

## “Finding your Breath Prayer, a personalized Jesus Prayer”

“Prayer of Petition” Parable of the Friend at Midnight, LK 11:1-13

Sermon notes by The Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 36078.

Text: “Pray continuously”, I Thess 5:17; “*To pray in the Spirit on every possible occasion*”, Ephesians 6:18; “*in every place to lift you hands reverently in prayer*”, I Tim. 2:8 (Also see, pp122ff, *Prayer, Finding the Heart’s True Home*, Richard Foster, Harper 1992.)

**Purpose:** To learn the steps in finding one’s Breath Prayer and begin using it as a “prayer of petition”.

**Introduction:** What is our basic need? What do we need most in this stage of our life? Suppose you could list ten things you wanted, and then God granted you the # 1 on the list. This sermon is about a way the Holy Spirit can give you greatest want.

The Jesus Prayer or the Breath Prayer may meet this need.

Before giving you directions on finding your Breath Prayer, here is a little history and background on the ancient Jesus Prayer. This goes back to the spirituality of Hesychasm, one of the oldest traditions in the Eastern Orthodox Church, (Greek word, hesychia= repose) going back to the Monasteries on Mount Sinai. In the past decades it has been revised by the publication of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, translated by Helen Bacovcin, Image Books, 1978.

This story cover an anonymous Russian peasant going from town to town praying without ceasing, or moving the mind to the heart, (praying 3,000-6,000 times a day.)

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God  
have mercy on me, a sinner.**

For example: use it several times emphasizing a different phase or word as you repeat it.

You can intone, sing it. You can use this through out the day. It moves from your mind into your heart. This is a short statement of the Gospel. God of mercy, God of Grace, fill me, empower me heal me.

Now, the Breath Prayer is a personalized approach to the Jesus Prayer. I want to lead you through some of the steps to find your breath prayer. I am following the suggestion of The Rev. Ron DelBene, a priest in the Diocese of AL; He had been interim rectors in Memphis in recent years. He has written several books on *Finding your Breath Prayer*, published by The Upper Room, Nashville.

Here are the steps:

### Step 1

Sit comfortably and be calm and quiet: Close you eyes to remind your self you are in God’s loving presence. Repeat a passage of scripture that places you in his presence, such as “Be still and know that I am God” Psalm 46:10)

### Step 2

With your eyes still closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Hear God asking you: “Bill, Jane, what do you want?” What is a deep need you need in this phrase in your life?

### Step 3

Answer God directly with whatever comes honestly form your heart. Your answer may be a simple and direct answer that comes to your mind. Some of the answers may be: **Peace, Power, Guidance, Control, Strength, Joy, Contentment, Confidence, Healing.** Your answer may be a brief sentence or phase, such as “ I want to feel your forgiveness” or “I want to

understand your love.” Remember your answer will be the foundation and heart of your breath prayer. Write down one or two words. For me my has been “peace and power”

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#### Step 4

Now choose your favorite name for God. The name of God chosen is a prayer of praise that follows a petition. Here are few of the divine names: Jesus, Lord Jesus, Christ, Lord, Jesus the Good Shepherd, Spirit, Creator, Divine Master, Lord God, Holy Father. You should choose a name that is most comfortable in using to speak to God.

#### Step 5

Next, combine your name for God with your answer to God’s question “ What do you want?” Remember, “Whatever you ask for my name I will do” (John 14:13). Then you have your breath prayer. Keep it to six or eight syllables. You are expressing an intimacy and closeness with God. As we pray this breath prayer, it is has a sense of dependence, trust in God.... Not self-reliance. For example:

What I want	Name I call God	Possible Prayer
peace	God	Let me know your peace, O God
love	Jesus	Jesus, let me feel your love.
Rest	Shepherd	My Shepherd, let me rest in thee.
Guidance	Shepherd	Good Shepherd, guide my paths.

What do you do if several ideas occur? You need to eliminate or combine ideas until you have focused your prayer. You may “want” many things. But if you think carefully, you can narrow your wants to a specific need that you feel is as basic to your spiritual well being as water is to life. What do I want that will give me a since of wholeness and well being? As you get to the core of your needs, search for words that give it expression. Then write out the words until you have a prayer of six to eight syllables. The words should flow smoothly whether spoken aloud or expressed silently as heart-thoughts.

Your prayer may be most rhythmic when God’s name is place at the beginning, but try it at the end as well. When you prayer seems right for you, write it down. Then use it often throughout the day. Here are a few samples of breath prayers:

Father, lead me into health. Jesus, guide me into your will.  
 Let me know your presence, Lord. Alleluia, have mercy, O Lord.  
 Show me your way, O Lord. Let me feel your Spirit, Jesus.  
 Divine Master, hold my hand in life and in death.  
 Lord Jesus, guide my paths with peace (power).  
 Lord Jesus be my shepherd in this life and the next.  
 Holy Spirit, empower my inner controls.

#### Where and How to use your breath prayer....

- Repeat it in your mind until you are comfortable.
- Give it a chance. Say it aloud and whisper it.
- Pray it when driving, walking, jogging, going to bed, waiting in line....
- Some even chant it, sing it in the car or shower, use it your way.
- In traffic when I am tempted to lay on the horn.

- When you need a calming influence when I need to be more loving. It is a help on stilling our soul: Christ is before us, behind us, beside us, around us.
- As a helpful way in quieting my self before a meditation or devotional time.
- In time, your breath prayer will become as natural as breathing.
- I used it when I need to make a decision... Also, a few years ago taking 6 weeks of external beam radiation at the Lurleen Wallace cancer treatment center at UAB.
- Your assignment in this first week of Lent.

I am thankful for these concepts in books published by The Upper Room, Nashville, by Ron DelBene with Mary and Herb Montgomery. These are: *Into The Light*, *When I'm Alone*, and *Near Life's End*. Ron is an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Alabama residing in Birmingham

The Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Post it on a 3 X 4 card.

My breath prayer is \_\_\_\_\_

Here are a few statements responding to questions about the breath prayer found in Ron DelBene's *Into the Light, a Simple Way to Pray with the sick and the Dying*. The Upper Room.

- It will not replace other ways of praying but may unify ways of praying.
- It is not mantra used in non-Christian forms of meditation. Typically those practicing this form of meditation focus on their mantra twice a day for twenty minutes. There is nothing mysterious or magical about it. This is a self-discovered prayer arising from within as a personal response to God.
- One gets into the habit of using it when one has made a decision be attentive to their spiritual growth.
- Yes, even though it is very personal, once you see the benefits of it mention it to someone in conversations that they may want to try this.
- Yes, the breath prayer may change especially when a major change of insight comes such as marriage, death, divorce, job change or relocation.

My Breath Prayer is: \_\_\_\_\_