

saint mary's press

150 NEW OPENING
AND CLOSING PRAYERS

As We
GATHER,
As We
PART

CARL KOCH



**As We Gather,
As We Part**

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150 New Opening and Closing Prayers

by
Carl Koch



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*To Lou Anne, Virginia, Vicki, and Janet,
who have supported and guided me
through beginnings and endings.*

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Introduction

As We Gather, As We Part will prove useful to anyone who is asked to start or end a meeting, a class, or a small community gathering with a prayer, but does not have time to prepare one. The prayers in this book touch on the key themes of Christian life, and each prayer can easily be adapted to various situations.

One important feature of the prayers is that they each include a passage from the Bible. By including biblical passages, the prayers not only set our attention on God but also proclaim God's word. The prayers give us words with which to communicate with God and provide us with a way to listen to what God is telling us.

Using These Prayers

At the beginning of each section of prayers, three opening statements are offered to call the gathering into God's presence. Select the opening Call to presence that best fits the prayer you have chosen and the circumstances in which you are praying. Pausing briefly after the Call to presence allows for recollection and calming before the prayer proper. Most people appreciate this peaceful pause.

Read the selected prayer slowly but naturally. Permit the words to sink in. If a pause is indicated—particularly in the "Ask and Receive" chapter—take it.

Practicing the prayers beforehand will enhance their effectiveness. Being familiar with the prayer becomes even more important if it is 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 to personalize 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 chapter of prayers. So, to end a prayer, just use the final line of the prayer, use the ending line given at the end of each chapter, or create an ending of your own.

Finally, these prayers may serve you well as

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

It is hoped that however you use these prayers, they will help you and your community communicate with God and listen to God's word.



CHAPTER 1

Ask and Receive

Call to presence

- We recall your presence with us, merciful God.
- Let us remember that the God of abundant blessings is with us and hears our prayer.
- Come, God of faithful love, be with us as we gather.

Prayers

Note: The bracketed statements offer a place to add particular petitions that you may want to offer for a group.

Matthew 7:7–8 _____

All through the story of our salvation, we have called on you, God, and you have answered. Jesus tells us: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives.”

As we gather now, we need your help, gracious God. We ask you in particular for guidance and peace. [Offer any petitions for the group now.] And, in the silence of our heart, we each ask for what we need right now. [Pause briefly.] Hear us once again, our God.

Mark 11:22–24 _____

God, you have always been faithful to us. When we ask you anything in faith, you show your overwhelming love for us. As Jesus tells us:

Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea,” and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

First, Holy One, we ask for the faith to move mountains. May our heart be filled with such conviction. [We also offer you these petitions.] In silence and with faith, we each ask for the graces we need. [Pause briefly.] Thank you, living God, for hearing our prayers.

Luke 11:11–13 _____

Over and over, God, you have delivered your people from their troubles. Your mercy is too generous to understand. Jesus declared: “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? . . . If you then, . . . know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will [God] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.”

We seek your Holy Spirit now. Come, Spirit of God, be with us. Teach us the truth of the Gospels; send us the wisdom of God. [In particular, we offer these prayers of petition.] Holy Spirit, each of us has need of your help, and so, individually and silently, we ask for the aid that we need. [Pause briefly.] Thanks and praise to you, God of endless mercy.

John 14:12–14 _____

Jesus tells his disciples and those of us gathered here: “I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these. . . . I will do whatever you ask in my name. . . . If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

Saving God, we find it hard to imagine that we could do works greater than Jesus could do. Nevertheless, we have his word for it, and his word is truth. In Jesus' name we pray for your continued grace so that we might have faith, love, and hope. [As we gather, we pray particularly for these needs . . .] In the silence of our heart, grant each of us the grace that we need right now. [Pause briefly.] All these things we pray for in the name of Christ Jesus.

John 15:5-7 _____

God of mercy, abide in us so that we may have the confidence to pray as Jesus tells us to pray. In John's Gospel, he says: "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. . . . If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

And so we ask most importantly that you dwell in our heart. May all of us bear the fruits of your grace. [As we come together, we especially make these requests of you . . .] We pray, silently and hopefully, for our own specific needs. [Pause briefly.] Come, God of life, abide with us.

James 1:5-6 _____

You, God, always welcome our cries for help. Moses, Ruth, Elijah, Esther, Jeremiah, and Judith needed your help and got it. As the Scriptures say: "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting."

As people in need, we gather in your presence. We have faith, but we ask for more of it. We have some understanding, but we ask for deeper wisdom. [Now, we also ask for these particular needs . . .] As individuals and in the privacy of our heart, we ask you, God, for what we need. [Pause briefly.] All praise and thanks to you, Source of all goodness.

1 John 3:21-22 _____

Your generosity to us, Holy One, is larger than we can comprehend. You invite us to pray boldly. As the Scriptures say, "If

our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive . . . whatever we ask.”

Those who have gathered with you now are not blameless, and we hope that our heart is ready for your grace. So, in the quiet of our heart, we place these needs before you. [Pause briefly.] Send us a deeper faith. [We place the needs of all gathered here in your hands.] Blessings and thanks be to you, God of all creation.

Psalm 21:2–4 _____

With confidence in your care for us, we pray this psalm to you, God of the universe:

You [God] have granted me my heart’s desire;
you refused not the wish of my lips.

.

I asked life of you:
you gave me length of days forever and ever.

You always answer our prayer with goodness in mind for us. Sometimes we do not comprehend your replies, but we trust in your will. We gather with you, our God, and each of us makes petition to you for the needs we have. [Pause briefly.] We ask fullness of life from you, our God. [And we set before you these petitions for the good of us all.] We bless you, Source of all goodness.

Psalm 20:4–9 _____

God, your people prayed this psalm, asking guidance for their leaders. We pray it now, asking you to lead us.

May God grant you what your heart desires
and fulfill all your plans.

May we shout for joy over your triumph
and in the name of our God wave our banners;
may Yahweh fulfill all your petitions.

.

Save us, Yahweh;
answer when we call.

We stumble into error and trouble unless you guide us. Save us, living God. We each have needs that we pray for now in the quiet of our heart. [Pause briefly.] Fulfill all our petitions. [We ask particularly for your help with these petitions . . .] We declare our thanks to you, our God.

Proverbs 8:17–18 _____

Holy God, in Proverbs you tell us:

I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and prosperity.

We come together to seek your will, and we desire the fruits of doing good. May we always find your love. [Right now, our God, we seek your presence and your help with these needs . . .] In the privacy of our heart, we each ask you for the graces that we need. [Pause briefly.] All honor and praise to you, Source of every good thing.

Jeremiah 29:12–13 _____

Loving God, you never want us to drift away from you. Even when the people of Israel turned their back on you, you told them: “When you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.”

We seek you, we call upon you, our God. Even though, like the people of Israel, we sometimes turn our back on you, we trust that you never turn your back on us. So, once again, we ask for your grace and guidance. [In particular we ask for your help with these concerns . . .] Silently we each offer our petitions to you, gracious God. [Pause briefly.]

Matthew 6:11–12 _____

We offer you, our Creator, these words from the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

We always come to you with our needs. You always listen and answer. [Today we come to you with these needs . . .] In the silence of our heart, we ask you to give us what we need. [Pause briefly.] We pledge in turn to be people of service and forgiveness.

2 Corinthians 6:1–2 _____

Source of all wisdom, we gather in your name again. May we keep in mind your constant care for us and Paul's words: "As we work together with [Jesus], we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For [God] says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.'"

We wish to work together with Jesus, because without him we can do nothing good. [Specifically we ask for these things . . .] Individually we offer you these petitions. [Pause briefly.] Glory and praise to you, our God.

Isaiah 41:9–10 _____

We have no God but you, Creator of the universe. Be with us just as you promised in Isaiah:

"You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off";
do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you.

With steadfast hope we call on you, our God, for help. Help us to put aside any fear in the sure knowledge that you love us and dwell with us. [In addition, we ask for these needs