

What are Prayer Beads?

Faithful people through time and across diverse faith traditions have used knotted rope, beads and strings to help orient themselves in relationship to God. Even touching the strand in a pocket is calming, and helps center the spirit. You can pray with beads in many ways. If one process or prayer makes unexpected sense to you, touches you, or feels helpful somehow, consider it a sacred invitation.



One String of Prayers:

This prayer string is based on an ecumenical Christian format. It has a “root” dangling below a circle of beads and knots. Between the root and circle is the “invitatory” knot—an “invitation” into the rest of the circle. Around the circle lie four sets of seven knots called “weeks.” Four beads at four “corners” of the circle are called “cruciform beads” because lines drawn between them form a cross.

The corner beads also echo the compass points and honor the Native tradition of the four directions. Prayers for the corner beads in this guide overlay South, East, North and West with reflective themes of creativity, awakening, guidance and letting go. If none of the prayers attracts you at a given time, you could pray the Quaker-style “query” or question at the bottom of each list.

How to Use Them:

To “pray the beads” begin at the root hanging below the circle of knots and beads. Hold it and pray the prayer given. Then move your fingers “up” to the invitatory knot and stop to pray again. Continue with the first corner bead above the invitatory. It stands for South, like the bottom of a compass rose.

Move toward the right to pray the first “week.” Choose one set of prayers to use for an entire cycle of weeks around the circle. When you reach another of the corner beads, offer one of the prayers for the East, North, West and finally South again. Exit the string by saying the invitatory prayer and root prayer one last time. One cycle of prayers takes between 8 and 15 minutes.

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Prayer Bead Prayers

1. Root *Dangling item, cross etc:*

May my roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love; and may I be able to feel and understand... how long, how wide, how deep and how high God's love really is. *(based on Eph 3:17)*

2. Invitatory *First knot above root:*

Hear, O Israel <"God-wrestler">
The Divine abounds everywhere
And dwells in everything;
The many are One.
—*Sh'ma (from Deut 6:4) translated by Marcia Falk in Book of Blessings*

3. Four Beads *See options at right.*

4. Weeks, 7 Knots *between four beads:*

Choose ONE cycle of prayer below. Pray a single /segment/ of the cycle as you touch each knot around the circle.

- *Daily Examen, seven each:* Thank you for.../ I'm sorry for or I regret... /Please help me.../ I love You... *(see next)*
- *Great commandment in seven parts:*
I love You/ with all my heart/ all my soul/
all my mind/ all my strength/
and my neighbor/ as myself
(Deut 6:5, Matt 22:37 & Mark 12:32)
- *Seven "I AM" sayings:* You are the light of the world/ the bread of life/ the gate/ the good shepherd/ the resurrection and the life/ living water/ the vine
(from Christian scriptures esp. John)
- *Seven answers to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?":* Yeshua, Emmanuel or "God with us", Rabbi, Healer, Prophet, Messiah, The Way

3. Four Beads • Cruciform • Compass Points *(Choose one prayer on each theme):*

South (first bead above the root):

When the sun is high, I pray:

- Fully alive! May my humanity reveal the Glory of God *(from Ireneaus)*
- May I bloom abundantly in your garden *(based on "life abundant" in John 10:10)*
- Ignite your passion, your energy, in me for your work before me.
- Where do you call forth my creative energies today? What deepest desires do you kindle?

East: (right bead)

In the morning, I pray:

- Here I am, God. Send me!
(from Isaiah 6:8)
- Illumine my imagination with the infinite possibilities born of faith
(from Therese of Liseaux)
- Awaken me to the needs and hungers of others. "Stir me to love."
(from Teresa of Avila)
- What do you create anew in me today?

North: (top bead)

When I need direction, I remember the North Star, the Pole Star, and pray:

- Guide me. Show my feet where to walk, teach my mouth what to speak, my hands how to heal, my heart how to love, my mind how to trust, and my spirit how to hope.
- Keep me in your love, as you would that all should be kept in mine.
(from Dag Hammarskjöld)
- In your service, keep me close to thy gift in me *(from Samuel Bonnas, Quaker minister)*
- Where is your Way in this?

West: (left bead)

In the evening, I pray:

- I let go of my failures and flaws, trusting your Love to heal and transform me.
- I release the results of my efforts into your care.
- I pray to know when to stop and rest.
- What former things do I need, with God's help, to lay down?

