

A close-up photograph of hands holding several smooth, grey and brown stones. The stones are inscribed with the words 'HOPE', 'WORRY', and 'JOY' in black marker. One hand holds a stone with 'HOPE' written on it, while another hand holds a larger stone with 'WORRY' written on it. Several other stones with 'HOPE' and 'JOY' are visible in the palm of a hand in the foreground. The background is dark, making the hands and stones stand out.

80 Reflective Prayer Ideas

A creative resource
for church and group use

Claire Daniel

'Highly recommended' Jeff Lucas

The Bible Reading Fellowship

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**A creative resource
for church and group use**

Claire Daniel



For my mum.

You began my life with prayer,
when you placed your tiny, premature baby into God's hands.
Thank you for being my constant in every season of life.

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Preface

Reflections of God's glory and symbols of his love and grace can be seen in everyday things. Many of the prayer responses included in this book came to me as I went about my daily life, yet suddenly came across something that spoke to me of God and resonated with me about the journey of faith. I find I encounter God very powerfully in the unexpected moments of everyday life, at home, on holiday or when doing seemingly ordinary things, like listening to a song or playing with modelling dough with my toddler.

I love developing creative ideas for reflecting on God's grace, and I am greatly moved by images as well as words. For example, the rainbow ribbon prayer in chapter 5 was inspired by an incredible art installation I saw in Grace Cathedral, San Francisco. These are my responses to God, thoughts that I believe he has dropped into my mind during times of reflection. That is not to say that I spend all day feeling inspired, praying effusively and profusely to God (far from it!). I do, however, believe that it is important in our faith walk to take time out to reflect and pause, to listen to God and to respond.

I have been developing ideas since writing *80 Creative Prayer Ideas* and finding new ways to focus on rest, with a fresh appreciation for the need to replenish our spirits in our busy world. I've recently encountered new ways to meet with God personally and new methods of expressing my faith in creative yet reflective ways, through Bible journalling, prayer-doodling and Christian colouring resources. In writing on reflective prayer, I've been exploring our need to stop, and it's challenged me to consider how we take time to breathe and refocus on our own relationship with God. There is benefit in finding ways to reconnect with him and to rest and reflect, especially in the hectic seasons of life. We need to find activities that renew our souls, giving ourselves permission to pause and make space to meet with God. I hope you can discover ways to do this through contemplative prayer.

I pray that these ideas spark a passion for reflecting, helping you meet with God in new, unexpected ways, as you adapt these prayers to suit your own needs and those of the church or group you share them with. May you encounter God through prayer, reigniting joy in the weary parts of your soul, as you experience hope, listen for his voice and bring your heart to him in fresh or renewed ways.

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Foreword

When I opened the email, I was delighted to glimpse a photograph of a large plant bursting with lush leaves and pea pods. Immediately, I guessed that the person who sent the email had attended the BRF *Woman Alive* women's conference I spoke at a couple of months previously. There, during my session, I handed out little wrinkled pea seeds and led the women in a prayer exercise as they held them, asking God to grow our faith during the seasons of our lives.

I read her email, touched by the words:

I'm now harvesting a small but delicious crop of mangetout. It was the perfect illustration of how something appearing to be dried up and dead can flourish and become productive with the right type of care, so thank you for that. It is a lesson I will try to take into my spiritual life both for myself and others, especially to try not to judge someone by outward appearances but look for the hidden fruitfulness within them.

Even though I knew intellectually that a pea seed could bring forth new life, seeing the photograph of such abundant growth helped me to receive the truth at a deeper level. For I've long prayed that in my writing and speaking, God would give me his seeds to fling widely, that he would be the gardener who will tend them, bringing them to life and fruitfulness. Seeing a physical manifestation of that prayer encouraged me deeply.

And the original pea seed exercise? It was partly inspired by Claire Daniel's *80 Creative Prayer Ideas*, her resource that gathers together engaging ways to help us pray individually or in a group. Now she follows up that wonderful book with 80 more ways of praying not only creatively but reflectively, which I'm delighted to recommend.

Why am I so keen on these types of prayer activities, including them when I speak to groups and in *The Living Cross* (BRF, 2016), the Lent book I wrote on forgiveness? Because they can be a means to encounter God. Not every exercise will touch every person, of course, and some people might approach the activities with some fear and the notion that they aren't creative. But no previous stores of creativity are required – honest! And the benefits will outweigh any niggling hesitation, for the

very act of engaging in these exercises involves a level of humility and an openness to receive from God that I believe he honours. Being willing to take part opens space for God to speak to us. He can bring to life what may have been an intellectual concept, as he did for me with the pea pods, or help us get in touch with buried emotions, or shower us with his love.

So I warmly recommend Claire's *80 Reflective Prayer Ideas*, a book that I hope many people will embrace. She provides a variety of ways to engage our senses with themes that are firmly rooted in the Bible as she leads us to reflect on God's word, nature, the church community, our journey of faith and our personal walk with God. She starts each exercise with a passage from the Bible as she helps us ponder its meaning and how its truth might apply to us before leading us into a conversation with God. Feeling the soil in between our fingers while planting seeds or hearing the pop of the bubble wrap or smelling the coffee or tea will help us to enter more fully into the experience of meeting with God, being present and receptive to how he speaks into our lives.

Claire's book is not only for individuals, but will be a wonderful tool for those leading others. For instance, I'm preparing to speak on the theme of living in and for Christ, and am gravitating to her exercises on spiritual transformation. As she says, even as a caterpillar changes to a butterfly, so are we changed to be more like Christ.

I'm grateful for how Claire helps us to foster an encounter with God through the living Christ and the empowering Spirit. May God use *80 Reflective Prayer Ideas* to plant and grow many seeds that will bear fruit in his name.

Amy Boucher Pye

Introduction

Prayer is a vital part of our Christian journey, yet finding the words to express our hopes, hurts, failings and joy is not always easy. The ideas in this book provide ways to bring our prayers to God through practical yet reflective responses, using visual prompts, creative actions, Bible verses and suggested prayers.

The prayer responses are designed to be personal, reflective acts of worship. They do not necessarily require any great artistic ability but do allow you to express your faith creatively. They are prompts for your individual response to God, a different way of pouring out the things that are on your heart, through prayer. You may want to write longer responses or do some journalling in a separate notepad as you read each prayer, or you may choose to spend time in quiet contemplation, write a single word or draw something as you pray.

Many of the prayers deliberately engage our senses, as well as give opportunity to respond with our heart and words. Using our hands and tactile experiences, looking at images or listening to music can help us experience a sensory style of worship and a deeper connection with God than words alone. I wanted to create prayers that are fun, challenging and even messy in places, just like our faith journey. I also wanted to make them accessible to those who find traditional prayer difficult, those who have additional needs and those with vision or hearing impairments.

In my ministry, I have had the opportunity to create and use many of these ideas at conferences, prayer workshops, women's weekends or in my own church. I've also had fun getting my children involved in having a go at some of them as I developed the ideas, like the bubble wrap, white board and modelling dough prayers. I can tell you that the sound of bubble wrap popping beneath stamping feet of various sizes, as you give your worries over to God, is indeed hugely cathartic!

Prayer is for all ages and stages of our faith journey. These reflections can be used by individuals, church congregations and small groups, and for setting up prayer events or all-age worship. They can also be used as a basis for prayer rooms or quiet spaces, in churches, retreat venues, conferences, schools or youth clubs, or in family prayer time, children's ministry or holiday club activities. It is powerful to use a reflective idea as a whole group or congregational response, while still making an individual prayer response. It can be an amazing experience to respond together as

a body of believers. Equally, you may want to use this book as part of your personal devotional time and quietly reflect on the prayers.

The prayer station ideas set out in each chapter are ready to use and can be the basis of an 'instruction sheet' for each station, or they can be used as a starting point, the springboard for your own creative response to God. Prayer is very individual, and God will lead you to pray in ways I couldn't write for you; but my hope is that, as you read the words I have included, you will rest in God's presence. I pray that God will speak to you as you pause to reflect and use these ideas as a guide for the path of prayer that you need to take with God, that you might hear from him and open your heart to all he has for you.

Getting ready

There are a few practical things you may want to consider as you prepare to set up reflective prayer stations, particularly if you are new to this type of worship response. These will vary depending on the space you are using and the type of activities you choose to provide but there are some general areas worth thinking about as you get started and plan for an event.

Venue/furniture

What changes will you need to make to the layout of the furniture to set up stations? What sort of lighting do you have and do you need to add in any extra lights to create atmosphere? Some of the stations you are setting up may need tables and chairs and good lighting; others may need soft furnishings, such as cushions or beanbags, and more relaxed lighting.

Electricals/AV use and safety considerations

Do you need additional lamps or equipment to play music or display slideshows? It may seem obvious but in preparing your event, you will need to ensure that you have these prayer stations set up near power sockets in your venue and that all equipment is set up and maintained to meet health-and-safety regulations, avoid trip hazards from wires, and so on. If you are using real candles in any of the stations, be aware of fire hazards and put into place precautions, following the fire regulations for your venue.

Handwashing/kitchen availability

If you are planning to do responses that generate mess or involve food, do you have suitable kitchen and handwashing facilities? It is worth considering positioning stations so that those who need access to clean water or handwashing are near a kitchen or sink. In some situations, a bowl of warm washing-up water that can be changed at intervals or even packs of hand wipes are sufficient. You will also need to ensure you have plenty of kitchen towel to deal with any spillages. Use protective table coverings and even sheets for the floor if you anticipate lots of mess, particularly if your venue has carpets or is used for other purposes.

Resources

It's great to have some general craft kit for prayer stations. Basics like paper, card, glue, scissors, pens in good working order and a whole range of other craft equipment can be useful. Things like plastic bowls, durable table coverings and washing-up bowls are also worth purchasing. There are lots of online retailers that provide good-quality craft resources in bulk if you need larger quantities at reasonable costs, so do shop around.

Bibles and Bible verse cards

Many of the prayer station ideas use Bibles to reflect on specific scripture or cards printed with Bible verses to take away, in addition to the 'Bible reflection' verse for each idea. It is good to have a selection of different translations available. Cards with Bible verses can be printed at home and cut into different shapes. You can also buy ready-made ones.

General prayer ideas

Some prayer responses can be used for a variety of themes and with materials different from those suggested. I encourage you to adapt ideas from the chapters to other topics, get creative with resources you have and add your own ideas! Sometimes having six or more stations is good, depending on the event and venue size, or you may just want to use an idea as a single response as a congregation, or as a prayer response in a service or group meeting. These are some methods of reflecting that can be tailored to suit various prayer topics:

- Gratitude list/happy list
- Bible journaling
- Colouring (for all ages)
- Modelling clay/dough
- Rest-and-reflect area
- Written journaling
- Sticky notes
- Prayer doodling
- Graffiti wall
- Food response, e.g. icing biscuits
- Pebbles
- Candles
- Bible verse cards to take away
- Prayer walks/labyrinths
- Reflecting on nature
- Music to inspire reflection
- Visual prayer aids: photographs or images (printed or shown on a screen)

Reflecting on the Bible

1

Reflections on the Psalms

Where my help comes from: Psalm 121

Prayer focus

To look to God, our helper in times of need, the creator of the world. Using the grandeur and splendour of a mountain, to reflect on the awesome power of God, who can move mountains yet is also our refuge and comforter.

Bible reflection

I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

PSALM 121:1-2

What I need

- Large green, brown or white cardboard sheet
- A4 card or paper, cut into small mountain shapes
- Marker pen
- Scissors
- Glue (if cutting out shape)
- Pens

Either cut out and construct a large mountain landscape from the cardboard, or draw a large mountain on to the white cardboard with the marker pen. Print or write the words of Psalm 121:1-2 on to small mountain-shaped cards to take away.

Reflect

When we spend time looking at the natural world around us, the sight of a mountain or range of hills can evoke feelings of awe at their sheer size and towering presence in the landscape. They can also help us remember the strength of our creator God, who made all things yet also cares about each of us and is our source of help when we face 'mountains' in life.

Pray

Take some time to look at the large mountain in front of you. Consider the significance of this image in your life. Perhaps call to mind incredible scenery you have seen on your travels and bring prayers of thanksgiving to God for the beauty of the created world. Reflect on those things in your life that may feel utterly insurmountable, like a huge mountain. Remember that when we put our faith and trust in God, he can move mountains – nothing is impossible for God. Lay these before God in prayer, as you read the verses from Psalm 121, giving thanks to him, your comfort and the source of help in times of need. If there are times you have neglected to lift your eyes to the Lord and you need to look to him again in awe and worship, do this as you look at the mountain. If you would like to respond by writing down your prayers or words of thanksgiving, add these to the mountain as you believe afresh that the God who created the splendour of a mountain also knows about all that you face and wants to comfort you. Take a small mountain verse-card home as a reminder to look to God and give all your 'mountains' to him.

Fearfully and wonderfully made: Psalm 139

Prayer focus

To reflect on the wonder of being created by God. Though we may feel insignificant, God knitted together our very being and knows us from before we came into existence. God has a plan and purpose for our growth, and a hand in our development at every stage of life and faith.

Bible reflection

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

PSALM 139:13–14

What I need

- Magazines with pictures of people of different ages
- Photographs of babies, ultrasound scans and perhaps also of other ages and stages of life, from children to the elderly (either personal copies or printed from the internet)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Large sheet of paper or cardboard
- Marker pen
- Pens

Print or write the words of Psalm 139:13–14 in the centre of the large sheet of paper or cardboard in big, bold lettering, leaving plenty of space around it.

Reflect

Sometimes we may feel that our faith is embryonic, that we have far to go in our understanding and development as a Christian. Or it can feel as if we are in a phase of life where our faith is growing as fast as a child, with big changes happening as we journey with God. If you are honest, you might have been a Christian for a long time and feel rather ‘aged’ in your faith – wise perhaps, but in need of a renewal of the energy of youth and vitality of early faith. God is with us in whatever season we find ourselves in on our faith journey. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Pray

Look through the magazines and photographs and spend a few moments cutting out some pictures as you consider the theme of human growth and development. Choose some images to stick around the verse, creating a prayer collage of different ages and stages of life. As you do this, begin to bring your faith journey to God, be open with him in prayer about the season you are in. Give thanks for the miracle of life and that God has made us all unique and wonderful, with individual talents and purpose. Consider ways you have grown in maturity in your walk with the Lord. If you feel your faith is in need of revitalising or that growth has slowed or even ceased, bring this before God, asking for a renewal of strength and opportunities to focus on your faith development. Reflect on ways you can rediscover this vitality, perhaps through rereading significant Bible verses or starting a new Bible study or devotional and sharing where you are with others in your church or family, as you look to grow together in faith.

The wonder of creation: Psalm 8

Prayer focus

To give thanks to God for his power and majesty in creating the world, even setting the stars in place. To respond to the awesomeness of God the creator. To reflect on our responsibilities as custodians of the world God created for us.

Bible reflection

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

PSALM 8:3-4

What I need

- Blue card or length of blue material
- Silver card or paper
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Pens
- Pins or double-sided tape (if using material)
- Metallic star stickers

Cut out star shapes from the silver card or paper and put out the material or card, the pens, the star stickers and whatever you are using to fix the stars in place.

Reflect

When we see the stars and consider the infinite nature of space and all that God has created, we can feel a sense of awe. It can also be humbling to reflect on the knowledge that the God who placed the stars in the sky also created each of us. He made you and placed you on the earth for a purpose, and he made us all guardians of the world we inhabit.

Pray

The moon and stars are so incredible to see, shining in the darkest of nights. Psalm 8 is a reflection on the majesty of God's creation, in all its greatness, and an outpouring in praise of the creator God, the maker of heaven and earth. It also acknowledges our responsibility and role to care for the world. Look at the blue paper before you, a wide expanse to represent the heavens. Take some time to reflect on the enormity of the universe and give thanks to God who placed the stars in the sky, yet also knows you, loves you and created you. Write a prayer on the back of a silver star. Fix your star on to the sky, thanking God for the world and praying for a fresh appreciation of its beauty and the ways we can care for it. Take with you a small metallic star sticker, and place it somewhere you will see as a reminder that the hands of God that flung stars into space also took time to create you. He has a plan for your life, however insignificant you may feel.

The Lord is my rock: Psalm 18

Prayer focus

To use words of hope to inspire and encourage. To reflect on God, our rock in whom we can take refuge, a stronghold in times of trouble and uncertainty.

Bible reflection

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

PSALM 18:2

What I need

- Pebbles
- Permanent marker pen
- Decorative table cloth

Use the permanent marker pen to write a word of inspiration on each pebble. Choose words you feel are appropriate, such as 'strength', 'hope', 'grace', 'mercy', 'peace' and 'light'.

Reflect

Take some time to look at the words written on the pebbles – words of affirmation and inspiration. These words mean different, significant things to each of us and may bring to mind different circumstances, struggles or concerns. They are words of hope and strength, and the pebbles themselves can remind us of the unchanging and solid rock that is God, our refuge and deliverer.

Pray

Select a pebble. Look at the word written on it as you hold it in your hands. Use this word to guide your prayers. Or perhaps you may ask God to speak to you afresh through the word written on the pebble, bringing your worries and cares to him, the rock of your salvation.

You might want to reflect on several of the pebbles in this way. Take time to use these simple but powerful words to inspire your reflections and prayers as you hold on to the words of hope that God, our rock and strength, gives.

When you are ready, choose a pebble with a particularly significant word on it to keep. Take this home and place it somewhere where you will see it – perhaps your bedside table, desk or kitchen window ledge – to remind you of your prayers and to continue to inspire you.



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