

# Seeking Wisdom

# **What's in it for me? Harness the power of prayer to lead a flourishing creative life.**

After years of struggling with alcoholism, author Julia Cameron found a way to sobriety by connecting with a deep creativity. Through the tools in this Blink, she was able to unblock herself as an artist and see a path forward for her creative life. In the four decades which followed, she has become the best-selling author of over forty books, including *The Artist's Way*, which has been translated into forty languages and sold over five million copies. In the late 70s, the author, Julia Cameron, hit rock bottom. Her husband left her because of her alcohol addiction and, to ease the pain, she took to the bottle again and again. Finally, she found herself at a complete loss over what to do next. So when a friend offered to introduce her to another alcoholic, she was finally prepared to admit she had a problem. During the long journey to recovery, the most powerful tool the author learned was to pray. Through prayer, she stayed sober. And, even more miraculously, she stopped feeling like a tortured writer. She was now able to create with increasing joy and ease. When she felt uncertain about what to write next, she continued to find answers through her personal practice of prayer. These blinks will talk you through a six week program based on the author's own experiences. You'll learn to harness the potential of creative prayer as a tool to overcome creative blocks. If you don't believe in God, this book is all about arriving at your own concept of God – a god that stems from you and your own creative instinct. Let's start with week 1: How to adopt a more benevolent God concept.

## **Week 1: Adopt a more benevolent God concept.**

You've all heard the story of Adam and Eve: Eve offers Adam an apple from the forbidden tree. Suddenly, God's voice thunders from the parting sky above, banishing them from Eden and condemning them to a future of pain and suffering. If this jealous and punishing version of God is the God you've grown up knowing, you're not alone. The story of Adam and Eve., as well as other stories in the Bible, have shaped a concept of divinity which teaches us to fear God and scold ourselves for having desires. But what if we were able to flip the script? What if we could rework our God concept, creating a God who is loving and encouraging – one who promoted original blessing instead of original sin? In week one of this six-week program, you'll be inviting a God into your life who encourages you to reach higher and higher. A God who wants you to eat the apple, so to speak. By changing our God concept, we start to build a conversational relationship with God. We allow ourselves to believe in a benevolent and supportive world, a world which encourages us to pursue our dreams and desires, and no longer humble ourselves or shy away from talent. If you're like the author, you may have some trouble with this at first. Perhaps you were told all along to think of God as a man sitting high up in the sky. When the author was advised to pray during her recovery as an alcoholic, she was hesitant. As an agnostic, the idea of praying to God wasn't something that came naturally to her. But since she wanted to get sober and needed to pray to something, she admitted that she did believe in some things. She believed in a line

written by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas: “The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” While other people in her recovery group prayed to Mick Jagger or sunspots – the point, she discovered, is that God can be anything you choose God to be. In order to arrive at this shift in thinking, try forming your own God concept, come up with a list of adjectives to describe the God you grew up understanding. And then, ask yourself, What if you could create a new, personal God? A God who likes to tango, a God who wants you to write a best-selling novel, a God who doesn’t want you to slog away at a 9-5 for the rest of your life. Construct a God who is tender, compassionate, a listening God.

## **Week 2: Prayers of petition open up a dialogue with God.**

If you could ask God for anything you wanted, what would it be? Would it be something small? Or maybe something larger. The truth is, when it comes to your relationship with God, there’s no limit for what you can ask for. In week two of the program, we’ll be experimenting with the first of three types of prayer: this week’s prayer is called a prayer of petition. A prayer of petition can be asking for something you want, something you need, or even just asking for guidance. You might ask God how to talk to your child about a tricky topic, you might ask for guidance around how to exit a relationship. At the core of this practice are two parts. First, we ask for what we want. Then, we open ourselves to receiving. Prayers of petition dare us to dream bigger. They inspire us to take a step toward what we want our life to look like. And you’ll be surprised how it works. When you create space to ask for guidance, you leave room for the divine to take a step toward you. The author has a number of prayers of petition that she does daily. She prays for faith and optimism. She prays that she’ll receive everything she needs. Other times, she prays for something specific – whether to take an opportunity or not. She asks for guidance. Should she agree with a less-than-ideal venue for one of her plays? And then she listens to the voice that answers: “Your perfect venue will come; don’t settle for anything less than you’re worth.” Once she has the answer, she has faith in it, and she acts in accordance with that faith. In this case, it’s turning down the venue offer and holding out for something better. Prayer may feel unnatural to begin with. And if talking out loud feels uncomfortable, try writing your prayers out by hand. First, write out your question. Then, listen for a response and write down whatever answer comes back to you. The author finds that addressing these letters “Dear God” creates the level of intimacy she needs to open up a conversation. You can also try practicing affirmative prayers. Like affirmations, affirmative prayers are positive statements stating your desire as if it’s already been realized. If you aspire to be a writer, you might write something like, “I am a successful and published author.” Affirmative prayers are a powerful tool that help us to connect with our dreams as well as the divine.

## **Week 3: Prayers of gratitude give us a sense of joy and abundance.**

When we look at the world with gratitude, we begin to take stock of the many blessings around us. We are attuned to the gifts that the world presents to us. We begin to cherish the people, nature, and things that we often take for granted. In week three of our program, we’ll be practicing prayers of gratitude. Prayers of gratitude can take many

forms. You might be thanking God for answering a prayer. Or you might simply be drawing your attention to the good in the world around you. It's helpful to begin our journey of looking at the world with gratitude by turning to nature. When we witness the constellation of stars in the night sky, the deep fuchsia color of spring flowers, or the shimmer of sun reflecting across high-rises in an urban landscape, we can access gratitude from a place of awe. The joy and abundance that God instills in nature is there for us to enjoy as well. In times when we feel our worst, prayers of gratitude have the capacity to lift us from depression into hope. If you ever feel overwhelmed by a feeling of frustration or hopelessness, think about a time you felt depressed and still managed to accomplish a tiny win. You might want to think of a specific example. It could be a time from the past. Or something you did today. Make a list of these tiny wins. Reading over your list will help you feel more resilient and pave the way to further feelings of gratitude. Sometimes our path to grace can be literal. When the author's friend Emma was grieving the death of her eighteen-year-old dog, the only thing she could think to do was walk. Emma walked over ten miles a day, grieving her lost companion. Over the years, the author has encouraged her students to see walking as a tool, a space for seeking guidance and gratitude. If you're experiencing emotional pain or you're weighed down by a problem, take a walk with a specific question in mind. As you walk, listen for an answer. When you're back, jot down any insights you had along the way. You may find you already have the solution that will help you to move forward.

## **Week 4: Prayers of praise draw us closer to the miracles of the universe.**

As you begin to communicate with God and your relationship to the world around you changes, you'll realize that the universe is a thing that lives and breathes. When we open ourselves up to co-creating with God, the universe responds to our needs. The third type of prayer for us to consider, in week four of our program, is the prayer of praise. Through prayers of praise, we celebrate the gifts of God that are all around us, noticing and appreciating small miracles. To get yourself in the right mindset for prayers of praise, allow yourself at first to just marvel at the universe around you. You can trigger this feeling by listing ten people, places, or things that inspire awe within you. In practice, this could be as simple as drawing your attention to the phases of the moon, or you might think about a friend who despite a packed agenda of her own, always seems to remember the important things coming up in your life. Another thing you might choose to marvel at, are life's remarkable "coincidences," otherwise known as synchronicity. Say you want to learn life drawing, but you don't know where to start. Then, one evening, at a dinner party, you find yourself sitting next to a beginner's art teacher who happens to have one slot left in their drawing class. This is an example of synchronicity. Life has presented you with an opportunity which perfectly aligns with your interests. Synchronicity can show up in many different ways. Perhaps you're searching for advice and a page of a book falls open, giving you the guidance you need to move forward with a problem. When you start to notice and give praise for all these minute moments of synchronicity in your life you also pave the way for a closer relationship with God. A God who is yours. A God who wants the best for you. A God who is constantly leading you closer to the thing you most need or desire.

## **Week 5: Creativity and spirituality go**

# hand in hand.

Here's some food for thought: what if God is creativity? In week five, you'll learn to see the connection between creativity and spirituality, on your path to creative unblocking. During the early stages of the author's sobriety, she worried that abstaining from alcohol would hamper her creativity. But, in practice, the opposite was true. While her creative practice before sobriety was driven by her ego, as she attempted to write brilliantly and impressively, her new approach to writing was driven by a spirit of service. To her surprise, her writing became more accessible and clear, and a successful career soon followed. Creativity and spirituality, it turned out, were connected - so connected that she even considered them to be the same thing. Forty-plus books later, the author's writing process remains largely the same. Instead of trying to think of something to write about, she approaches her work by trying to let her Higher Power write through her. An essential part of the author's process is what she calls the Morning Pages. Every morning, the author wakes up and writes three pages by hand about anything. That's right - anything. You can write about being tired, your plans today, or something that's bothering you. This might seem like a pointless exercise. But you'll find that starting your day by venting, thinking, and dreaming brings direction, productivity, and clarity into your creative practice as well as every other area of your life. If you meditate, write your morning pages beforehand. You'll find that the practice sets you up for an even more clear communication with a Higher Power. Morning Pages alone won't solve our creative blocking. When we feel creatively blocked, we're usually facing an issue of faith. You might be worried that you don't have enough ideas, that they're not good enough, or that whatever you have to say has already been said by somebody else - and far better. But if you think that creativity and spirituality go hand in hand, you'll begin to see unblocking yourself as a matter of faith. When the author is writing her plays and worried about how they will be received, her ability to work depends on her faith in God's timing. By having faith that God will take care of the quality of her work, the author is able to focus on the quantity that she writes. To consider the ways in which you might be getting in your own way, try writing the following lines and respond: "If It didn't feel so risky I would . . ." "If I let the Great Creator create through me, I would make . . ." Whether you want to redecorate your bathroom or shoot a feature film, no creative endeavor is too large or too small. Begin by writing a small sign for yourself which says, "OK, God, you take care of the quality, I'll take care of the quantity." Post this note in the place where you create, and it'll remind you of the relationship between creativity and the divine.

## **Week 6: Routine prayer and praying with and for friends can strengthen your relationship with the divine.**

God is an unlimited resource that we can tap into whenever we need. You've learned to witness this divine Higher Power in nature, people, and your creative endeavors. In the sixth and final week of the program, you'll consider two more ways in which God can be your constant companion: routine and the power of friendship. You can pray anytime, anywhere. But if you want to keep the line with God as open as possible, it's a good idea to establish a routine for your prayers. The author's daily prayers take up almost two full pages of paper each day. And just as she begins each day with her Morning Pages,



every night she prays on her knees and thanks God for her sobriety. This prayer of gratitude is for her sobriety today as well as her sobriety tomorrow. The discipline of praying every evening offers both comfort and humility. It establishes prayer as a regular practice in her daily life and sets her up for success for the day to come. But praying doesn't only have to be a practice of solitude. Praying for and with your friends can be an inspiring and rewarding practice. Consider this: if friendship is holding goodwill for one another, then goodwill is a form of prayer. The author has known her friend Laura Leddy for over twenty five years. Their friendship had seen the dissolution of the author's second marriage as well as both Laura's career as a teacher and her retirement. It lasted beyond their shared time living in Chicago to when the author lived in Manhattan and the Southwest. They talk on the phone at least once a week. An important part of their weekly phone calls is prayer. At times, the prayers passed between the author and Laura are casual. The author often asks Laura to pray for her to be an effective, funny, and wise teacher. And in the author's experience, this prayer has worked: when she goes to teach writing classes, she feels bolstered by her friend's words. But the author has also asked Laura for more serious matters. When her friend Lisa was suffering from leukemia and lung cancer, the author asked Laura to pray for Lisa. Even though Laura doesn't know Lisa, the author trusts that Laura's prayers will benefit her sick friend. In return, the author prays for Laura's health and well-being. She writes down Laura's name as well as her other friends and prays on the page for their joy, peace, acceptance, and health. She prays for both the living and the dead. She prays for her accountant. She even prays for people she doesn't know, including the artists that she admires, like the playwright Sam Shepard. As you near the final week of the program, consider reaching out to someone with whom you can share your new practice. Try listing a few friends you could pray with as well as friends that you could pray for. Once you've prayed for and with at least one friend, write about the experience.

## Final summary

The point of this six-week program is this: Through adopting a more benevolent concept of God, we can begin a dialogue with the divine. Prayers of petition, gratitude, and praise can help us recognize our dreams and desires and liberate us from what keeps us from pursuing them. Through routine practice of prayer, morning pages, and walking with questions, we can unblock our creativity and work collaboratively with the divine. And here's some more actionable advice: Identify an artist with whom you can share your early ideas. When it comes to sharing ideas, it's important to be discerning about the people we let into our creative practice. But if executed wisely, connecting with other artists when nourishing an idea can be an answered prayer. To identify who you should and shouldn't share your ideas with, try filling in the following sentences: "I can share my ideas safely with . . ." "A person I shouldn't have trusted . . ." ". . . is someone who might be overly critical."