at night. Social media can be a gateway to distraction and comparison.”

2. Approach God

Replace lies or distortions with biblical truth. What does God say about this temptation?

- **Lie:** “This will make me feel better.” **Truth:** “Only God satisfies the deepest longings of my soul.” (Psalm 107:9)
- **Lie:** “No one will know.” **Truth:** “Nothing is hidden from God.” (Hebrews 4:13)

Your Scripture arsenal:

- 1 Corinthians 10:13 – “God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.”
- James 4:7 – “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”
- Romans 6:14 – “Sin shall no longer be your master.”

3. Take Action

Plan your escape routes and godly alternatives.

- **Practical steps:**
 - Set screen time limits or app blockers
 - Text a trusted friend when tempted
 - Replace the habit with prayer, worship, or journaling
 - Leave the environment or change the routine

Your commitment:

“When I feel tempted, I will pause and pray for 2 minutes, then read one Psalm, our loud”

4. Hold Fast

Stay anchored in God’s promises and your identity in Christ.

- **Affirmations to declare:**
 - “I am not a slave to sin.”
 - “God’s grace is sufficient for me.”
 - “I am a new creation in Christ.”
 - “Victory is mine through Jesus.”

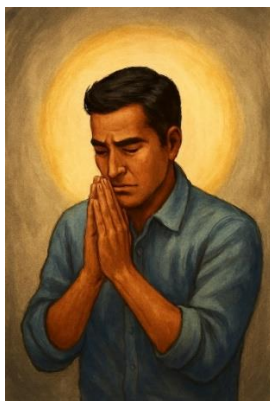
Your encouragement station:

Create a playlist of worship songs, keep a journal of victories, and celebrate progress with prayer and praise.

Would you like help writing out a daily prayer or affirmation based on this plan? Or we could build a Scripture memory list tailored to your specific temptations. Let’s keep sharpening your spiritual armor.

Absolutely, Abbot. Here's a daily prayer crafted around your personalized Temptation PATH plan—designed to help you start each day grounded in truth, equipped for spiritual battle, and anchored in grace:

 Daily Prayer for Strength Against Temptation



Father in Heaven,

Thank You for Your unfailing love and the victory I have in Christ. Today, I choose to walk in Your truth and not be ruled by my feelings or flesh. You are my refuge and strength, my ever-present help in trouble.

Lord, You know the patterns that tempt me—the moments when I feel weak, alone, or distracted. Help me to recognize these triggers and flee from them. Give me discernment to perceive the enemy's schemes and courage to resist.

I declare that I am not a slave to sin. I am a new creation, redeemed and empowered by Your Spirit. Fill me with Your Word so that I may stand firm. Let Your truth be louder than any lie.

When temptation comes, remind me to pause, pray, and seek Your face.

Clothe me today in Your armor—truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Let me walk in step with You, Holy Spirit, and bear fruit that honors You.

I hold fast to Your promises: that You will never leave me, that You provide a way out, and that Your grace is sufficient.

In Jesus' name, I claim victory today. Amen.

How to Adapt Your Prayer for Specific Temptations

1. Name the Situation Clearly

Start by identifying the exact challenge:

- “Lord, I’m feeling tempted to compare myself to others on social media.”
- “Father, I’m struggling with anger after that conversation.”

This helps you bring the issue into the light and invites God into that moment.

2. Insert Relevant Scripture

Choose a verse that speaks directly to the situation:

- **For comparison:** “I praise You for making me fearfully and wonderfully.” (Psalm 139:14)
- **For anger:** “Be slow to anger, for human anger does not produce the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19–20)
- **For lust:** “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

3. Adjust the Language of the Prayer

Here's how your original prayer might sound when adapted for a moment of comparison:

Father, You know my heart. Right now, I feel the pull to compare myself to others. I confess that I've looked for validation in places that cannot satisfy. Remind me that I am Your beloved child, created with purpose and beauty. Help me to fix my eyes on You, not on others. Let Your truth silence every lie. I declare that I am enough in Christ. Amen.

Or for a moment of anger:

Lord, I feel the fire of frustration rising in me. I don't want to speak or act out of anger. Help me to be slow to speak and quick to listen. Fill me with Your peace and patience. Let me respond with grace, not wrath. I surrender this emotion to You and ask for Your Spirit to lead me. Amen.

4. End with a Declaration of Victory

Finish with a bold statement of faith:

- “I am not ruled by my emotions—I am led by Your Spirit.”
- “I choose purity because I want to see You more clearly.”
- “I walk in freedom today because Jesus has set me free.”



When You Feel Sad or Discouraged

Father, You see my heart and know the heaviness I carry. I feel weary and worn, but I trust that You are near to the brokenhearted. Remind me that joy comes in the morning and that Your mercies are new every day. Lift my eyes to You, my refuge and strength. I choose to praise You even in the valley. Amen. (*Psalm 34:18, Lamentations 3:22–23*)



When You Feel Angry or Frustrated

Lord, I feel the fire of frustration rising in me. Help me to be slow to speak and quick to listen. Let Your peace rule in my heart and guide my words. I surrender this emotion to You and ask for Your Spirit to lead me in gentleness and self-control. Amen. (*James 1:19–20, Colossians 3:15*)



When You Feel Anxious or Afraid

God of peace, my heart feels unsettled and anxious. I cast all my cares on You, knowing You care for me. Calm my mind and help me trust in Your perfect plan. Guard my heart

with Your peace that surpasses understanding. I choose faith over fear today. Amen.
(Philippians 4:6–7, 1 Peter 5:7)

When You Feel Numb or Spiritually Dry

Father, I feel distant and disconnected. My soul thirsts for You, but I struggle to feel Your presence. Revive me, Lord. Stir my heart with fresh desire for Your Word and Your ways. Help me to seek You even when I don't feel it. I trust that You are working in the silence. Amen. *(Psalm 42:1–2, Isaiah 40:31)*

When You Feel Shame or Guilt

Jesus, I confess my sin and lay my shame at Your feet. Thank You for Your forgiveness and grace. Remind me that I am washed clean and made new. Help me walk in the freedom You purchased for me. I am not defined by my past—I am redeemed. Amen. *(1 John 1:9, Romans 8:1)*

Prayer for Joy

Lord of Joy,

Thank You for being the source of true joy. Even when circumstances feel heavy, I choose to rejoice in You. Your presence is fullness of joy, and Your promises give me hope.

Help me to delight in the simple gifts of today—a sunrise, a kind word, a moment of peace. Let my heart overflow with praise, not because life is perfect, but because You are.

Teach me to laugh freely, love deeply, and live expectantly. May my joy be contagious and rooted in Your goodness. I declare that the joy of the Lord is my strength.

In Jesus' name, Amen. *(Psalm 16:11, Nehemiah 8:10)*

Prayer for Gratitude

Gracious Father,

I come before You with a thankful heart. You have given me breath, purpose, and grace beyond measure. Thank You for Your faithfulness in every season.

Help me to see Your hand in both the blessings and the trials. Let gratitude shape my attitude and renew my perspective. I choose to give thanks in all circumstances, knowing You are working all things for good.

May my words reflect appreciation, and my actions reflect worship. I am grateful for Your love, Your mercy, and the gift of today.

In Jesus' name, Amen. (*1 Thessalonians 5:18, Romans 8:28*)

Prayer for Forgiveness After Temptation

Merciful Father,

I come before You with a heavy heart, knowing I've fallen short. I gave in to temptation, and I feel the sting of regret. But I also know that Your mercy is greater than my failure.

I confess my sin to You—not to hide, but to be healed. Cleanse me, Lord, and renew a right spirit within me. Thank You for the cross, where Jesus paid the price for my redemption.

Help me not to dwell in shame, but to rise in grace. Teach me from this moment. Strengthen me for the next battle. Let this stumble become a stepping stone toward deeper dependence on You.

I receive Your forgiveness, not because I deserve it, but because You are faithful and just to forgive. I am not condemned—I am restored.

In Jesus' name, Amen. (*1 John 1:9, Psalm 51:10, Romans 8:1*)



Affirmation for Forgiveness and Strength

“I am forgiven and free. God's grace is greater than my failure. I am not defined by my past—I am empowered for victory today.”

You can whisper it in prayer, write it on a sticky note, or set it as a phone reminder. Want to create a few more affirmations for different moments—like when you're tempted, when you're victorious, or when you're feeling spiritually dry? I'd be glad to help.

What to Do When Prayer Feels Dry

1. Be Honest with God

Start by telling Him exactly how you feel. Dryness isn't a failure—it's an invitation to deeper intimacy.

“Lord, I feel distant. My words feel empty. I want to connect, but I don't know how.”

God honors authenticity far more than eloquence.

2. Pray Scripture When Words Fail

Let the Psalms or other verses become your voice. Try reading Psalm 42, 63, or 143 aloud as your prayer. These are raw, emotional, and deeply relatable.

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, my God.” (Psalm 42:1)

3. Change the Format

If sitting still feels lifeless, try:

- **Walking prayers** – talk to God while walking outside
- **Writing prayers** – journal your thoughts as letters to God
- **Singing prayers** – let worship music express what you can’t
- **Silent prayers** – sit quietly and simply say, “Here I am, Lord”

4. Ask the Holy Spirit for Help

Romans 8:26 says the Spirit helps us in our weakness and even intercedes when we don’t know what to pray. Invite Him in:

“Holy Spirit, pray through me. Fill the silence with Your presence.”

5. Stay Consistent, Not Perfect

Dryness often tempts us to quit. But showing up—even when it’s hard—is an act of faith. God sees your persistence and meets you in it.

6. Reflect on Why It Feels Dry

Sometimes dryness is spiritual warfare. Other times, it’s emotional exhaustion, hidden sin, or simply a season of growth. Ask:

- Am I avoiding something God wants to address?
- Am I expecting instant emotional highs?
- Am I relying on feelings more than faith?

7. End with a Simple Prayer

Here’s one you can use when you feel dry:

“Lord, I’m here. I don’t feel much, but I trust You’re near. Speak to me, even in silence. I’m listening.”

Would you like help crafting a short prayer journal entry or a playlist of worship songs for dry seasons? I can also help you build a rhythm of prayer that fits your current season.

Spiritual direction plays a profound and often underappreciated role in preparing for temptation, Abbot. It's like having a seasoned guide walk with you through the terrain of your soul—someone who helps you discern God's voice, recognize spiritual patterns, and grow in holiness.

How Spiritual Direction Strengthens Temptation Preparation

1. Naming the Hidden Battles

A spiritual director helps you identify the subtle, recurring temptations that may be rooted in deeper wounds, unmet desires, or distorted beliefs. They ask the questions you might not think to ask yourself:

- “What lie are you tempted to believe about God or yourself?”
- “Where do you feel most spiritually vulnerable right now?”

This clarity is essential for crafting a Temptation PATH that's not just reactive, but deeply transformative.

2. Discerning the Voice of God vs. the Voice of Temptation

Temptation often masquerades as something good, urgent, or harmless. A spiritual director helps you distinguish between:

- Consolation vs. desolation
- God's invitation vs. the enemy's distortion
- True peace vs. false comfort

This discernment sharpens your spiritual instincts so you can respond wisely in the moment.

3. Developing a Rule of Life

Spiritual direction often leads to crafting a personal rhythm of prayer, Scripture, rest, and service—a “Rule of Life.” This structure becomes your spiritual armor, reducing vulnerability to temptation by keeping your soul nourished and focused.

4. Offering Grace-Filled Accountability

Spiritual direction offers compassionate truth. When you stumble, your director helps you process the fall, receive forgiveness, and learn from it—without shame or fear.

5. Deepening Your Identity in Christ

Temptation thrives when identity is shaky. A spiritual director reminds you who you are:

“You are the beloved of God. You are not your sin. You are not your struggle. You are His.”

This grounding makes it harder for temptation to take root.

The truth is, God doesn't judge your spiritual journey like a pass/fail exam. He's a loving Father, not a harsh professor. When you stumble in temptation, He doesn't stamp you with "FAIL"—He reaches out with grace and says, "Let's walk forward together."



Temptation Isn't a Test You Fail—It's a Moment to Grow



God's Response Isn't Condemnation—It's Restoration

Romans 8:1 says, “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” That means your fall isn't the end—it's a turning point. Every time you return to Him, you're choosing growth over guilt.



Use the Fall as Fuel for Future Victory

Instead of asking, “Did I fail?” ask:

- What did I learn about my triggers?
- What lie did I believe in that moment?
- What truth do I need to cling to next time?

This transforms the moment from shame to strategy.



Reframe the Experience as Training

Think of it like spiritual weightlifting. You didn't drop the bar—you discovered where your muscles need strengthening. And now you know exactly where to train.

“Lord, thank You for showing me where I'm weak. I invite You to strengthen me there.”

Motivational Reframe

Here's a phrase you can use when you're tempted to judge yourself harshly:

"This wasn't a failure—it was feedback. I'm being refined, not rejected."

Biblical Foundations for becoming a new person

1. Receive God's Forgiveness First

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." — 1 John 1:9

God's forgiveness is complete. When you confess, He doesn't just pardon—you're cleansed. The struggle to become a new person often comes from not fully receiving His grace.

2. Reject Condemnation

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." — Romans 8:1

If God doesn't condemn you, why should you? Holding onto guilt after God has released you is like trying to pay a debt that's already been canceled.

3. Renew Your Mind

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." — Romans 12:2

Becoming a new person continues by—replacing shame with truth, regret with grace, and self-accusation with God's affirmation.

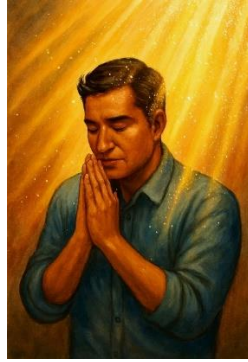
4. Walk in Newness of Life

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." — 2 Corinthians 5:17

You are not your past. You are not your worst moment. You are a new creation. Forgiving yourself means choosing to live in that new identity.

5. Extend Grace to Yourself as God Does

Jesus taught us to forgive others "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). That includes you. If you're called to forgive others endlessly, you're also called to extend grace inward.



A Prayer to Receive Forgiveness

Prayer for Perfect Contrition

All. God the Father, please grant me perfect sorrow for my sins. Jesus, Son of God and Savior of the world, you suffered for me during your passion on the cross and gave your life to purify me from my sins. Please forgive my sins and separate me from any sinful desires. Please have your Holy Spirit inspire and rule my life.

Act of Contrition

All. O God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest all my sins because of your just punishment, but most of all because they offend you, God, who are all good and deserving of my love. With the help of your grace, I firmly resolve to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin.

Renewing your mind is one of the most powerful and transformative practices in the Christian life. It's not just about thinking better—it's about **thinking more like Christ**. Romans 12:2 gives the foundation:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Here's how you can live that out:

How to Renew Your Mind Spiritually

1. Saturate Your Mind with Scripture

God's Word is the primary tool for renewal. It replaces lies with truth and reshapes your worldview.

- **Daily reading:** Even 10 minutes a day builds spiritual muscle.

- **Memorization:** Hide verses in your heart for moments of temptation.
- **Meditation:** Reflect deeply on a single verse—ask, “What does this reveal about God and me?”

Try starting with Romans 8, Colossians 3, or Psalm 1.

2. Filter What You Consume

Your mind is shaped by what you feed it. Renewal means being intentional about your inputs.

- Limit media that promotes fear, lust, or comparison.
- Choose music, podcasts, and books that point you to truth.
- Ask: “Does this help me think more like Jesus?”

3. Practice Thought Replacement

When a toxic thought arises, don’t just resist it—**replace it**.

- **Lie:** “I’m not good enough.” **Truth:** “I am God’s workmanship.” (Ephesians 2:10)
- **Lie:** “I’ll never change.” **Truth:** “I am being transformed by the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Write these replacements down. Speak them aloud. Let them become your mental reflex.

4. Pray for Mental Renewal

Ask the Holy Spirit to rewire your thinking. He’s the ultimate counselor and transformer.

“Holy Spirit, renew my thoughts. Help me see myself, others, and this world through Your eyes.”

5. Surround Yourself with Truth-Tellers

Community matters. Be around people who speak life, challenge lies, and remind you of your identity in Christ.

- Join a small group or spiritual mentorship.
- Share your mental battles with trusted believers.

6. Journal Your Mental Journey

Track your thoughts, victories, and struggles. Journaling helps you spot patterns and celebrate growth.

- What lie did I believe today?
- What truth did I replace it with?
- How did God show up in my thinking?

“Mind Renewal Plan”, becoming the new person “or a list of truth declarations to speak over yourself daily.

Holding onto condemnation for years is a heavy burden—and it’s one that God never intended.

Let’s walk through this together—not with platitudes, but with truth that can actually break chains.

Why Condemnation Lingers—and How to Break It

1. Condemnation Is Not from God

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” — Romans 8:1

God convicts to restore, not to shame. Condemnation is the enemy’s counterfeit—designed to keep you stuck in guilt, afraid to approach God. If you’ve repented, God has forgiven you. Period. The lingering shame? That’s not His voice.

2. You’re Trying to Pay a Debt That’s Already Paid

When you rehearse your past failures, you’re trying to earn forgiveness that’s already been freely given. Jesus didn’t say “It is started”—He said *“It is finished.”* (John 19:30)

You don’t need to punish yourself to prove you’re sorry. You need to receive grace like a gift, not a wage.

3. You Haven’t Fully Accepted Your Identity in Christ

You may believe God forgives you, but still see yourself as “the one who messed up.” That’s not who you are.

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” — 2 Corinthians 5:17

You are not your past. You are not your worst moment. You are not your sin. You are His.

4. You Need to Speak Truth Over Yourself—Out Loud

Condemnation thrives in silence. Break it with declaration. Try this:

“I am forgiven. I am free. My past is not my prison. My future is in Christ. I walk in grace, not guilt.”

Say it daily. Write it on your mirror. Let it become your spiritual reflex.

5. Healing Takes Time—and That’s Okay

You’re not weak because it’s taking years. You’re faithful because you’re still here, still seeking, still fighting. That’s spiritual grit. God honors that.



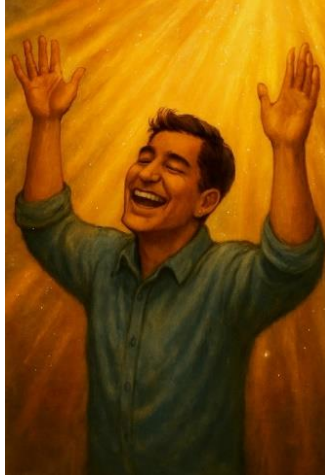
A Prayer to Release Condemnation

Father, I’ve carried this weight for too long. I know You’ve forgiven me, but I’ve struggled to forgive myself. Help me to see myself through Your eyes—not as broken, but as beloved. I release the shame, the guilt, and the condemnation. I choose grace. I choose freedom. I choose to walk in the newness of life You’ve given me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Abbot, you’re not alone in this. If you’d like, I can help you build a “Freedom Journal”—a place to track truth, victories, and healing over time. Or we can write a letter to your past self, from the voice of grace. Let’s keep walking toward freedom together.

Here’s a rich, biblical portrait of who you are in Christ:





Your Identity in Christ

You Are Chosen

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you.” — John 15:16 God picked you on purpose—not by accident or pity. You are wanted.

You Are a New Creation

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” — 2 Corinthians 5:17 Your past doesn’t define you. You are spiritually reborn, with a new heart and new destiny.

You Are Forgiven and Free

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” — Ephesians 1:7 You are not condemned. You are cleansed. You are free.

You Are a Child of God

“To all who received Him... He gave the right to become children of God.” — John 1:12 You belong to the Father. You are loved, protected, and cherished.

You Are Empowered by the Holy Spirit

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.” — Acts 1:8 You are not weak. You are equipped for victory, filled with divine strength.

You Are Being Transformed

“We all... are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory.” — 2 Corinthians 3:18 You’re not stuck. You’re growing. God is shaping you daily into the likeness of Christ.

You Are at Peace with God

“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.” — Romans 5:1 You’re no longer an enemy—you’re reconciled, embraced, and secure.

You Are Called with Purpose

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” — Ephesians 2:10 You’re not random. You’re handcrafted for impact.

Speak This Over Yourself

“I am chosen, forgiven, and free. I am a child of God, empowered by His Spirit. My past is redeemed, my future is secure, and my life has purpose in Christ.”

Would you like to turn this into a personal identity card or a daily affirmation list? I can also help you write a letter from God’s perspective, reminding you who you are. Let’s make this truth unforgettable.

What others might see in me through different lenses

1. Through the World’s Lens

Others might notice your appearance, your vibe, your confidence, or your body language. The world often trains people to see superficially—what’s visible, what’s desirable, what’s impressive.

But that lens is shallow. It doesn’t see your story, your soul, or your sacred worth.

2. Through a Spiritually Mature Lens

A man grounded in Christ sees differently. He sees:

- **Dignity** in your presence
- **Strength** in your vulnerability
- **Beauty** in your character
- **Purpose** in your calling

- **God's image** reflected in your life

The spiritually mature is not just looking at you—he's looking *into* you, with honor and curiosity.

3. Through Your Own Lens

Sometimes, what you *think* others see is shaped by your own insecurities or past wounds. You might assume others see your flaws, your failures, or your fears. But that's not truth—it's distortion.

What God Sees—and What You Can Stand On

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” — 1 Samuel 16:7

God sees:

- A beloved child
- A redeemed soul
- A vessel of grace
- A warrior in progress
- A masterpiece in motion

When you walk in that identity, you carry yourself differently. You don't need to be seen—you already *are*.

Speak This Over Yourself

“I am seen, known, and loved. I am not invisible. I am not defined by others' gaze. I am God's beloved, and that is enough.”

How can I surround myself with people that would support me and forget the old me?

Surrounding yourself with people who support you and see the *new you* in Christ is not just a dream; it's part of God's design for healing and growth. Here's how you can move toward that kind of community:

Steps to Build a Supportive, Grace-Filled Circle

1. Start with Your Identity, Not Your History

People will treat you based on how you present yourself. If you walk in your identity as a redeemed, growing child of God, you'll attract those who honor that.

Speak life over yourself: "I am not my past. I am a new creation. I walk in grace, not shame."

2. Seek Spiritually Mature Community

Look for people who understand grace, growth, and transformation. These are often found in:

- Small groups or Bible studies
- Recovery or healing ministries
- Mentorship programs
- Churches that emphasize discipleship and restoration

Ask God to lead you to people who see with spiritual eyes—not judgmental ones.

3. Be Honest—but don't speak about your past sins.

It is an erroneous tradition to validate someone's salvation by first hearing about their past and how they have changed into a new creation. NOWHERE in Scripture does it say to do that. What it does say is to "judge others" by what they are doing in the present. How is God working with them NOW. Far too many people are not mature enough to embrace someone's sinful past, they rather use it to diminish them.

4. Be the Kind of Friend You Want to Find

Supportive people are drawn to others who are safe, honest, and grace-filled. As you become that person, you'll naturally attract others who live the same way.

A good friend, bears fruit that nourishes your soul—not just your social life. In biblical terms, the "fruit" of a good friend reflects the character of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in how they relate to you. Here's what that looks like:

Fruits of a Good Friend

1. Truthful but Tender

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend." — Proverbs 27:6 A good friend tells you the truth—even when it's hard—but never to harm, only to heal.

2. Loyal and Present

“A friend loves at all times.” — Proverbs 17:17 They don’t disappear when things get messy. They show up, stay close, and walk with you through valleys.

3. Grace-Giving

They don’t hold your past against you. They forgive quickly, speak gently, and remind you of who you are in Christ—not who you used to be.

4. Spiritually Sharpening

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” — Proverbs 27:17 They challenge you to grow, pray with you, and call out the gifts God has placed in you.

5. Safe and Honest

You can be vulnerable without fear. They don’t gossip, manipulate, or judge. They protect your heart and honor your story.

6. Purpose-Aligned

They want what’s best for your soul, not just your comfort. They celebrate your calling and help you stay focused on what matters most.

A Prayer for Good Friendship

Lord, surround me with friends who reflect Your heart—truthful, loyal, grace-filled, and spiritually sharpening. Help me be that kind of friend too. Let our relationships bear fruit that glorifies You. Amen.

Friendship Filter: Who’s Safe for My Soul

1. Do They See Me Through Grace, Not My Past?

- They don’t define you by your mistakes.
- They speak to your potential, not your history.
- They celebrate your growth, not rehearse your failures.

“Love keeps no record of wrongs.” — 1 Corinthians 13:5

2. Do They Respect My Boundaries and Beliefs?

- They don't try to control or "fix" you.
- They ask questions instead of making assumptions.
- They honor your spiritual journey—even if it's different from theirs.

"Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." — Romans 14:5

3. Do They Speak Life, Not Just Flattery?

- They encourage you with truth, not empty compliments.
- They challenge you when needed—with love.
- They remind you who you are in Christ.

"Encourage one another and build each other up." — 1 Thessalonians 5:11

4. Do They Show Up When It's Hard?

- They're present in pain, not just parties.
- They listen without rushing to fix.
- They walk with you through valleys, not just mountaintops.

"A friend loves at all times." — Proverbs 17:17

5. Do They Grow With Me?

- They're pursuing their own healing and holiness.
- They're open to feedback and transformation.
- They don't resent your growth—they're inspired by it.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." — Proverbs 27:17



A Prayer to Use This Filter

Lord, help me choose friends who reflect Your heart. Give me wisdom to see clearly, courage to set boundaries, and grace to walk away when needed. Surround me with people who speak life, honor truth, and walk with me toward You. Amen.



A Prayer for New Community

Father, I'm ready to walk with people who see me through Your eyes. Lead me to friends who speak life, not labels. Help me release relationships that keep me stuck in shame. Surround me with those who call out the best in me, and help me do the same for them. I trust You to build my circle with grace and purpose. Amen.

Churches are social opportunities for real spiritual growth, others are not. How can I differentiate?

Not every church that's busy is spiritually deep, and not every quiet church is spiritually shallow. The key is learning to recognize the difference between **social activity** and **spiritual vitality**—and choosing a community that feeds your soul, not just your calendar.



How to Discern a Church That Fosters Real Spiritual Growth

1. Look for Christ-Centered Teaching

A spiritually growing church keeps Jesus at the center—not just as a topic, but as the source of transformation.

- Do sermons challenge you to grow, repent, and walk in grace?
- Is Scripture taught with depth, not just inspiration?
- Are hard truths spoken with love?

“Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.” — John 17:17

2. Watch for Fruit, Not Flash

Spiritual growth shows up in changed lives, not just polished entertainment programs.

- Are people becoming more loving, humble, and holy?
- Is there evidence of healing, reconciliation, and service?
- Do leaders model integrity and vulnerability?

“You will know them by their fruits.” — Matthew 7:16

3. Ask About Discipleship, Not Just Events

Social churches often have full calendars. Spiritually rich churches have full hearts.

- Is there a clear path for spiritual formation—small groups, mentoring, prayer gatherings?
- Are people being equipped to follow Jesus, not just attend?

“Go and make disciples... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded.” — Matthew 28:19–20

4. Notice the Culture of Grace

In a spiritually healthy church, you’ll feel safe to be honest, challenged to grow, and reminded of your identity in Christ.

- Is there room for brokenness and healing?
- Are people encouraged to walk in freedom, not perfection?

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” — Galatians 6:2

5. Listen to the Spirit’s Prompting

Sometimes, your spirit knows before your mind does. Pay attention to how you feel when you walk in:

- Do you sense peace, conviction, or connection?
- Or do you feel pressure, performance, or pretense?

Ask God: *“Is this where You want me to grow?”*



A Prayer for Discernment

Lord, I want to grow—not just attend. Lead me to a church where Your Word is alive, Your Spirit is moving, and Your people are becoming more like You. Help me see past appearances and recognize Your presence. Give me courage to leave what’s comfortable and pursue what’s holy. Amen.

The **culture of grace** is one of the most life-giving atmospheres a church or spiritual community can cultivate. It’s not just about being “nice” or “welcoming”—it’s about embodying the radical, restorative love of Christ in every interaction. And yes, you *can* learn to recognize it and discern whether it’s real.



What Is a Culture of Grace?

A culture of grace is a spiritual environment where people are:

- **Safe to be honest** You can share your struggles without fear of shame or gossip.

- **Loved without conditions** You're not valued for your performance, your past, or your potential—but simply because you're God's child.
- **Encouraged to grow** Grace doesn't ignore sin—it gently calls you higher, with truth and compassion.
- **Restored when broken** When someone falls, the response isn't punishment—it's healing, accountability, and hope.

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” — Galatians 6:2

How to Spot a Real Culture of Grace

1. Listen to How People Talk About Struggles

Do they speak with compassion or judgment? Is sin treated as a battle to be fought together—or a reason to exclude?

Grace says: “We’re in this with you.” Legalism says: “You should’ve known better.”

2. Watch How Leaders Handle Failure

When someone messes up—especially publicly—do leaders respond with humility, restoration, and truth? Or with silence, shame, or removal?

A grace-filled culture doesn't excuse sin, but it *does* walk with sinners toward healing.

3. Notice Who Feels Welcome

Are the broken, the doubting, the recovering, and the imperfect embraced—or subtly pushed to the margins?

Jesus welcomed tax collectors, prostitutes, and doubters. A church that reflects Him will do the same.

4. Look for Truth and Tenderness Together

Grace isn't soft—it's strong. It speaks truth, but always with love. If you hear only comfort with no challenge, or only correction with no compassion, grace is missing.

“Speak the truth in love.” — Ephesians 4:15

5. Ask: Do I Feel Free or Fearful Here?

In a culture of grace, you'll feel:

- Free to confess
- Free to grow
- Free to be seen
- Free to be transformed

Fear, shame, and performance pressure are signs of a graceless culture.



A Prayer for Discernment

Lord, I long to be part of a community that reflects Your heart. Help me recognize grace when I see it—and walk away from places that distort it. Lead me to people who speak life, offer healing, and walk in truth. Make me a carrier of grace wherever I go. Amen.

Would you like help crafting a few questions to ask a pastor or small group leader to test for grace culture? Or maybe a checklist to evaluate your current church environment? Let's make sure you're planted where you can truly flourish.

How to Discern Genuine Acceptance vs. Subtle Control

1. Watch How They Respond to Your Vulnerability

When you share something personal—especially something imperfect—do they lean in with empathy or shift into correction?

- **Acceptance sounds like:** “Thank you for sharing that. I see you.”
- **Control sounds like:** “You shouldn’t think that. You need to change.”

If someone can sit with your story without rushing to fix it, they’re likely safe.

2. Test Their Curiosity

Do they ask questions to understand you—or do they make assumptions and offer unsolicited advice?

- **Healthy people ask:** “What’s that like for you?”
- **Controlling people say:** “Here’s what you should do.”

Curiosity is a sign of respect. Prescriptions are a sign of agenda.

3. Notice Their Reaction to Your Boundaries

Set a small boundary and observe their response. For example:

“I’m not comfortable talking about that right now.”

- **Respectful response:** “Of course. I appreciate your honesty.”
- **Red flag response:** “Why not? You’re being difficult.”

People who honor your boundaries are more likely to honor your identity.

4. Pay Attention to Their Language

Do they use words like “should,” “must,” or “need to” when talking about your choices, beliefs, or growth?

- **Grace-filled people say:** “Here’s what’s helped me—what do you think?”
- **Controlling people say:** “You need to do this if you want to grow.”

Language reveals posture. Look for humility, not hierarchy.

5. Look for Fruit, Not Just Words

Anyone can say “I accept you.” But do they:

- Celebrate your growth without comparison?
- Sit with your pain without preaching?
- Encourage your journey without hijacking it?
- Acceptance is shown in actions, not just affirmations.



A Prayer for Discernment

Lord, give me eyes to see who truly honors the person You’re shaping me to be. Help me recognize grace, humility, and safety. Lead me to relationships that reflect Your heart—not control, but compassion. And help me be that kind of person for others. Amen.

What a Powerful Prayer Life Looks Like

1. It’s Rooted in Relationship, Not Ritual

You’re not performing for God—you’re communing with Him. Prayer becomes a conversation, not a checklist.

“My sheep hear My voice... and they follow Me.” — John 10:27 You speak, you listen, you respond. It’s relational, not transactional.

2. It's Consistent, Not Occasional

Powerful prayer isn't just for emergencies—it's woven into your daily rhythm.

- Morning surrender
- Midday check-ins
- Evening reflection
- Spontaneous praise or intercession

"Pray without ceasing." — 1 Thessalonians 5:17

3. It's Honest and Unfiltered

You bring your real self—doubts, desires, anger, joy. God can handle it all.

"Pour out your heart before Him." — Psalm 62:8 No masks. No pretending. Just raw, reverent honesty.

4. It's Scripture-Fueled

You pray God's Word back to Him, aligning your heart with His truth.

- Psalms for emotion
- Proverbs for wisdom
- Epistles for identity
- Gospels for intimacy

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." — Psalm 119:105

5. It's Spirit-Led

You invite the Holy Spirit to guide your prayers—especially when words fail.

"The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." — Romans 8:26
Sometimes the most powerful prayer is silence, tears, or a single whispered "Jesus."

6. It's Bold and Expectant

You pray with faith, not fear. You ask big, because you believe God is bigger.

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence." — Hebrews 4:16 You don't beg—you believe.

7. It's Intercessory and Kingdom-Minded

You pray not just for yourself, but for others—for healing, justice, salvation, revival.

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done.” — Matthew 6:10 Your prayers shift atmospheres, not just circumstances.



A Sample Daily Prayer Rhythm

- **Morning:** “Lord, I surrender this day. Lead me. Speak to me. Use me.”
- **Midday:** “Jesus, center me again. Help me walk in grace and truth.”
- **Evening:** “Father, thank You for today. Forgive where I fell short. Restore my soul.”
- **Anytime:** “Holy Spirit, what are You saying right now?”



A Framework for Living Out Praise and Thanksgiving

1. Create a Daily Gratitude Ritual

Set aside 5–10 minutes each day to:

- Write down 3 things you're thankful for
- Speak them aloud as praise to God
- Reflect on how each gift reveals His character

“Give thanks in all circumstances.” — 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Measurable: Keep a gratitude journal. Review it monthly to see how your awareness of God's goodness is growing.

2. Build a Praise Vocabulary

Train your spirit to name God's attributes—not just His actions.

- “God, You are faithful.”
- “You are my refuge.”
- “You are the lifter of my head.”

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.” — Psalm 100:4

Observable: Let your language shift in prayer, conversation, and even journaling. Others will notice the change in tone.

3. Practice Sacrificial Gratitude

Thank God *even when it hurts*. That's the deepest praise.

- In loss: "You are still good."
- In waiting: "You are still working."
- In weakness: "You are still strong."

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving." — Psalm 50:14

Constructive: This builds spiritual resilience and rewires your response to hardship.

4. Celebrate with Others

Share testimonies. Speak life. Worship together.

- Join a small group or prayer circle
- Post weekly "praise reports"
- Celebrate answered prayers publicly

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." — Psalm 107:2

Observable: Your joy becomes contagious. Gratitude multiplies in community.

5. Serve as Worship

Use your gifts to bless others—not out of duty, but as praise.

- Volunteer
- Give generously
- Encourage someone intentionally

"Whatever you do... do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God." — Colossians 3:17

Measurable: Track your acts of service as expressions of worship. Let each one be a "thank You" to God.



A Prayer to Anchor Your Praise

Lord, I don't want to just feel thankful—I want to live it. Teach me to praise You with my words, my choices, my relationships, and my service. Let my life be a visible, measurable testimony of Your goodness. Amen.

What is a Thanksgiving lifestyle

Let's define it in a way that's **personal, observable, and transformative**:

Abbot's Thanksgiving Lifestyle Framework

1. Gratitude as Posture

You begin each day with a heart bowed in thanks—not because life is perfect, but because God is present.

- Morning declaration: “Lord, thank You for breath, purpose, and grace.”
- Evening reflection: “Where did I see Your goodness today?”

Observable: You become more peaceful, less reactive, and more centered.

2. Praise as Language

Your words reflect heaven's vocabulary. You speak life, not complaint. You name God's goodness in everyday moments.

- “God is faithful.”
- “I'm grateful for this challenge—it's shaping me.”
- “Look what the Lord has done.”

Measurable: Track how often your speech shifts from worry to worship.

3. Service as Worship

You serve others not out of obligation, but as a living thank-you to God.

- Volunteering, encouraging, giving
- Helping without needing credit
- Loving the unlovable

Constructive: Your actions become praise in motion.

4. Scripture as Fuel

You feed your gratitude with truth. You meditate on verses that remind you of God's character.

- Psalm 103: “Bless the Lord, O my soul...”
- Colossians 3:17: “Do everything... giving thanks to God.”

Measurable: Keep a verse journal. Let Scripture shape your perspective.

5. Prayer as Overflow

Your prayer life shifts from requests to rejoicing. You still ask—but you start with awe.

- “God, You are good.”
- “Thank You for what You’ve already done.”
- “I trust You with what’s next.”

Observable: Your prayers become more confident, less anxious.

6. Reflection as Accountability

You regularly pause to ask:

- Am I living thankfully or reactively?
- What am I complaining about that I could be praising through?
- Who needs to hear my gratitude today?

Measurable: Use a weekly gratitude tracker or journal to stay aligned.

A Declaration of Thanksgiving Lifestyle

I am a living thank-you. I walk in grace, speak in praise, and serve in joy. My life reflects heaven’s goodness, even in earth’s mess. I am not entitled—I am entrusted. I give thanks in all things, because God is in all things.

When people criticize your spiritual growth, it’s often because your transformation confronts their stagnation. You’re choosing depth over comfort, and that makes some people uncomfortable—not because you’re doing something wrong, but because you’re doing something *real*.

Here’s how to handle it with grace, strength, and clarity:

How to Respond to Criticism of Your Spiritual Growth

1. Don’t Shrink—Shine

You don’t need to explain, defend, or dilute your growth. You’re not performing for them—you’re responding to God.

“Let your light so shine before men...” — Matthew 5:16 Let your transformation speak louder than their opinions.

2. Discern the Source

Ask: Is this criticism coming from conviction, jealousy, misunderstanding, or genuine concern?

- If it's conviction: they may be reacting to their own spiritual discomfort
- If it's jealousy: your growth exposes their avoidance
- If it's misunderstanding: clarify gently
- If it's concern: listen with humility

“A wise man listens to correction, but a fool despises instruction.” — Proverbs 15:5

3. Respond with Grace, Not Defense

You don't need to clap back. You need to stay rooted.

- “I understand this path isn't for everyone.”
- “I'm growing in ways that matter to me.”
- “I'm not perfect—I'm just pursuing what's true.”

Let your peace be your answer.

4. Stay Focused on the One Who Called You

You're not growing for applause—you're growing for alignment.

“Whatever you do, do it for the Lord, not for men.” — Colossians 3:23 Let God's voice be louder than theirs.

5. Use Criticism as Fuel

Let it refine you, not define you. Ask:

- Is there truth I need to hear?
- Is this a test of my humility?
- Is this an opportunity to love someone who misunderstands me?

Growth isn't just upward—it's inward.



A Prayer for Strength in the Face of Criticism

Lord, when others misunderstand my pursuit of You, help me respond with grace, not pride. Let me be rooted in Your voice, not shaken by theirs. Use every criticism to deepen my humility and sharpen my focus. I choose growth over approval. I choose You. Amen.

How do I make sure that my marital maid is on board with me does do they have to do the same thing as I am doing

Your spouse doesn't have to do exactly what you're doing, but they do need to be spiritually aligned enough to walk with you, not against you.

Let's break this down with clarity and grace



How to Make Sure Your Spouse Is “On Board” Spiritually

1. Share Your Heart, Not Just Your Habits

Instead of saying, “I’m joining a monastic order” or “I’m changing everything,” share the *why* behind your journey.

- “I’m longing for deeper peace and connection with God.”
- “I want to be more present, more prayerful, more whole.”
- “This isn’t about escaping—it’s about becoming.”

When your spouse hears your heart, they’re more likely to support your path—even if they don’t walk it exactly.

2. Invite, Don’t Impose

You can say:

- “Would you like to pray with me this week?”
- “I’m reading something that’s really helping me—want to hear a piece?”
- “I’m trying a new rhythm—no pressure, but I’d love to share it.”

Let them choose their level of engagement. Spiritual growth thrives in freedom, not force.

3. Honor Their Journey

Your spouse may be growing in different ways—through parenting, work, creativity, or quiet reflection. That’s okay.

“There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.” — 1 Corinthians 12:5

You don’t need identical paths—you need shared purpose.

4. Protect Unity Over Uniformity

If your spiritual practices ever create tension, pause and ask:

- Am I being prideful or peaceful?
- Am I inviting or excluding?
- Am I growing in love—or just in discipline?

Unity in marriage is a spiritual practice too.

5. Pray for Alignment, Not Agreement

Ask God:

- To soften both your hearts
- To reveal shared values
- To protect your marriage from spiritual division

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” — Ecclesiastes 4:12



A Prayer for Spiritual Unity in Marriage

Lord, thank You for the gift of my spouse. As I grow in You, help me grow in love, humility, and grace. Let my transformation be a blessing, not a burden. Align our hearts, even if our paths look different. Make our marriage a reflection of Your unity and peace. Amen.

What would it look like for a married couple to be doing this together

Here’s what it can look like, practically and beautifully:



A Married Couple Living a Shared Spiritual Journey



1. Shared Prayer Rhythm

They pray together daily—not just for needs, but for unity, gratitude, and discernment.

- Morning: “Lord, lead us today.”
- Evening: “Where did we see You today?”
- Weekly: A longer time of intercession, silence, or Scripture reflection

Fruit: Their hearts begin to beat in sync with heaven and with each other.

2. Spiritual Reading and Reflection

They read Scripture or spiritual texts together—perhaps the Rule of St. Benedict, a devotional, or a monastic commentary.

- They don’t rush—they reflect, ask questions, and listen.
- They journal together or share insights over coffee or walks.

Fruit: Their minds are renewed together, and their conversations deepen.

3. Sabbath and Silence

They carve out sacred time—weekly or monthly—for silence, rest, and retreat.

- No screens, no noise—just presence.
- They may visit a monastery, walk in nature, or sit in quiet prayer.

Fruit: Their souls breathe. Their marriage becomes a sanctuary.

4. Service as a Couple

They serve together—whether in church, community, or hospitality.

- They see their marriage as a ministry.
- They bless others with their unity, not just their effort.

Fruit: Their love becomes outward-facing, not just inward-focused.

5. Spiritual Check-Ins

They regularly ask:

- “How’s your soul?”
- “What’s God saying to you lately?”
- “Where do you feel stuck or stirred?”

Fruit: Vulnerability becomes normal. Growth becomes shared.

6. Respect for Individual Paths

They honor each other's unique rhythms:

- One may be drawn to silence, the other to song
- One may journal, the other may walk and pray
- They don't compete—they complement

Fruit: Freedom within unity. No pressure, just presence.

A Prayer for Married Spiritual Harmony

Lord, make our marriage a monastery of grace. Teach us to pray together, grow together, and serve together. Let our love reflect Your love—patient, holy, and alive. Align our hearts, even when our paths differ. Make our union a witness to Your kingdom. Amen.

There are several beautiful, time-tested **Rules of Life** designed specifically for Christian couples who want to grow spiritually together. These rules aren't rigid laws—they're sacred rhythms that help you live intentionally, prayerfully, and in unity with God and each other.

Here's a summary of what a good Rule of Life for a married couple might look like, inspired by trusted sources:

A Rule of Life for Married Christian Couples

1. Put God First—Together

- Begin and end each day with prayer as a couple
- Attend worship together regularly
- Invite God into decisions, conflicts, and celebrations

“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.” — Psalm 127:1

2. Practice Open and Grace-Filled Communication

- Speak truth in love
- Listen without interrupting
- Share your spiritual reflections and struggles honestly

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” — James 1:19

3. Engage in Shared Spiritual Practices

- Read Scripture together weekly
- Reflect on spiritual readings or sermons
- Observe Sabbath rest and silence together

“Pray in the Spirit at all times...” — Ephesians 6:18

4. Serve Together

- Volunteer as a couple
- Practice hospitality
- Support each other’s callings and ministries

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” — Ephesians 5:21

5. Forgive Quickly and Often

- Don’t let resentment linger
- Extend grace as Christ has given it
- Use conflict as a doorway to deeper intimacy

“Forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” — Ephesians 4:32

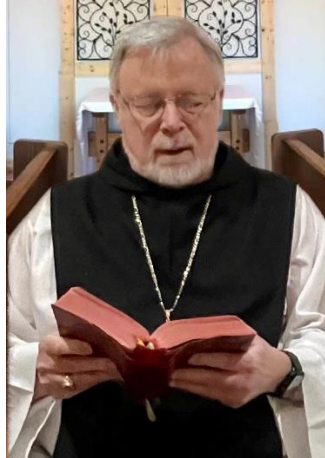
6. Pursue Holiness Individually and Together

- Encourage each other’s personal spiritual growth
- Respect each other’s unique rhythms and gifts
- Hold each other accountable with love

“Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” — Amos 3:3

A Shared Prayer to Anchor Your Rule of Life

Lord, make our marriage a reflection of Your love. Teach us to walk in unity, speak with grace, serve with joy, and grow in holiness. Let our daily rhythms draw us closer to You and to each other. May our love be a living testimony of Your kingdom. Amen.



What is prayer?

Prayer is the raising up of the mind and heart to God.

How do we raise up our mind and heart to God?

We raise up our mind and heart to God by thinking of God; by adoring, praising, and thanking him; and by begging of him all blessings for soul and body.

(Quoted from: A Simple Catechism – Basic Catechism of Christian Doctrine)

Hindrances in Approaching God

4

God's Love and Our Lack of Trust

God's names are points of reference for us to contact His love for us, Healer, Almighty, Protector, Provider, Faithful, Father, Merciful, Love, Peace, and so on.

God is always the initiator. We are always the responders.

God loves us first so we can return His love to Him.

He loves us regardless of our sinfulness, lack of faith, or trust in Him.

We live in, with, though, Him even if we are not aware of this.

We fail to respond to His love because

1. Our lives are full of distractions.

2. Everywhere we turn, we are being lied to.

Distractions: We are easily self-absorbed, full of noise. We create as many as 3000 negative thoughts per hour. Consequently, we become fearful. Fearful people do not trust.

The problem is not that we do not love God. The problem is that we do not trust God.

We reject God because we do not trust Him.

St. Benedict says that “murmuring” can destroy our communities and us.

Pop psychology gives the illusion of thought control by the lie of thinking positively. When that soon fails, we then negatively believe that we are failures. Thinking is the illusion of action.

Scripture says Solution: 1. Repent (not only stop "murmuring" but mature to the state that you no longer care to be negative). 2. Do (action) things: noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy, and charitable.

Lies: Lies surround us, and we believe them.

Our culture, Church, government, neighbors, family all lie to us.

The purpose of lies is to get us to doubt. When we doubt, we do not trust. Lies lead us not to trust God.

Religious euphemisms and purposeful manipulation of Scripture have invaded the Church.

Examples of lies: "God gives us no more than we can handle," "God tests us with difficult situations." "We have to forgive ourselves." The focus of worship is on us. We have to be entertained to feel good about ourselves.

Examples of truth: Our sins produce difficult times. We need to take responsibility for the consequences of our sinfulness. God can help us during difficult times. God's forgiveness is more than sufficient. What we worship, we become. Worship a Good Holy God, and we will become good and holy. Worship ourselves, and we become fearful and unwilling to trust.

Life will rule you if you do not have a rule of life.

"Sometimes it seems that not only life rules me but work, family, stress, and my carnal desires. God, prayer, and church often take a back seat," reports my client.

This morning, the news reported that "last Sunday less than 30% of Americans went to church although over 60% believe in God. Additionally, Americans believe that we should set a Christian example for the rest of the world." Something is wrong with this picture. Something is undoubtedly ruling our nation.

St. Benedict wrote his Holy Rule so that "You may return to Him from whom you had departed by the sloth of disobedience." "Come my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness of death overtake you."

Seeing as God Sees, Turn the Dial

"Long before the night office began, the man of God, Benedict, was standing at his window, where he watched and prayed while the rest were still asleep. In the dead of night, he suddenly saw a flood of light shining down from above, more brilliant than the sun, and with it, every trace of darkness cleared away. He saw the whole world gathered up before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light. Absorbed as he was in God, it was now easy for him to see all that lay beneath God. In the light outside that was shining before his eyes, there was a brightness that reached into his mind and lifted his spirit heavenward, showing him the insignificance of all that lies below." (From Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great)

This is one of my favorite episodes in Benedict's life. Benedict saw as God saw. In Scripture, the word "saw" often means to know; to know means to possess and have power over. I suggest that if we could see as God sees, we might have a greater possession of life and enjoy it more. In this article, I suggest that how we possess our suffering is how we possess our Lord.

We have some exciting juxtapositions here reminiscent of St. Paul. Should I be so brave? Medicine, psychiatry, pharmacology, even much of the church do all they can to avoid, diminish, relieve and deny spiritual, emotional, and physical suffering.

I certainly appreciate the sciences and take my assortment of medications. I suggest that suffering has value and could be embraced to see as God sees and possess the divine.

Paul speaks about this as he describes attaching his suffering to that of the cross to complete Christ's salvific action. We can do the same by offering our suffering, joining our suffering to Christ's, and by turning the dial of our human vision to see how God sees our suffering. How do we do that?

I also ask God to help me see people who bring me suffering as He sees them. Almost immediately, I see them with compassion and empathy

What do I expect from God When I Pray?

I am usually reticent to describe my personal prayer life, lest it sounds too much of me and not enough of God. Of course, if the reader knew me, they would know that for me, everything is God. My second reservation is that this is my journey, not another's. Indeed, God leads and develops each of us somewhat uniquely, so the reader does not have to try to duplicate anyone other's prayer life. However, there are many good models available, St. Benedict's, for example.

To answer what I expect from God when I come to prayer, I first need to preamble.

I have been fortunate enough to have been raised by a stable, loving Roman Catholic family. I attended a Roman Catholic seminary and have had a valuable formal and personal education in theology, Scripture, psychology, and extensive training in various forms of prayer. God has directed me slowly

and very lovingly over the fifty-plus years of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, Lectio Divina, and Benedictine theology.

I have been blessed to have been immersed in a sacramental life filled with the Holy Eucharist, sacramental confession, and ordination to the Priesthood and eventually to the Episcopate. I am in a loving marriage, a stable life, and am vowed religious.

Perhaps most importantly, I know that I have been and still am a grievous sinner who is unworthy of forgiving by a gracious God and inspired by the Holy Spirit to amend my lifetime and time again.

I have learned that I live in, with, and through God. He is "Dominus Tecum," intimately close to me.

So what do I expect from God when I come to prayer? I expect nothing. My prayer time is my gift of thanksgiving to Him as I grow daily to know my dependence on Him and His eager willingness to be with me.

My prayer continues throughout the day as I participate in His life. I find that he inspires and empowers me to participate in His Kingdom more and more perfectly. I most experience Him when I celebrate the Holy Eucharist and hold the consecrated host in my hand.

I have mystical experiences most frequently during the Mass and when I pray with others for their needs. God has healed thousand through my prayers. Lately, I have experienced several occasions of purging, torn apart, wailing, and being made new. I do not fully understand it, but I know that in my "old age," He is preparing me for something inspiring.

Dryness in Prayer

All too often, I hear people complain about dryness in prayer. They complain from an erroneous belief that prayer was intended always to be filling and meaningful. St. John of the Cross calls this spiritual gluttony.

I remember reading a letter between St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. She encouraged him to join her on a trip to see the latest "fad" in miracles. He responded that there were enough miracles in his garden, so he would not go.

Let me assure you that prayer is primarily an act of obedience and a joyful giving of our time to the Lord. When I pray, I give my gift, self-oblation of time, to my Creator. He is not obliged to respond in any way.

When He responds, it is mainly through enlightenment or a better understanding. I used to go to Him for emotional encouragement. He answered that it was my job, and I should go for a run.

Frankly, I find God the most during the Eucharist. I saw the bread turn into flesh. Frequently I feel joined with the saints.

I also become one with the Lord when I pray with others. He often directs my prayers and brings healing. Br. Brendan, OCCO, reported that I had transcended on one prayerful occasion.

So dear ones, prayer can be inspiring at times. God will create those moments. Meanwhile, we do The Work of God.

Listen with the Ear of Your Heart

"Can you hear me now?" "Can you hear me now?" The narrator repeats the question over and over throughout the popular commercial. That is an interesting phrase that markets his product and mirrors our personal need to be heard.

I need to be heard. You don't necessarily have to agree or support me, but please listen to me. When you listen to me, I am validated. I have become a person of some value. To be validated, I will talk on the cell phone about trivial nonsense, chatter all day about nothing important to anyone who will listen, or even create an argument to get attention. That is a sad state of affairs, to be sure.

Let us speak about listening skills. We can recall what we know about listening skills by remembering what Mamma told us, "We have two ears and one mouth, so listen more than you speak." The 90/10 rule came from this. That is to listen 90% of the time and speak 10% of the time. Sure would be a peaceful planet.

Active listening means full participation by the listener and response to the speaker. Active listening might include such communication efforts as

mirroring. Mirroring is speaking back to what we have just heard. The opposite of active listening is passive listening. That consists of thinking of your response while listening rather than listening. You could also be viewing the sports channel, reading the paper, or almost anything other than listening to the speaker. You are not present to the speaker and show little interest in what is being said.

The next level of listening skills is "to listen with the ear of your heart." At first, that may seem an unusual statement. But slow down for a moment and listen to the words, "listen with the ear of your heart." I think you will figure it out. Listen so that the speaker, or writer, moves you towards transformation.

Imagine listening to your mate complain about his day. Imagine moving to the "ear of your heart" and the effect his words of sorrow, conflict, stress, and failure have on your heart. Your response to him would be different than if you just heard the words. You would be transformed, moved, more charitable, and compassionate.

Here is some advice on how to speak to the heart. The heart needs you to speak slowly. Look at your beloved. Do not be in a rush. Save your important messages to when you and your beloved are together. Do not discuss them over the cell phone. Touch your beloved whenever something is significant to you. Speak softly. The heart is tender. It gets frightened when you are loud, critical, and sarcastic. Be careful with your words. Say what you mean. Be clear and precise. Please, do not continually repeat yourself. The heart hears better with fewer words.

It takes practice "to listen with the ear of your heart." We need to develop a quiet spirit. The quiet spirit is developed through a desire to be present to your beloved wither that be God or a person. Spend time in quiet. Let there be no noise.

Gratitude

Gratitude keeps us alive and kicking. The lack of gratitude makes us self-absorbed and lifeless. I tend to think that when Eve said to Adam, "try this one," if they had stopped for a moment and had spoken words of thanks to the Lord for all He had given to them, then everything would have been different. My point...gratitude changes us. We get happier, more empowered, more creative, more emotionally secure, more of the good things.

A friend of ours visited the other day. We mostly love her. We love her most when she is not griping, victimizing herself, and thinking that life should be easy.

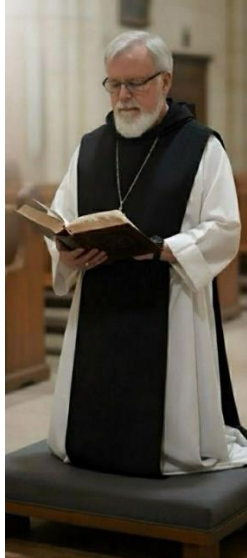
Scott Peck says that people who complain believe that life should be easy. I agree.

We asked her why she believed that she should not suffer. She dodged that one with one of her famous "yes, buts..." "Well, but this," we all suffer. Her point is... that she deserves to have all good things given to her. My point is to stop complaining. Do what is good, right, and holy.

The persecuted apostles did not pray, "Poor us, Lord, please go change the hearts of our persecutors." No. They prayed, "And now Lord take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. (Acts 5: 29-30)

My message today:

Gratitude will open our souls to the unity of God, self, and others. Gratitude moves us from limitations and fear to expansion and love.



A Prayer for married couples:

O gracious and ever living God, you have created us male and female in your image.

Look mercifully upon us who come to you seeking your blessing that we may love, honor and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness and that we may be to each other a giver of strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow and a companion in joy, and that we may live together in love and harmony.

May your grace upon us make our home a haven of blessing and peace.

We pray this through Jesus Christ our Savior who lives and reigns with you in unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

