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Opening and Closing

PRAYERS

CARL KOCH



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P R A Y E R S



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by
CARL KOCH



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*To Susan and Lanny Harmon,
God's blessings of peace and love!*

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Contents

- Introduction** 7
1. **Celebration and Thanksgiving** 9
 2. **Compassion and Service** 16
 3. **Courage in Hard Times** 21
 4. **Creating Community** 24
 5. **Creation** 29
 6. **Faith** 31
 7. **Freedom** 36
 8. **Manifestations of God's Great Love for Us** 39
 9. **Hope** 44
 10. **Leaders** 48
 11. **Love** 50
 12. **Peace and Reconciliation** 55
 13. **Trust in Providence** 61
 14. **Wisdom and Understanding** 65



Introduction

150 Opening and Closing Prayers will be helpful to anyone who wants to begin or end a meeting, a school day, or a class with a prayer but does not always have time to compose one. The prayers in this book cover many themes in Christian life, and each prayer may be adapted to varying situations.

One important feature of the prayers is that they each employ a passage from either the Hebrew Scriptures or the Christian Testament. By using scriptural passages, the prayers not only lift the attention of those praying to God but also proclaim God's word. The prayers communicate to God and provide a way for those praying to listen to what God has to say.

Using These Prayers

At the beginning of each unit of prayers, three opening statements are offered. These statements call those praying into God's presence. Three types of statements for the call to presence are offered:

1. *proclamations* that announce God's presence
2. *petitions* that assume God's presence
3. *invitations* that ask the people to place themselves in God's presence

Select the opening statement that best fits the prayer you have chosen and the circumstances in which you are praying. Pausing briefly after this opening statement allows for recollection or calming before the prayer proper.

Read each prayer slowly and naturally. Permit the words to sink in. If a pause is indicated, take it.

Practicing the prayers beforehand will enhance their effectiveness. The prayers combine four modes:

- scriptural passages
- reflections
- responsorials
- invitations

Being aware of these different modes of prayer and distinguishing them by way of pauses and voice inflections will make the prayers more meaningful and evocative. Practicing the prayers becomes more important if they are to be read over a public address system.

After you have read a prayer, you may wish to add a short prayer of your own that personalizes it for the community. For instance, after a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, you might say something like, "Tonight, we thank God especially for . . ."

In many of the prayers, the last line serves as a good ending, but a distinct closing line is also provided for each unit of prayers. So to end a prayer, just use the final line, use the ending line as given at the end of each prayer theme, or create one of your own.

Finally, although most people will use the prayers for opening and closing various gatherings or at the start or finish of a school day, you may also use the prayers as

- morning or evening prayers
- meal prayers
- parts of longer prayer services
- sources of reflection or meditation
- prayers for any occasion

Hopefully, however you use the prayers, they will help you and your community communicate with God and listen to God's word.



CHAPTER 1

Celebration and Thanksgiving

Call to presence

- Let us remember that our bountiful God is with us today in this place.
- The God who gives us all things is present.
- Gracious God, here present, listen as we pray.

Prayers

Psalm 139:13–14 _____

Psalm 139 declares:

[God,] You created my inmost being
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
For all these mysteries—
for the wonder of myself,
for the wonder of your works—
I thank you.

We do thank you, God, for the wonder of ourselves, because we are unique, marvelous, talented creations of your hands.

May we appreciate and value all the wonder of our life and the wonders of people and nature. In valuing people and nature, may we protect, affirm, and build a better, more peaceful world.

John 10:10 _____

Jesus tells us,

I have come
so that they may have life
and have it to the full.

Jesus wants us to enjoy the many great things in life. For a moment, let's remember some of the truly good things God has given us that make life enjoyable and fulfilling. [Pause briefly.]

Thank you, God, for all these gifts that make our life full. Thank you especially for Jesus' coming to live with us. He showed us how to love.

James 1:16–17 _____

Today, let us give thanks for all the wonders around us, remembering what James said in his letter, "Make no mistake about this . . . : all that is good, all that is perfect, is given us from above."

So thank you, God, for our friends, our family, and all those who share their goodness with us. Thank you for nature with its many wonders—the seasons, the rain for the crops and flowers, doves and eagles, rabbits and foxes, all living things. Thank you for kind works, for praise, for our talents, for our skills, for learning and teaching, for hope in the future. For all things, we thank you.

Each of us, in silence, can offer thanks in our own way. [Pause.]

1 Peter 4:9 _____

Our God is revealed as a God of open arms who always welcomes us with care and protection. Saint Peter says, "Welcome each other into your houses without grumbling."

The feeling of welcome is a good one, and it comes not only when we are welcomed into a house but also when we are welcomed into a conversation, into a group activity, into another person's joys and fears.

Thank you, God, for those who have opened their home, mind, and heart to us.

May we do likewise.

Colossians 1:3–4 _____

As the Apostle Paul says, “We give thanks for you to God . . . continually in our prayers, ever since we heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you show towards all God’s holy people.”

Thank you, God, for those who love us—those who are there when we need encouragement, a kindly ear, a good talking to, a pat on the back, a shared meal, or the gift of their time. Thank you, God, for our ability to show love to other people, for the times when we have encouraged, listened, shared advice, patted another’s back, shared a meal, or given our time. For all these gifts of love, we give you thanks.

Psalms 118:1 _____

Psalms 118 begins by saying:

Alleluia!

I give thanks to you, Yahweh, for you are good;
your love is everlasting!

God gives us unconditional, totally faithful love. As humans we usually condition our love, and we are not always faithful. But let us thank God for our friends and those people who love us and are loyal in their support and affection for us. They are good. They are precious gifts from a loving God.

So we thank God for them, and maybe today we can thank each of our friends for being our friends.

James 1:19 _____

We like to be listened to; it makes us feel as if we are taken seriously and valued. For this reason James remarks in his epistle, “Remember this . . . : everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak and slow to human anger.”

Listening is a great gift that you, God, and the people in our life can give us.

For all those who have heard us out, who let us share our pain and joy, who have taken our words and feelings seriously, who have valued and appreciated what we have said—for all our listener friends, we give you thanks, God who always listens.

May we listen for others too.

Matthew 5:16 _____

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "Your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise" to God.

For a moment, let us silently recall some of the good that we have done for other people. [Pause.]

Now let us celebrate these good works and thank God for giving us the grace to do them.

Thank you, God, for the goodness that resides within us. Nourish our ability to do good. Thank you, all-good God.

Matthew 9:12-13 _____

God sent Jesus to heal our wounds, teach us wisdom, and show us mercy. His words and works manifest God's gracious love for us. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus proclaims: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. . . . I came to call not the upright, but sinners."

No doubt exists about the fact that we are sinners. You call us, Jesus. You heal us.

For our wholeness and health of spirit, we thank you and celebrate.

Matthew 26:28 _____

God sent Jesus to lift us out of hopelessness and sin and to teach us charity and peace.

Matthew's Gospel tells us that at the Last Supper, Jesus gave us his body and blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

With joyous celebration we give you thanks and praise for this perfect gift of Jesus. We have new and full life with him. His blood has washed our souls; his body nourishes us to eternal life. Blessed and holy, gracious and good are you, our saving God.

Romans 5:2 _____

We rejoice in our salvation by Jesus the Christ. Saint Paul writes, "It is through him, by faith, that we have been admitted into God's favour in which we are living, and look forward exultantly to God's glory."

All praise and thanks are yours, Jesus our Savior. You have set us free from sin. We hope in glory because we live in God's favor.

May we always praise you and celebrate our salvation by good works and acts of peace.

Romans 8:14–17 _____

Through Jesus we have become children of God. So Saint Paul says: "All who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons [and daughters] of God. . . . And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

Our inheritance is not gold or jewels, mansions or fast cars. Our inheritance is a life liberated from the darkness of self-centeredness and purposelessness. We are children of light and love learned from Jesus.

All praise and glory are yours, our gracious God. We are your children. May we play before you, laughing and full.

John 3:17 _____

John's Gospel proclaims that God sent Jesus

"into the world
not to judge the world,
but so that through him the world might be saved."

We celebrate the always-present Spirit of Jesus in our heart and in all your creation. That you would send your own child to set us free from sin and death is a fact we cannot completely understand. But we can and do thank you, praise you, and celebrate the wonder of your love for us.

May we always be mindful of your awesome gift.

John 12:46 _____

In John's Gospel, John tells us that Jesus came

“into the world as light,
to prevent anyone who believes . . .
from staying in the dark any more.”

The faith, hope, and love you taught and modeled are a bright flame in the darkness. Your light guides us to fullness of days. Glory is your name, our light. The heat from your light warms our heart.

May we remember your light today when we see the radiant sun, a burning candle, or a shining lamp. Jesus, our light, we praise and thank you. Shine on us forever.

John 14:16–18 _____

We celebrate God's presence in the Spirit sent to be with us when Jesus rose, and with us ever since. As Jesus said,

“I shall ask the Father,
and he will give you another Paraclete
to be with you for ever,
the Spirit of truth . . .
you know him,
because he is with you, he is in you.
I shall not leave you orphans.”

You, Spirit, are in and with us now and always. Even if we sometimes forget your presence, you call us back and remind us that you are here. Your presence is light and warmth to our soul, and so we celebrate and thank you.

May we always take notice of your holy dwelling place within. We are not orphans and never will be.

Acts 2:12–13 _____

The Spirit of the living God inflamed the disciples on Pentecost. The Scriptures tell us that the crowd that gathered to listen to them “was amazed and perplexed; they asked one another what it all meant. Some, however, laughed it off. ‘They have been drinking too much new wine,’ they said.”

When we are on fire with your Spirit, we are intoxicated by the warmth of your love flowing in us. Such love is “new wine” because we cannot feel it from any other source.