



**Using your body  
in prayer**

## **Introduction**

Using our whole body when we pray acknowledges that we are whole people and that the physical is an important element of our relationship with God and consequently of our prayer life.

My six year-old is always quick to remind me – “hands together, eyes closed” and whilst I might chuckle to myself, there is something helpful about focusing our prayers by physical cues. Of course we can pray with our eyes open and our hands waving around (or holding the steering wheel!) but to have a particular prompt to ourselves that we are taking some special time to talk and listen to God can help us all.

We can also use a range of intentional and particular physical movements or postures to help us with our prayers.

## **Praying using our bodies in church**

One of the key ways we can use our bodies in prayer is by moving ourselves during the course of a service. We can move into different poses / positions of prayer.

**Kneeling** – we can kneel in “repentance” and “petition” - many prayers are traditionally said whilst kneeling – particularly prayers that ask for God’s forgiveness and help. It helps to symbolise our humility and respect for God.

**Standing** can be used in prayers that are primarily to praise and thank God. This standing prayer could be accompanied by upturned hands to symbolise surrender to God and willingness to offer up our prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God like a gift.

**Prostrate** – less typically in a service we may wish to lie flat on the ground or kneeling with our head on the ground and our hands beside our head. This is a powerful symbol of total humility and surrender to God’s will for our lives and of complete respect for God’s holiness. It is a way of praying that could be used at home or maybe on a retreat or at times of particularly seeking God’s will for your life.

**Sign of the Cross** - some Christians like to use their hand to make the sign of the cross during a service when referring to the Trinity or before the reading of the Gospel. There are a number of variations but the basic idea is to make the sign of the cross using bent fingers touching in turn your forehead, navel and left then right shoulders while saying “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. It’s a simple symbolic reminder and physical action you can use to help you in your prayers. It can remind us of our baptism, when we were marked with the sign of the cross; it can be a way of reminding ourselves that we are made whole through Jesus’ death on the cross; or it can be a way of committing ourselves to following Jesus as one of his disciples. You can find out more about it here [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sign\\_of\\_the\\_cross](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sign_of_the_cross)

As well as using some of these movements in public worship, they can become a powerful part of your personal prayer life. During a time of prayer using the pattern, ‘*Thank-you, sorry, please*’ you could stand with arms outstretched to express your thanks to God, kneel with a bowed head as you seek God’s forgiveness and kneel with your palms open as you ask for his goodness. This is powerful because it allows us to be honest, open and vulnerable before God, as we use every part of who we are - mind, spirit and body - into his presence.

### **Prayers with actions**

Sue Wallace in her excellent book “Multisensory Prayer” offers some great ideas for actions to accompany traditional prayers like the Lord’s Prayer, St Patrick’s Breastplate and Come Holy Spirit. The suggestions are accompanied by pictures to help you. We have a copy of this book if you are interested or you can see a preview of it on the Scripture Union website here [www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/MS%20Prayer%209781859994658.pdf](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/MS%20Prayer%209781859994658.pdf)

Or why not have a go at creating your own actions or body movements as you pray, allowing yourself to creatively interpret and ‘give voice’ to the prayer using your whole body.

## Walking

Prayer whilst walking intentionally, meditatively and / or ‘aimlessly’ can be incredibly powerful. Many people find walking a *labyrinth* – or prayer path a moving and spiritually profound experience. The act of walking slowly and deliberately towards the centre of the labyrinth, and a symbolic encounter with God, can be a very powerful way of praying. There’s lots of information about the use of labyrinths as a way of prayer at this website <http://www.labyrinth.org.uk/> There’s even an online, virtual labyrinth for you to ‘walk’!

You may not have access to a labyrinth of course and though we would like to prepare a temporary labyrinth here at some time during 2015, *walking or moving whilst praying* can be done at any time and take many forms. It could just as well take place on an informal stroll or even a bike ride around one of the inspiring forests, woodlands or villages of our beautiful Weald.

Such a physical activity could incorporate some ‘*thanksgiving*’ for the specific beauty of the created world – all the while using our senses to *appreciate* the blessings of nature; a time of *quiet letting go* of the internal busyness so to allow God to speak to us – the act of walking and breathing itself setting a meditative rhythm; the walk may include *metaphorical and biblical symbols* – walking beside water and being reminded of God’s promises to us in Psalm 23 for example; maybe the walk would incorporate an element of being reminded of our place in creation and even our need to ask for God’s *forgiveness* and the blessing of restored relationship.

This leaflet is part of a series of monthly introductions to different ways of praying as we seek to get to know God and each other better.

All of the previous leaflets can be found on the website at

[www.gkchurch.org](http://www.gkchurch.org)