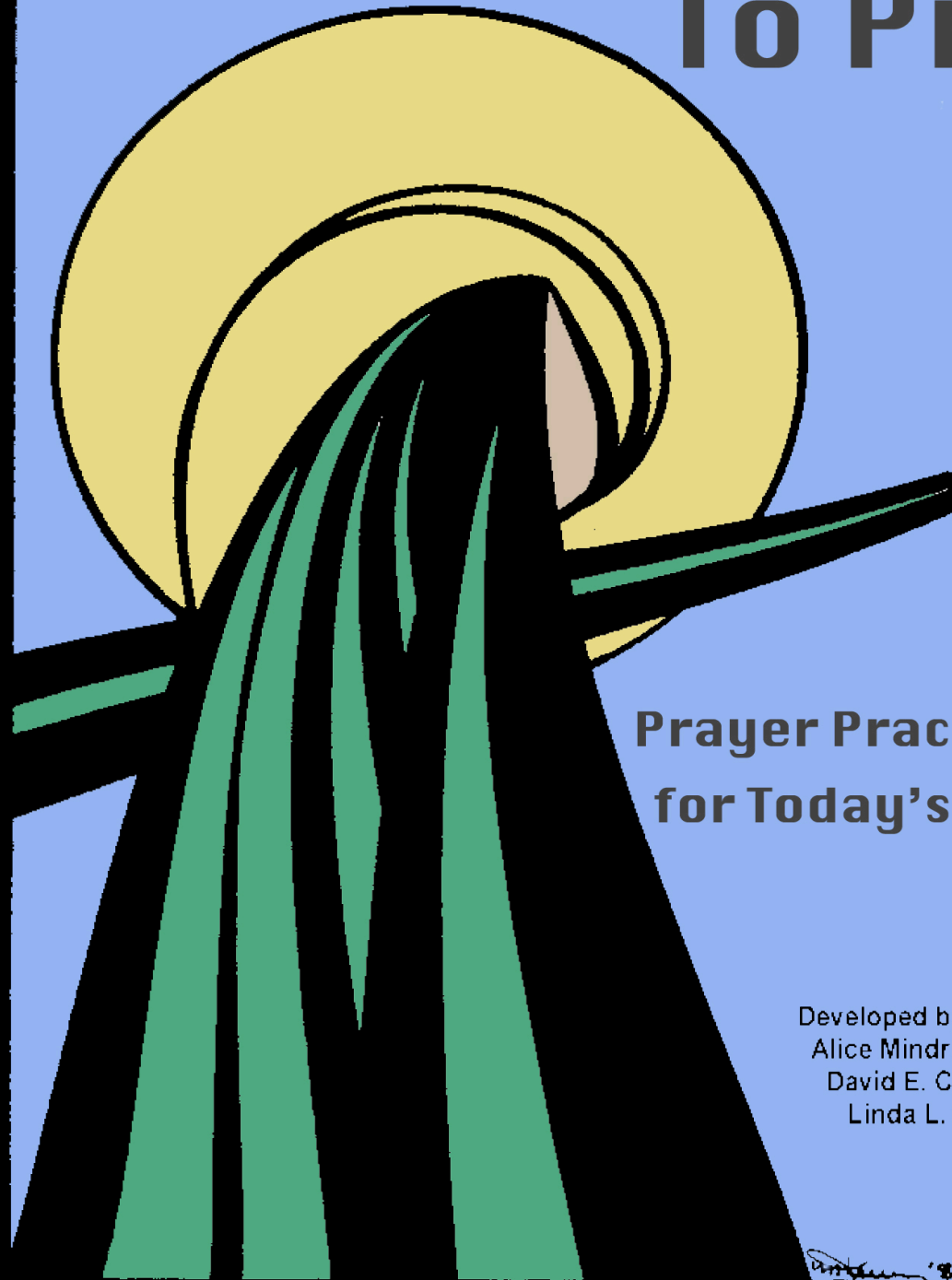


Teach Us To Pray



**Prayer Practices
for Today's World**

Developed by
Alice Mindrum
David E. Crean
Linda L. Grenz

Alice Mindrum

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR LIMITED-USE LICENSE

General Terms:

- This agreement covers all printed and electronic copies of this resource, including material downloaded from the LeaderResources website or obtained in any other manner.
- Licenses are normally issued to a church or other single-entity, non-profit organization. For information on multiple-entity organizations (such as dioceses and other judicatories, national organizations with local subsidiaries, etc.) or a one-time use license, please contact LeaderResources at the numbers below. Licenses are never issued to an individual person.

What you CAN do:

- If you have purchased the license to this resource or a membership including this resource, you may make as many copies of the material as needed for use in your congregation or organization ONLY. If this resource is part of a membership/subscription program, you may only use it as long as your membership/subscription is current. When your membership/subscription expires you must destroy all copies.
- You may make as many copies of the material (in part or in whole) as needed to implement and promote the program in your congregation or organization
- You may burn additional CDs or save the material on disk to distribute to teachers or other members of your congregation (for use as part of this program ONLY)
- You may use artwork images or graphics in posters, church bulletins, newsletters or other documents used for the program

What you can NOT do:

- Distribute material to anyone who is not a member of your organization for any reason
- Use any part of these materials outside your organization
- Use any part of these materials after the expiration of your membership/subscription term.
- If this is a Resource Center copy you may not use the program or any portion of it without purchasing a license or membership.
- Sell copies of these materials in any form (including images on t-shirts, mugs, etc.) for any reason without permission from LeaderResources
- Use images or graphics to create or have a third party create a stained glass window, wall mural, statue or other permanent artwork installed in a building without permission from LeaderResources.
- Use images or graphics on a website without permission from LeaderResources

PLEASE DON'T VIOLATE THESE RULES

First of all, it's illegal: violating a copyright can result in substantial fines, a criminal record and embarrassment. Secondly, our program developers, artists and staff are paid from the revenues generated by your fees. If you use resources without paying, they don't get paid. We trust you to observe the conditions of your license and invite you to help educate others about the importance of respecting copyrights in a day when photocopying and computerizing data make the theft of intellectual property easy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
How to Use this Resource	5
1) What Is Prayer?	6
2) What Did Jesus Say About Prayer?	11
Handout—Personal Prayer Inventory	17
3) Types of Prayer: Supplication	19
4) Types of Prayer: Thanksgiving	24
5) Types of Prayer: Confession	29
6) Types of Prayer: Adoration	35
The Decalogue: Contemporary	39
A Penitential Order: Rite Two	40
Handout—My Busy Life	42
7) The Lord’s Prayer	44
Handout—The Lord’s Prayer	47
Handout—The Lord’s Prayer	48
8) Collective Prayer	49
Handout—Writing Our Own Prayers	52
9) Listening and Silence	54
10) Lives Dedicated to Prayer: Religious Orders	57
Traditional Religious Orders	63
Other Christian Communities	71
11) Pray Without Ceasing	76
Handout—Types Of Prayer	80
Handout—Ways to Remember How to Pray	85
12) Sacred Movement: Part I and II	86
Part I: Exploring Movement	89
Part II - Ideas for Use in Worship	95
13) An Introduction to Christian Meditation	104
Steps to Relaxation	109
14) Prayer Cycles and Prayer Beads	110
BLESSING PRAYER BEADS.....	114
Handout: Prayers for Use with Prayer Beads.....	115
15) Praying the Rosary	119
Handout: How to Pray the Rosary	124
Handout: The Mysteries of the Rosary	125
16) Icons and Angels	127
17) Holy Reading (Lectio Divina)	132
18) Praying the Scripture Stories	135
Handout: Suggested Scripture Stories for Meditation.....	139
19) Visual Imaging: Healing Prayer	141
20) Contemplative Prayer	147
21) Centering Prayer	152
22) Reflections on My Prayer Life	155

INTRODUCTION

We all pray at some time or another. These sessions on prayer introduce participants to ways in which they can enhance their own spirituality. We cannot emphasize strongly enough the role that prayer plays in our lives.

Teach Us to Pray focuses on the nature of prayer and its necessity for faith development. These sessions will enable participants to examine the ways in which people pray and inventory the things they pray for; look at some of the teachings about prayer that Jesus used; examine some of the different *ways* and *methods* by which we pray and find them in *The Book of Common Prayer*; and explore how some people in the Bible, and elsewhere, have prayed. The participants will also write their own prayers and share these with the group or in a wider worship setting, and have ample opportunity to experience various ways of praying.

The purpose of these sessions is to give participants a solid grounding in prayer and to introduce them to the myriad ways of praying that are part of the Christian heritage. Many people are attracted by the meditative prayer forms in new age spiritualism or Eastern religions. It is important that we help them learn about and experience the Christian tradition of meditation, contemplation, mysticism, sacred movement, etc. Some of the forms introduced here may not be familiar to you, and you may want to draw on the experiences of others in your congregation or community in the presentation of these forms.

Overview

Prayer is a special word for the interaction of our hearts with the heart of God. For most of us, we consider prayer to be a kind of talking, quietly, humbly, with our heads bowed down, our eyes closed, our bodies very still. But for the sake of this section of the program, we want to consider a broader definition of prayer.

- Prayer can be spoken or silent, whispered or shouted.
- Prayer can be active or contemplative.
- Prayer can be still and motionless, or action-packed.
- Prayer can be talking or listening.
- Prayer can be joy-filled or sorrowful, triumphant or angry.
- Prayer can be passive or insistent.
- Prayer can be individual or collective.
- Prayer can be public or private.
- Prayer is at the very center of the life of the Church.

The brothers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist defined prayer in their Rule of Life:

Prayer is responding to God in thought, word and deed, with or without words, through Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not all will use the time of personal prayer in the same way, but whether in meditation based on Scripture or in the lifting of the heart in contemplation, we are united to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This union with Christ will find expression in the offering of adoration, thanksgiving, penitence and prayer for our needs and those of the whole world. It is the source of the hope and love we bring to our personal relationships and the wellspring of commitment to work for social justice.

We want to begin with the notion of establishing unity with God, in Christ Jesus. Leading people into their own experience of God is our primary task – which means we will honor their understanding of who God is, while helping them find new and useful ways to deepen and enrich their relationship with God. We will incorporate the teachings of Jesus, the lessons from the Bible and the rich heritage in the *Book of Common Prayer*, as these are reliable sources for direction in establishing a life hallmarked by prayer. We will also reach into the heritage of saints and mystics who have gone before us, as well as the wealth of spiritual writings available. But most important of all, we will pray, and by our prayers open up the most important relationship we have: our relationship with God.

It is not possible to have a true relationship with a stranger. In many ways, God is a stranger to us; and in fact, we are strangers to ourselves. Prayer is one way we can be known by and know the One who loves us, calls us into new life and asks us for obedience. Every aspect of our life – every thought, longing, need, plan and celebration – can be wrapped in our prayers. As we pray, we get to know God. We get to know ourselves and each other. We light the path and take steady steps on the journey of faith. These lesson plans are designed to be a kind of road map. Our goal is to pray, and then to pray again. All the information and intellectual insight available to us concerning prayer is still not prayer itself. Prayer is a wondrous dialogue between the heart of God and the hearts of God’s people. Thinking about prayer, talking about prayer, worrying about prayer can never replace the action of prayer itself. Prayer is a process, not a concept. We learn and understand it only by *doing* it.

As we begin these sessions on prayer, leaders are encouraged to look closely at their own prayer disciplines. It will be useful to ask, How do I pray? What do I believe about the nature of God’s call on my life? How do my prayers sustain me and make me strong for this work? It is also a good time to begin to pray for the participants on this journey, and our ministry to them. No matter how well we work this program, no matter how wise we may be in responding to the needs of others, our God—the one true God of all living things, young and old, rich and poor, wise and foolish—will have to meet us in this effort. God will answer our prayers. It will be God who calls us to himself.¹ It will be God who shows himself true and faithful to them. It will be God who invites them into a deeper and deeper relationship with Love. Our task is not to “get out of God’s way” but rather to get in there and model

¹Although the authors are sensitive to the value of inclusive language—seeing God as both mother and father, nurturer and sustainer—sometimes the pronouns becomes too cumbersome. We chose to use masculine pronouns, but we do so with a gentle disclaimer: God is more than male or female – God is all in all.

for others the nature of a life of prayer. Our task is to show by word and deed the power and presence available to us through prayer.

So, how shall we begin? We will begin where we will end – in prayer:

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord, saying, “Lord have mercy.”²

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource outlines a series of lesson plans which can be used during a Sunday morning or evening adult education program. They can also be used individually or grouped into the number of sessions appropriate for your context. It is often best to promote adult education programs as a short series of four or six sessions. You may, therefore, wish to divide these materials accordingly. The series currently progresses from more basic lessons about prayer to lessons that help people explore prayer methods in greater depth. Generally it will be most appropriate to take them approximately in the order given. However, there may be specific situations in which you may re-arrange the order.

These lessons can also be used for a weekend or multi-day retreat. Again, you can simply group the lessons as you see fit. The lessons in the second half of the program (beginning with the Introduction to Christian Meditation) might be best suited for a retreat.

If you use these lessons consecutively throughout a year, we recommend that you end with a week or two in which people can reflect on their experience and discuss which methods worked or did not work for them. You may also wish to introduce the group to the *Adult Journey Series: Journey as Community*³. This program introduces participants to Benedictine spirituality and encourages them to develop a Rule of Life. It would be an appropriate “follow-up” to this introductory program on prayer.

²This section and the first 11 lesson plans are taken from *The Journey to Adulthood* by Amanda Millay Hughes and David E. Crean. The remaining lesson plans were developed by Alice Mindrum or Linda L. Grenz.

³ Available from LeaderResources: 1-800-941-2218.

SESSION ONE

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Goal

To give participants an opportunity to pray together and reflect on the nature and purpose of prayer

Objectives

To establish the meeting place as “holy ground”

To look at the ways in which we currently understand prayer

To spend time in prayer

Guiding Scriptures

Exodus 3:1-7 Moses takes off his shoes at the burning bush

Joshua 5:13-15 Joshua takes off his shoes when the Lord tells him

John 13:2b-20 Jesus washes the feet of his disciples

Introduce the Series

Begin by introducing the series, stating how many sessions it will be and what you hope participants will experience. Because you may be doing all or just some of the sessions, you will need to define what to say in this section to fit what you have decided to do in your congregation. This also is the time you will want to introduce the leaders and review logistics and norms—location of restrooms, smoking policy, encouraging people to ask questions, availability of food and drinks, etc.

Background

Sometimes we need a reminder of who God really is. We forget, in the midst of our busy lives, that God is holy, powerful, omnipotent, wise and in the person of Jesus Christ, a servant and savior. In this lesson, we hope to surprise people into considering the presence of God in their lives. We want to make a prayer space—and like Moses, Joshua and the disciples, we are going to take off our shoes as a reminder of the power and holiness of God.

Being barefoot in this modern culture can be a sign of poverty and weakness. It was the same in the Bible. The men and women needed their shoes to protect them from the heat and stones and dust. We need our shoes to protect us from concrete and glass shards, from hot asphalt and cold marble. And we use shoes as status symbols. Television and print media seem convinced that we will be better

athletes, better people if we wear hundred-dollar sneakers or all-leather Doc Martin boots. It is a great equalizer to remove our shoes and sit barefoot with one another. It's a little thing, but its significance is reinforced throughout Scripture. God wants us to stand on holy ground, and to feel it through our feet.

This may seem a bit risky to leaders and participants. Suddenly we all find ourselves self-conscious—what if my feet smell? What if I am wearing hose or tights? What if I have ugly feet? What if I have toenail polish with chips and scratches? What if I need a pedicure badly? All of these concerns are just tiny reminders of how difficult it is for all of us to be vulnerable to one another and to God. If we cannot even show one another our feet, how will we welcome one another into our day-to-day lives? If we think everything depends on whether we have clean toes, how will we set out to do God's work in the world?

For the most part, we want to do good, to work for social justice, for peace and equality, but only if we can maintain our position as "right," "good," "clean," superior." Taking off our shoes to talk about prayer is one way to touch our inadequacy and our fears. And in a funny sort of way, taking off our shoes in front of each other will remind us, if we have hearts and eyes and ears ready to learn, that God already knows everything about us—even the shape of our tiny feet.

The second thing we will focus on is the nature of prayer. What are we trying to accomplish? Why do we do it at all? Throughout these sessions, we will look at lots of ways to pray and ways to think about prayer. But for today, the focus is on getting to know who God is, and who we are. Prayer is one access point. In addition, we want to remind participants that getting to know God requires that we try to respond to God's action, God's attendance in our lives. God is already here, waiting for us to turn and look and see how good and loving and faithful and present he is.

Preparation

- ❖ Make a sign for the meeting room door that reads:

REMOVE YOUR SHOES AND LINE THEM UP NEATLY BY THE DOOR.

THIS IS HOLY GROUND.

- ❖ Bring flowers, candles, a scarf or piece of linen cloth, a loaf of bread, a glass of wine, a branch or vine
- ❖ Have newsprint, masking tape and Bibles

Activity One

As the group arrives, explain to them that today we are going to make our meeting room into a prayer closet. Do not let anyone in who is wearing shoes. Someone may need to stand outside the door to help facilitate the removal of shoes.

Rearrange the furniture, and set up a space for prayer. This could take on many different forms. Perhaps your group will want to set up individual corners for prayer. In this case, you might want to have enough flowers and candles to go around. Or perhaps the group will want to make a central focal

point. Choose a spot on the floor in the middle of the room or create an altar-like arrangement at one end. Ask the participants what configuration they would like to try. Work quickly. Involve everyone.

Once the space is prepared, light the candles and turn out the lights. Ask the participants to sit silently for three minutes.

At the end of the three minutes, a leader asks:

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

WHY ARE WE DOING IT?

WHAT IS PRAYER AFTER ALL?

Turn on the lights and record answers on newsprint.

The answer we are looking for is: We're talking to God. But the question remains: *Why?* And why did we take our shoes off?

Leaders may want to take a few minutes to explain that prayer is a word for the special way God and God's people talk to one another. Prayer is the means to building a relationship with God. We took our shoes off to remind us that we all need God, and God is not interested in our looking good or smelling good or being well-dressed. God is more interested in our coming into relationship than impressing one another. God wants us to simply be who we are.

Leaders may want to make note of the stories in the Old and New Testaments where God asked people to take off their shoes—with Moses at the burning bush, with Joshua at the walls of Jericho and with Jesus at the foot-washing. If the group is unfamiliar with these stories, have them look them up in the Bible and take turns reading them aloud. Talk about what happened to these people and why they took off their shoes. In all three examples, holiness and vulnerability were the issues. We cannot do the work of God in the world—we can hardly pray at all, if we come with all sorts of protection. Taking off our shoes reminds us that we are dealing with God. We take off our shoes as a small reminder of our need to be humble before God.

Activity Two

Try this as a demonstration of the problems of getting to know someone! Ask one participant to stand in the middle of the room. Ask all the others to sit in a circle around the central figure, facing away from her. Recording responses on the newsprint, ask the group to describe the central figure. What is her name; what color are her eyes? How long is her hair? Is she smiling? Frowning? Laughing? Crying? Ask as many questions as you can think of, and be sure to ask specific questions, ones that will make the group realize that they will have trouble answering the questions without looking at the one in the middle. What is she wearing? What color is her shirt? Are her toenails painted? What size shoe does she wear?

After the group has listed as many things as they can, have them turn around and face the person in the middle. Ask a new round of questions, or ask again the questions that were difficult or impossible to answer without looking.

Until the group acknowledges that they need to ask that central figure, need to talk to her and with her, their experience and understanding of this individual will be limited. It's hard to answer a question like, "What did she have for breakfast?" without asking her, "What did you have for breakfast?"

Prayer is like that.

A lot of what we say in prayer is really looking away from God and thinking things over. We look at our past experience, our memories, our knowledge, but we avoid looking at God. Perhaps we are even afraid that if we look, we won't be able to see God. But God has promised that as we look at Jesus, in the Bible and in each other, we will begin to see and know God's face. When we look to see God, we join with Moses and Joshua and David and Mary and Martha and Paul and all the men and women throughout history and in our present day who have looked and have seen the one true God.

Ask the participants to list ways that they might get to know God.

Possible answers might include:

- Prayer
 - Leaders might ask: Do you all pray? What kinds of things do you pray for?
- Reading the Bible
 - Leaders might ask: Yes, but do you ever read the Bible? Why? Why not?
- Talking to people who know God
 - Leaders might ask: When was the last time you asked someone to tell you about God? Or, when was the last time you told someone else about God?
- What about feeding the poor? Clothing the homeless?
- Can you really see Jesus in your friends? In your co-workers? In your family members?

Leaders might suggest that this week we all try to see God in everyone. After all, we are all made in God's image. There must be some sparkle of God in everybody and everything. Remember the psalmist says that "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the earth shows forth his handiwork" (*Psalm 19:1*). We can get to know God by opening our eyes to see the people and the world around us. We can even ask God to open our eyes to see all the ways that we turn away from looking, turn away from seeing God in our day-to-day lives.

Closure

Explain that each session will introduce a concept about prayer or a way to pray. In either case, you will encourage participants to reflect on and practice what they learned throughout the week (or, in the case of a retreat, in the intervening time). It would be helpful if each participant used a "prayer journal" during this time. It can be a bound book with blank pages, a notebook or a binder with blank paper.

Participants can use this journal to record their reflections on what each session covered, what occurred during their prayer time or how they feel their prayer practice impacted them and/or their relationship with God and others. They can also use the journal as a way to pray—recording their prayer conversations with God. In either case, it is an important record of their experience. Encourage them to try this practice while acknowledging that not everyone is a “writer” so some may find this less helpful than others.

To close the session, ask the participants to choose one of the objects leaders brought to the meeting room this morning. Ask them to hold it in their hands and look closely at it. Assure them that each of these objects is a symbol designed to remind us to look at God. Each object is there to bring us closer to the one who made us. Explain that you are going to read the following verses from the Bible to welcome God to come to us, and be known to us in prayer. Holding the objects, stand in a circle. Leaders will read the following:

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.”

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”

Jesus said, “I am the vine.”

Our God is a consuming fire, a burning bush. God whispers in our hearts. Our God cares about every single thing we do, think, remember and want. But most of all, our God wants to be in relationship with each of us, individually and collectively, as living members of the Body of Christ, standing barefoot on holy ground.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the power of your spirit, lift us up to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God. Give us ears and eyes and hearts to see you and your hand in everyone, everything, all the time, because we want to know you and we want you to know us. We ask all this and so much more through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

— adapted from BCP, p. 832, The Prayer for Quiet Confidence

SESSION TWO

WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT PRAYER?

Goal

To gain a deeper understanding of the personal nature of prayer

Objectives

To look at the ways we currently pray: What do we pray for? When and where?

To look at what Jesus says about prayer

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 6:5-15 The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 7:7-11 "Your Father in heaven [will] give good things to those who ask."

Background

Last week we focused on understanding prayer as relationship building. While we only hinted at these things, in fact, we opened up three distinct areas that are worth bearing in mind as we proceed.

First, by taking off our shoes, we established our own weakness and humility. It is a small thing, but if we are going to be in relationship with God, one of the first things we need to recognize is who we are. We are God's beloved creation, and we are very small. By taking off our shoes, we reminded ourselves and one another, if only just a little, that we are vulnerable and human. No amount of covering, no fancy footwear, can hide what is true. We are human, and we are children in God's eyes. God wants to be, and is, the satisfaction for our needs.

Second, we focused our attention on who God is, and where we might see him in his creations. At the end, we talked briefly about seeing God in one another, co-workers, friends, even enemies. We remembered together that God can be seen in the heavens, in the earth, in all people and in all things. This is important because, unlike us, small and barefoot, God is everywhere, large, powerful and present.

The third thing we focused on was building a relationship between ourselves and God. God has already moved toward us in the person of his son Jesus, and continues to move toward us all the time. We are the ones with our backs turned away. Any action, any prayer, any motion we make toward God is always in response to his first move toward us.