

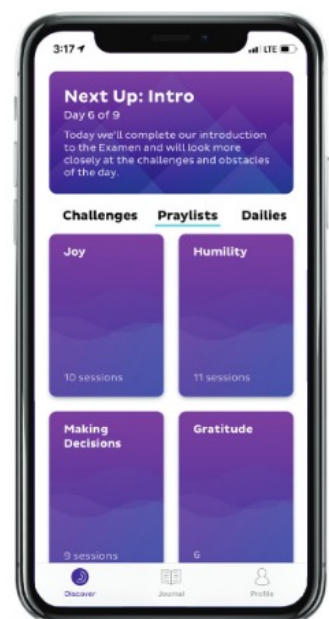
App lets God 'hallow our lives'

It's often been said that necessity is the mother of invention. That certainly is the case for a new Catholic audio app called Hallow, which has the goal of helping people grow in their faith through guided prayer and meditation sessions.

Hallow is the brainchild of Alex Jones and Erich Kerekes, two engineering graduates of the University of Notre Dame who recently rediscovered the Catholic faith and, in the process, created a tool to help people pray in deep and meaningful ways amid busy lives.

Christian meditation

For Jones, the inspiration for Hallow came while working in Chicago and using Headspace, a secular meditative audio app, to ease stress and gain peace.



Hallow app challenges users to listen in

prayer. Courtesy
image

“My mind usually races from to-do list to to-do list, and the attraction of the app was a way for me to learn to live in the present moment and center myself amid all of the craziness of work and relationships,” Jones said.

He also started praying more, but struggled to go beyond the surface.

“All I knew of prayer was the standard ‘thank you for stuff, help me with stuff, and sorry for stuff,’” he said. “I started doing this each morning, and it was powerful in the sense that it built a habit of gratitude. But I always felt like I was talking to the wall. It never really felt like a two-way conversation.”

Jones approached Kerekes and asked him when the last time was that he had learned about a new way to pray. Kerekes didn’t have an answer, but was eager to find one. The two started talking to friends and family, priests and seminarians to learn how they prayed. What they discovered was a gold mine of Catholic prayer traditions. They soon decided to create Hallow, a meditative app like Headspace but with a Catholic orientation.

According to Jones, the name comes from a meditation he was doing on the Our Father and the phrase “hallowed be thy name.”

“The definition of the word ‘hallow,’ which means to make holy, also perfectly represented Hallow’s mission: to let God hallow our lives, and to help others do the same,” Jones said.

In 2018, Jones and Kerekes took the bold step of quitting their consulting firm jobs to dedicate themselves full-time to creating this unique audio app with the assistance of a handful of other Notre Dame grads.

Customizable prayer

According to the duo, Hallow meditations are all about developing a relationship with God that goes beyond rote prayers. The app focuses on slowing down and listening.

Hallow offers three types of prayer sessions: challenges, praylists and dailies. Challenge sessions, such as a line-by-line guided meditation on the Our Father, help users take a closer look at some familiar prayers or elements of the Faith. Prayer sessions centered on themes, such joy or humility, are included in the praylist section, while dailies walk the listener through St. Ignatius' Examen, meditation, lectio divina and spiritual writing. The app also allows users to customize elements such as music, the amount of time they want to pray or which voice leads the meditation.

"People liked the fact that Hallow meets them where they are," Kerekes said. "We are not out to teach people about who God is, but rather make him more accessible and more convenient. We want people to be able to explore ways they can engage with God and develop a two-way relationship with him."

Abby Fredrickson, the head of content for Hallow, said the app's content is drawn from the Hallow team's own varied prayer experiences.

"We all have had different faith journeys, different areas of education, different experiences with prayer," she said. "We recognize that everyone using the app is coming from a different place, and while the Examen might speak to one person, for another, praying lectio divina might be particularly powerful, or maybe another person feels called to explore the Our Father more deeply."

Individual and group uses

Kerekes and Jones have heard time and again from Catholics

that they never knew this type of prayer tool existed.

“We had people who were super skeptical and didn’t think that they could get into a spiritual mood with an audio recording, but they quickly became hooked,” Kerekes said.

Not only are individuals using it for personal prayer, but others have incorporated it into group settings, such as Bible studies, prayer groups and some classrooms at Catholic schools.

Among their supporters is Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana. “Hallow is an excellent resource for people searching for deeper spiritual lives, especially for the younger generation of Catholics today,” Bishop Rhoades said. “It helps make it clear that a relationship with God is and can be extremely personal and can be a great source of peace, joy and strength.”

Jones and Kerekes hope for Hallow to be the go-to Catholic prayer app. “We hope that users who are looking to grow in their faith lives in a specific way know that Hallow will be able to help regardless of what that specific way might be,” Kerekes said.

Eddie O’Neill writes from Michigan.