

writing to GOD

group guide

More than many of us would admit, prayer can be a struggle in our spiritual lives. We worry that our prayers are not “good enough,” and we stress when prayer feels stagnant. Lent is the perfect season for pushing beyond our fears in prayer and exploring a new prayer discipline! By focusing our prayers through the tips of our pens, we can shift our self-consciousness into creativity and engage God anew, as prayer becomes an active experience of mind, body and spirit. Joining together with a group to write prayers adds the gift of community to encourage our spirits.

To get your small group together, invite persons who enjoy writing as well as those who would like a fresh approach to prayer. Find a weekly time to meet during Lent. Choose a gathering place where everyone has room to write around one table. Sometimes the church is a logical meeting space, but I encourage writing groups to meet in non-church locations. The change of scenery provides a reminder that prayer goes beyond our church walls, and it inspires our writing with varied sights and sounds. (My writing group loves a local tea shop, where hot cups of tea and warmed muffins delight our senses as we write.)

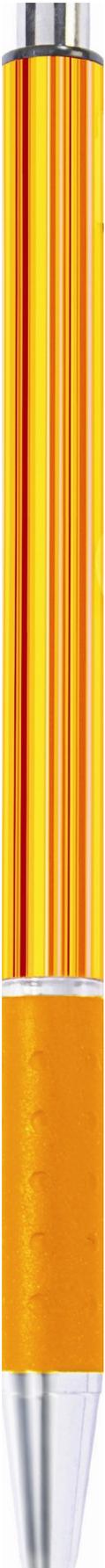
Anticipate 1 - 1½ hours for your group meeting; length of time will vary by writing time and sharing. The group facilitator should set and keep time. For each meeting, this *Group Guide* provides an introductory question for conversation, followed by creative writing exercises to get pens rolling and synapses firing, before turning to a prayer-writing prompt in *Writing to God*. Along the way, the *Group Guide* helps group members share their writing with one another.

Here are the writing guidelines that I offer to my own small group and in workshops:

- Throw your grammar book out the window. Let your pen venture beyond the rules of form, punctuation, sentence structure, and familiar prayer styles; try writing a prayer with free-form poetry, for example.
- Trust your pen. In creative writing and prayer-writing, get your pen moving as soon as your brain has an idea – don't hesitate or second guess yourself! (That hesitation is part of the self-consciousness that holds us back in prayer.)
- Keep writing! Keep the ink flowing during the allotted writing time. If you reach a dead end or lose a train of thought, pause, take a sip of your tea, and then set your mind, soul and pen onto a new writing path.

Have a great time writing as a group! Be willing to risk letting others hear – and affirm – the prayers you've penned. Appreciate the turns-of-phrase that catch your ear as others share their writing. Most of all, let your spirit be refreshed by the time of praying in community!

—Rachel G. Hackenberg



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Week 1 Gathering

Opening Conversation

What writing are you doing this week (emails, grocery lists, etc.)?

Writing Warm-Up

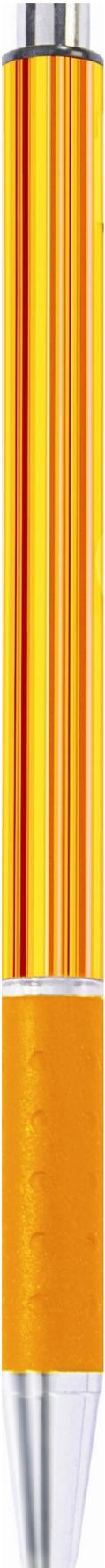
Take two minutes to jot down a list of words that describe “Thunder.” (Only the group facilitator keeps time.) Suggest to the group that, if they get stuck or seem to reach an end, they can embellish their lists of words with details. End the writing time by saying something like “Find a stopping point” or “Remember that you can add more to your writing later.” Invite sharing.

Creative Writing

Write creatively (in any genre – fiction, poetry, memoir, etc.) for ten minutes in response to this prompt: “Tomorrow promised to be a good day.” Offer the opportunity for group members to share parts or all of their writing after the ten minutes.

Writing to God

Use the prompt in Writing to God that corresponds with this day in Lent; Ash Wednesday is Day 1. Read the scripture aloud, followed by the prompt. Allow ten minutes for prayer-writing. Ask, “How did this prompt resonate with you?” Invite sharing. Close with the day's prayer in Writing to God. (For a non-Lenten writing group, which might choose to jump between prompts, use the Day 3 prompt and prayer.)



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Week 2 Gathering

Opening Conversation

How do you experience God in the arts?

Writing Warm-Up

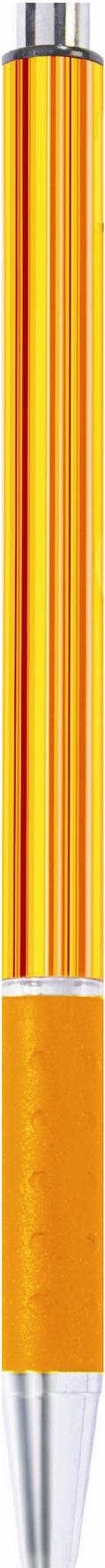
Take two minutes to write a cloud of verbs around “Water,” expressing what water does. For example, water boils, water washes, water floods, etc. Invite group members to share a favorite or particularly descriptive verb from their clouds.

Creative Writing

Write creatively for ten minutes in response to this prompt: “Where she walks barefoot...” (The group facilitator keeps time; all others write without watching the clock.) As needed, assure group members that sometimes the prompt fails to spark our imaginations for writing; if a prompt doesn't inspire the pen, or if writer's block occurs, follow any tangent available in order to keep writing! Offer the opportunity for group members to share parts or all of their writing.

Writing to God

Use the prompt in Writing to God that corresponds with this day in Lent; for example, the Wednesday after Ash Wednesday is Day 8. Read the scripture aloud from a Bible, and then read the prompt. Allow ten minutes for prayer-writing. Ask, “What prayer did your pen find today?” Invite sharing. Close with the day's prayer in Writing to God. (For a non-Lenten writing group, use the Day 11 prompt and prayer.)



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Week 3 Gathering

Opening Conversation

Talk about the notebook/journal and pen you are using.

Writing Warm-Up

Take two minutes to write an acrostic poem on your middle name. An acrostic poem uses each letter of a word to start a new word or sentence; for example, two acrostic poems on the name Joy might be:

<i>Jazz</i>	<i>Jumping</i>
<i>Occurred</i>	<i>Oscillating</i>
<i>Yesterday</i>	<i>Yo-yoing</i>

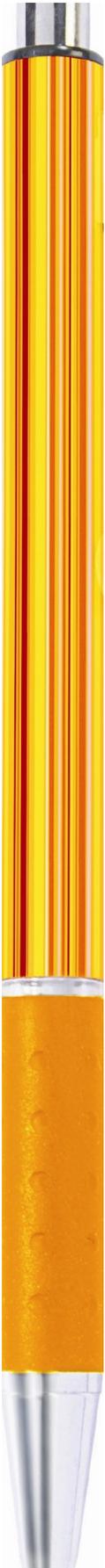
Invite group members to share the stories of their middle names.

Creative Writing

Write creatively for ten minutes in response to this prompt: "The color of spring." Challenge group members to write for the full ten minutes. Then offer the opportunity for group members to share parts or all of their writing. Invite group members to affirm one another's writing, perhaps praising a word choice or appreciating a vivid image.

Writing to God

Use the prompt in Writing to God that corresponds with this day in Lent; for example, the second Wednesday after Ash Wednesday is Day 15. Read the scripture aloud, followed by the prompt. Allow ten minutes for prayer-writing. Ask, "How do you feel after writing this prayer?" Invite sharing. Close with the day's prayer in Writing to God. (For a non-Lenten writing group, use the Day 14 prompt and prayer.)



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Week 4 Gathering

Opening Conversation

What (if any) are your childhood memories of Lent?

Writing Warm-Up

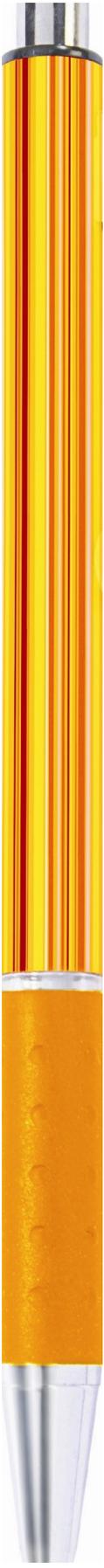
Take two minutes to write a description of your breakfast. Try to describe the food using all five senses (taste, touch, sight, sound, smell). Invite group members to share their breakfast recollections!

Creative Writing

Write creatively for ten minutes (in any genre – fiction, poetry, memoir, etc.) in response to this prompt: “Now is not the time.” Offer the opportunity for group members to share parts or all of their writing.

Writing to God

Use the prompt in Writing to God that corresponds with this day in Lent; for example, the third Wednesday after Ash Wednesday is Day 22. Read the scripture aloud, and then read the prayer-writing prompt. Allow ten minutes for writing. Ask, “What prayer did your pen find today?” Invite sharing. Close with the day's prayer in Writing to God. (For a non-Lenten writing group, which might choose to jump between prompts, use the Day 24 prompt and prayer.)



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Week 5 Gathering

Opening Conversation

What song makes you smile?

Writing Warm-Up

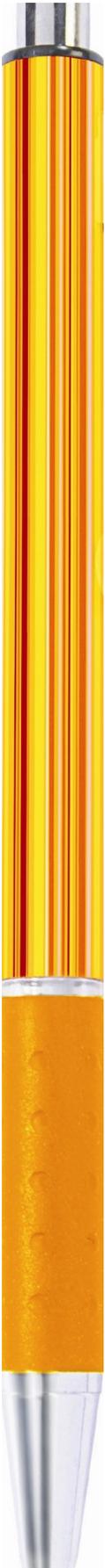
Take two minutes to draft a random list of round objects (soccer ball, clock faces, etc.). How many different objects did the group write down?

Creative Writing

Write creatively for ten minutes in response to this prompt: "Who knew?" Remind group members to follow their first image or train of thought, and to work through writer's block when it occurs. Offer the opportunity for group members to share parts or all of their writing.

Writing to God

Use the prompt in Writing to God that corresponds with this day in Lent; for example, the fourth Wednesday after Ash Wednesday is Day 29. Read the scripture aloud, followed by the prompt. Allow ten minutes for prayer-writing. Ask, "What words or emotions stand out to you in your prayer?" Invite sharing. Close with the day's prayer in Writing to God. (For a non-Lenten writing group, use the Day 29 prompt and prayer.)



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Week 6 Gathering

Opening Conversation

What Easter rituals or traditions are important to you?

Writing Warm-Up

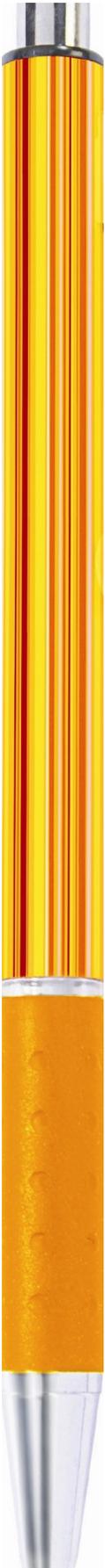
Take two minutes to write a few sentences to describe one of your emotional responses to Jesus. For example, "I admire Jesus, because..." Share your sentiments with one another.

Creative Writing

Write creatively (in any genre) for ten minutes in response to this prompt: "The box is taped shut." Offer the opportunity for group members to share parts or all of their writing.

Writing to God

Use the prompt in Writing to God that corresponds with this day in Lent; for example, the fifth Wednesday after Ash Wednesday is Day 36. Read the scripture aloud, followed by the prompt. Allow ten minutes for prayer-writing. Ask, "How do you feel after writing this prayer?" Invite sharing. Close with the day's prayer in Writing to God. (For a non-Lenten writing group, use the Day 40 prompt and prayer.)



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Holy Week Gathering (optional)

Opening Conversation

Describe a moment of peace that you've had this week.

Writing Warm-Up

Take two minutes to begin a list of things/people/events you are grateful for. Invite group members to share one or two items from their lists.

Creative Writing

Write creatively for ten minutes in response to this prompt: "Surprise!" Offer the opportunity for group members to share parts or all of their writing.

Writing to God

Use the prompt in Writing to God that corresponds with this day in Lent; for example, the sixth Wednesday after Ash Wednesday is the Wednesday of Holy Week. Read the scripture aloud from a Bible, and then read the prompt. Allow ten minutes for prayer-writing. Ask, "What prayer did your pen find?" Invite sharing. Close with the day's prayer in Writing to God. (For a non-Lenten writing group, which might choose to jump between prompts, use the Holy Saturday prompt and prayer.)