

# Prayer: AS INDIVIDUAL AS YOU ARE



## bring Jesus

### Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



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**If we were attending a leaders' retreat and it was announced that instead of the planned program we were to be silent for the whole weekend, my wife Ruth and I would respond differently.**

Ruth would say, 'Great! Let's get started.' I, on the other hand, would be driven to prayer: 'Lord, send me a headache or a dodgy stomach or something ... Help! Get me out of here!' A whole weekend without being able to speak is not my idea of heaven.

There is no doubt about it. We should all pray. We all need a real devotional life. St Paul exhorts us, 'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you' (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). We should pray regularly, indeed 'without ceasing'.

However, we do not all pray the same way. Each of us finds some styles of prayer easier to practise than others. That's why asking everyone to sign up to a congregation's preferred devotional resource rarely works.

The following four types of prayer are named after four leaders in the ancient church. As you read them, pick the one that seems most natural for you and then find devotional aids that help you to pray in that way. If you ask others to do the same, you will grow in your appreciation of the diversity in the body of Christ.

#### AUGUSTINIAN PRAYER

**Saint Augustine** has had a powerful influence on the church in the west. Those who pray in this way make strong

use of intuition and feeling. They see the Bible as a personal letter from God and ask, 'What do these words mean to me in my present situation?' They seek the hidden meanings in events and relationships. They are creative and imaginative and have a natural hunger and thirst for spirituality. They are usually best cared for spiritually; but they also need this special care, because without spiritual growth and development they wither, fade and die, just like a plant without water. They are not averse to risk and experimentation.

#### THOMISTIC PRAYER

**Saint Thomas Aquinas** is best known for his scholarly approach to prayer, characterised by an orderly progression of thought from causes to their effects. Those who pray in this way seek to attain the whole truth about the subject chosen for consideration. They take a theme and 'walk around it', studying it from every angle. It is similar to the approach of a detective trying to solve a mystery. They are intuitive and may see connections not obvious to all. They bring an investigative, analytical approach to Scripture. They want to connect with the wisdom of God. To others this may seem more like study and reflection than prayer.

#### IGNATIAN PRAYER

**Saint Ignatius of Loyola**, the founder of the Jesuit order, was a great teacher of prayer. He taught his followers to strive to participate in the actual event by projecting themselves back into the historical situation. Discipline, order and the historical perspective are highly



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valued. Those who pray in this way see the journey of faith as a spiral which again and again comes back to the same point, but at a deeper level. They often find following the liturgical year to be helpful; practices such as the stations of the cross assist them to walk with Jesus through his passion. They can become gloomy if they do not also focus on resurrection themes.

## FRANCISCAN PRAYER

**Saint Francis of Assisi** practised an attitude of openness to the leading of the Spirit. He wanted all his actions to be marked by a spontaneous, informal praise and a loving dialogue with God. Prayer is not seen as a routine; set forms and the lectionary may not be much help. Those who pray in this way prefer free-flowing informal prayers and worship that is spontaneous and action-filled, and involving art, movement and the senses. They pray best when doing something with their hands: shaping clay, painting

a mandala, making a church banner and so on. They see God in creation and find it easy to meditate on a flower, a tree, a waterfall or other natural things.

As we mature, it is good to explore ways of praying that don't come so easily to us. We learn more about God and ourselves, and we grow in our appreciation of others.

God has made us to be different. Insisting on one approach to prayer will not help all of us to relate to him. As we learn from one another, our walk with God is deepened and enriched. We need each other!

(This column is based on the books *Prayer and temperament* by Chester P Michael and Marie Christian Norrisey and *Personality type and religious leadership* by Roy M Oswald and Otto Kroeger.)

**Steen Olsen serves as the SA/NT Director for Mission and as a member of the LCA Board for Local Mission.**



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