

Letting go and letting God:

Whether we are seeking to grow in prayer, or become free of what we have come to recognise as life-diminishing ways of acting or thinking, or to know what it is God wants us to do, it is in letting go that we make room for God. It is the Spirit that roots and grounds us in God, draws us into wholeness and guides us along the way that leads to life. If we try too hard, believing that it is only through the sheer force of our will and effort that change can happen, we leave little room for God. Everything is gift.

However 'letting go' is in itself a work, for our natural inclination tends towards keeping life in our minute control, depending entirely on our own resources rather than being open to another's help, and bringing about change by the strength of our will and endeavour. To go against this instinct for self-sufficiency and self-definition can feel daunting; yet we let go not into nothingness but to 'let God' be active in our lives. In doing so we find that we too are alive in a way we have never been before.

- Put a stone in your hand to represent that which you desire to let go to God.
- Place a candle or cross nearby to symbolize the place of letting go.
- Using the reflection below may help you to identify what you want to put in God's hands:

We let go to God our regrets about the past – the choices we have made however we now feel about them, whatever has happened to us for good and for harm. God is in the place where we are, however we got there.

We let go to God our anxiety about the future. We cannot control what is in essence beyond our control – instead of torturing ourselves with fears that begin 'what if...' we let go to God who will always be alongside us in 'what is'.

We let go to God what hurts. True we cannot switch off our painful feelings; they flow into our lives, but if we do not cling to them they will flow from us again, carried in the stream of God's presence and care.

We let go to God our resentment. Even though the anger may not die down in our hearts we consent not to hold on to our need to get even; we give to God to heal what we cannot heal by ourselves

We let go to God our need to be good enough. God gives freely what we can never earn. We are valued, loved and believed in as we are.

We let go to God our desire for growth. It is God who continues to create us and who works to make us whole.

We let go to God the choices we face today. Though we do not know what to do, as we choose to listen, God will lead us along the unseen way.

We let go into God's working: We consent to be drawn this day into the stream of God's life: to become the activity of Love in that part of the world that is ours.

- As you sense something you want to let go to let God, put down your stone by the candle or cross.
- There may be feelings you need to share with God before you feel ready to let go: fears, hopes, doubts, desires or pains. You may sense you are not ready yet to let go and let God in this area of your life; if so, let go at whatever level you are able to today, with your ambivalent feelings and doubts.
- You will probably find that on another day you will need to let go in this area all over again. Letting go is rarely a 'done deal'; it is a process where little by little we allow God to become the source of our life.

In the palm of God's hand



- Take a small natural object such as a stone, a twig or a nut and place it in the palm of your hand.
- Read the words from Julian of Norwich in the other column.
- Rest in the awareness that you are held in God's hand, enfolded in love, known and wanted.

I saw that he is everything that we know to be good and helpful. In his love he clothes us, enfolds and embraces us; that tender love completely surrounds us, never to leave us. As I saw it he is everything that is good.

...he showed me more, a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, on the palm of my hand, round like a ball. I looked at it thoughtfully and wondered, 'What is this?' And the answer came, 'It is all that is made.' I marvelled that it continued to exist and did not suddenly disintegrate; it was so small. And again my mind supplied the answer, 'It exists, both now and for ever, because God loves it.' In short, everything owes its existence to the love of God.

In this 'little thing' I saw three truths. The first is that God made it; the second is that God loves it; and the third is that God sustains it.

[Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love]

Prayer stones



You may wish to use a stone as a focus for your prayer.

Spend a few moments quietly resting in God's presence.

Look at your stone: see its colour and shape. Feel its texture and its weight. How does it feel in your hand?

Think about the story of this stone: the rock from which it came, the wind, sun, frost and water that shaped it into its current form.

Think about your own story, and what has led you to today.

As you hold your stone know that your yesterday, today and tomorrow are held in the palm of God's hand.

If you wish, when you have finished your prayer you put your stone down as a symbol of trusting your life to God's care.

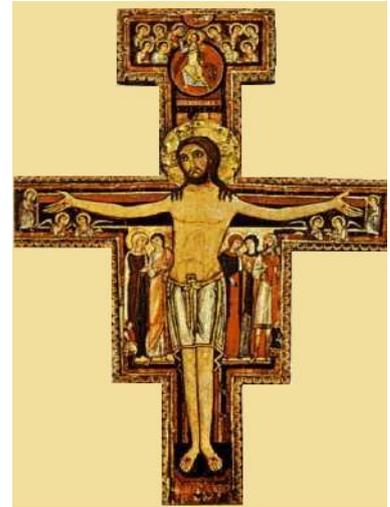
You may want to take your stone home or keep it with you and use it again when you pray.

Gazing on God: praying with icons and religious art

Gaze: Choose a visual focus point for your prayer; this could be a cross or an icon, or a painting – something that for you, expresses a dimension of who God is for you.

To gaze is to fix one's attention in one place, but in a relaxed way. Rest your eyes on what you see, and let it still you. Though your eyes and thoughts may be drawn elsewhere,

bring them back to the picture or image that is the focus of your prayer.



Consider: As you gaze, consider what is before you. What strikes you in what you see? What do you glimpse of God through it? Are there any ways you sense some challenge or invitation for you? You may find you don't so much have a thinking response as a feeling response: what are you feeling – can you give it a name?

You may find there are there things you want to say to God, or that you sense God in some way speaking to you.

Contemplate: Remain gazing attentively. Relax into the picture. Rather than being active in your observation and thinking by trying to identify new insights, look to be present to what you have already thought or felt and let God, if God chooses, take you more deeply into these.

This is a time of simply being there, present to God as God is present to you.

Meeting God in Creation

To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower
[William Blake]



In the Creation story in the bible God summons each being into life by name; God looks at what he has made and sees that it is good [Genesis 1].

1. Remember a particular time or place when you felt a sense of wonder awoken by the created world: walking by the sea, a small seed that became a flower, birdsong at twilight, snow wrapping the earth in silence, stars at night... Go back to that time or place in your prayer – be present to it again in your imagination, getting in touch with what you heard, saw, felt, sensed then.

2. God is in all things; all creation sings God's song. You too are made in God's likeness. Go for a walk in a garden or park, or in the countryside if you can. Ask God for the gift of awareness of his presence as you walk. As you walk stay in your senses, more than in your thoughts. Take in what you see – the changing sky, trees and flowers of different shapes and colours, the movement of birds or of grass in the breeze....feel the freshness on your face...touch leaves or the bark of trees...listen to birdsong, wind blowing leaves. Pause for a while if a sight, or sound draws you...take time to 'stop and stare'.

Ask God for the gift of prayerful presence to the beauty and wonder of what 'is'. Give God thanks for your own life and for all that lives and breathes around you.

3. Walking can be a way of prayer. There is a long biblical and Christian tradition of pilgrimage. The outer journey, made step by step, expresses the inner journey, deeper into God. As you walk repeat a short prayer in rhythm with your walking e.g.

- Jesus my light
- I thirst for you
- Draw me to you
- Your kingdom come

or the words of a poem or the Lord's prayer. Alternatively use a verse from a hymn that expresses what is in your heart. The words, and your walking act as a way of stilling you, making you more receptive and open to God

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare... [William Henry Davies]



A holding cross

You may find it helpful to hold a cross in your hand as you pray

The cross is a symbol of how God is with us in times of trouble. God understands and shares our pain.

As you hold the cross you may sense how God is holding you and holding those you love and care for.

The cross is also a symbol of hope. Having shared our sufferings and struggles Jesus rose from death to life.

As you hold the cross, be aware how God is with you as One who is turning all sorrow into joy, and every ending into a new beginning.

