

# follow Prayer: Liturgical Prayer

## Introduction: The Map and the Ocean

In this session, we explore **Liturgical Prayer**, often referred to as "written" or "formed" prayer. Many of us value spontaneous, "from the heart" prayer, but there is a profound depth found in using the ancient prayers of the Church.

C.S. Lewis once shared a story about an RAF officer who felt he didn't need "all that theology stuff" because he had felt God out alone in the desert. Lewis replied that while the desert experience was like looking at the real ocean, theology—and liturgy—is like looking at a **map**. The map isn't the ocean, but if you want to go anywhere and not just stare at the waves, you need the map.

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## What is Liturgical Prayer?

Liturgy comes from a word meaning "the work of the people." It refers to the communal, structured prayers and rituals that have been handed down through history.

- **The Map Analogy:** Spontaneous prayer is our personal experience of the "ocean" of God. Liturgy is the "map" that compiles the experiences of thousands of people who have sailed those waters before us. It keeps us from getting lost in our own limited emotions.
  - **Relational and Formational:** As defined throughout this series, prayer is "talking to God about what we are doing together" (Dallas Willard). Liturgy provides us with the language to talk to God when our own words fail or our perspective becomes too narrow.
  - **Common Prayer:** When we pray a liturgy, we are "joining the story" of the global Church across time and space. We are never praying alone.
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## The Benefits of Liturgical Prayer

1. **Relief from the Burden of Originality:** We live in a culture that prizes "authenticity" and "spontaneity." This can make prayer feel like a performance where we have to come up with something new every day. Liturgy allows us to rest; the words are already there.
2. **Prayers Wiser Than We Are:** Left to our own devices, we tend to pray about our immediate needs and feelings. Liturgy forces us to pray for our enemies, for the poor, and for the glory of God—things we might otherwise forget.
3. **Stability in the Storm:** When we are in a "dark night of the soul" or a season of heavy grief, we often cannot find our own words. Liturgy carries us during those times, providing a "scaffold" (like the Lord's Prayer) that holds us up when we are weak.

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## The "Christ-Mask" Analogy

Liturgy is like a child "playing grown-up." A child puts on a mask and pretends to be something they aren't yet, and through that play, they actually begin to grow into the person they are imitating. When we pray words like "Our Father," we are putting on the "mask" of Christ. We may not feel like perfect children of God in that moment, but by saying the words, we are being formed into the reality they describe.

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## Biblical and Historical Foundations

- **The Psalms:** The Psalms are the original liturgy of the people of God. Jesus himself used liturgical prayer; on the cross, he quoted **Psalm 22** ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") and **Psalm 31** ("Into your hands I commit my spirit").
- **The Book of Common Prayer:** A classic Anglican resource that provides prayers for every occasion.

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## Conclusion: Expanding the Horizon

Liturgical prayer is not a replacement for spontaneous conversation with God; it is a companion to it. It expands our horizons, protects us from our own changing moods, and anchors us in the "Common Prayer" of the people of God. By "turning aside" to look at the map, we ensure that our journey across the ocean of God's presence is both deep and true.