**How do I pray?**

Corporate prayer is a primary component of our identity as Episcopalians, worshipping together each week using the Book of *Common* Prayer. However, the Church often does a lesser job in helping us to engage in and reflect upon our individual prayer lives. Each of us personally prays to God in some way, whether we say prayers or not. This session invites you to explore the concept of personal prayer.

**A Reading for Reflection:**

From “The Landscape of Prayer” in Avery Brooke’s *Healing and the Landscape of Prayer*

A landscape is something we see. Landscapes can be meadows, city streets, or four walls. Looked at it more broadly, landscapes are not just what can be framed in a photograph, but also the whole moving panorama of life around us. No two people will look at the same landscape in exactly the same way because we also have an interior landscape of meaning—or lack of meaning—that influences how we see what is around us.

“If we knew how to listen to God, if we knew how to look around us, our whole life would become prayer, “ wrote Abbe Michel Quoist in his book, *Prayers*. He obviously didn’t mean just *prayers*—words that we say to God—but something much broader and deeper. Fundamentally, *prayer* (without the “s”) means any communication or communion with God. And “a life of prayer” means that we are in constant communion with God. Or trying to be so.

…[in our western culture] we want to be in control, to manipulate life to fit our desires. In contrast, a Judeo-Christian perspective assumes that God is in control. As we surrender to God and follow God’s lead in our lives, we are healed. We may or may not be physically cured, but we are healed in the sense that our lives are in God’s hands and we know it. Whatever our physical condition, we are at peace. Physical cures in response to prayer obviously happen, but not for everyone. But all of us, with time, prayer, and surrender to God, may be *healed*.

My friend Martha had a directee, Helen, who was dying of a brain tumor. Helen wanted prayers for physical healing. Every week for a year and a half one or two of us from the healing team prayed for and with Helen. There was no improvement in her physical condition. Indeed, her brain tumor grew steadily worse. But during the same time her spiritual growth was tremendous. A few days before Helen died, when she could talk only with difficulty, she said to me, in a clear but halting voice: “Now when I pray…I don’t pray *to* God…I pray *with* God.”

When I am teaching prayer I often use Helen’s words as an illustration of the *unitive stage*, or *union with God*, traditionally the highest stage of the spiritual life. Helen was no longer *asking God* for something; she was simply praying *with* God.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. How do *you* pray? Think broadly about this, thinking about *prayers*, but also other ways in which you might “commune or communicate with God.”
2. Have you experienced the difference the author suggests between praying *to* God vs. praying *with* God? Is there value to both?
3. What does it mean to be *healed*? Have you been *healed* before, but not *cured*? Have you participated in the healing of another? What was that like for you?
4. In the reading, Helen experienced a phase of intense spiritual growth right at the end of her life.  When have you experienced a moment or phase of significant spiritual growth?

**A prayer**

O Lord,
teach me to seek you,
and reveal yourself to me
when I seek you.
For I cannot seek you unless
you first teach me,
nor find you unless
you first reveal yourself to me.
Let me seek you in longing,
and long for you in seeking.
Let me find you in love,
and love you in finding.

--Saint Ambrose of Milan, c. 340 - 397