

September/October 2012—In the Habit/Guide—Week 1

everyday prayer

Sally Chambers

For use with devozine meditations for September 1–9, 2012.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“Mother Teresa once said, ‘My secret is a very simple one: I pray.’ I remember being puzzled. *Prayer is the secret to life? Really?* I thought. *Well certainly not the way I pray—with my lists of petitions and thanksgivings!* But then my journey of discovery began. After a few years of searching, practicing, reading, listening, and writing, I realized that yes, the secret to life *is* prayer.

“In his book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Richard Foster explains that for the pioneers of the faith, to breathe was to pray and to pray was to breathe. Life without breath simply cannot be. So perhaps, life without prayer cannot be either—or at least it cannot be lived well.” —Sally

MEET THE WRITER

Sally Chambers has been practicing youth ministry for nineteen years as part of her life with God and people; she is currently on sabbatical. By trade, she is a counselor and spiritual director. She is a lover of art, photography, people, hosting, adventure, stories, a cup of tea, beauty, all things English, her niece and her Grandma, abbey ruins and cathedrals, creation in its grandeur and wildness, playlists, and her furry four-legged companion Doodlebug. Sally is a co-author of the leader’s guide to *The Way of Pilgrimage* and the creator of *The Pilgrim’s Way*, an approach to leading pilgrimage with teenagers and adults. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and is currently on staff and worshipping with St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church. She dreams of creating altars in the world where pilgrims may gather together, rest for a while, find renewed vision, be healed (in body, heart, soul, and mind), and offer to the world the hope of God in Jesus Christ.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- candle
- matches or lighter
- newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- index cards
- pens

PLUGGED IN

Check out some great Internet resources to help with daily prayer:

- + “Pray as You Go” offers a podcast that updates once a week and MP3s to download. [<http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/>]
- + “Sacred Space” guides you through daily prayers and scripture. [<http://www.sacredspace.ie/>]
- + “The Daily Office” offers prayers for morning, midday, evening, and night, with daily readings and reflections. [<http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/pray-the-daily-office>]
- + “ReJesus: Daily Prayer” is another version of the daily office, providing a prayer, meditation, and reflection for several times in the day. [http://www.rejesus.co.uk/site/module/daily_prayer/]
- + As part of your preparation for this session, read *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* by Richard J. Foster. [<http://www.amazon.com/Prayer-Finding-Hearts-True-Home/dp/0060628464>]

CHECKING IN

Invite the group to join you in this responsive greeting:

“God is here. The Lord be with you.”

“And also with you.”

Then ask someone to light the candle.

Invite people to spread out around the room, and then to close their eyes, to take a deep breath, and to relax. Invite them to pay attention to their breathing. Suggest that as they exhale, they imagine breathing out the distractions (tiredness, homework, worries) that occupy their mind, body, and spirit. Suggest that as they inhale, they imagine breathing in the peace of God. Repeat this for a minute or two.

When they are breathing in a slow, relaxed, and deep fashion, ask them to notice how their breath moves up and down the trachea and through middle of their body. Then say something like this: *“At the center of your body and your being flows your breath, your breathing.”*

Bring the group together. Ask group members in turn to say their name and to identify a time during the week when they were stressed out, worried, or anxious and a time when life was as good as it could be.

When everyone has spoken, introduce the session by saying something like this: *“Today, we are going to talk about everyday prayer. First, we are going to come up with a good working definition of prayer. Second, we’re going to think about what breathing might have to do with prayer. Third, we’re going to practice a new way of praying.”*

Write “prayer” at the top of a sheet of newsprint. Ask the following questions, encouraging group members to think creatively, and write down all their answers.

What is prayer?

Why is prayer important?

Why should prayer be part of our daily routine?

Sum up the group’s answers. Be sure to add these ideas if they were not mentioned:

- Prayer is talking to God. It is also listening to or for God, which means being quiet.
- Prayer can also include, for example, reading scripture, praying with prayer beads or icons, writing in a journal.
- Prayer can be done alone or with other people.

Write on a sheet of newsprint these metaphors for prayer:

- Prayer is the key that unlocks the door to being close to God and to living a life with God. (Richard Foster in *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, paraphrase)
- “Prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven.” (St. Thérèse de Lisieux)

Ask:

What do these metaphors tell us about prayer?

In what ways do they change our definition of prayer?

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Acts 17:22–28; 1 Thessalonians 5:11–24

Suggest that perhaps we have limited prayer, that our definitions of prayer may be too small. Prayer is more than making requests. Maybe prayer has more to do with being aware of and attentive to God as we go about our daily lives.

Distribute Bibles, and invite people to read chapters 4 and 5 from 1 Thessalonians. Then ask:

What is this letter talking about?

What was going on in the church that this letter addresses? What does the letter encourage? What does it teach?

Ask the group to reread 1 Thessalonians 5:11–24. Then ask:

What, overall, is this section trying to say?

How is the letter encouraging the young church?

What is it teaching?

What verse speaks specifically to prayer? [Verse 17 (NRSV): “Pray without ceasing.”]

What does it mean?

How are we supposed to pray continually?

Ask group members to turn in their Bibles to the Acts of the Apostles and to discuss:

Who are some of the apostles?

What story does this book tell?

Invite people to read Acts 17:22–28 and then to skim a few chapters before this passage and the rest of chapter 17. Then ask:

What’s going on in the story?

Where are we in the life of the apostles and the church?

What in Acts 17:22–28 relates to prayer?

What in these verses might help us to understand prayer?

Highlight verse 28: “*In him we live and move and have our being.*” Ask people to consider these questions:

To whom does this verse refer? Who is “him”?

How does this verse shape our understanding of prayer?

How would believing that in God “we live and move and have our being” change the way we pray?

You may want to include some of these ideas in the conversation:

- God is bigger than our prayers. God is bigger than who we are and what we do.
- The Book of Acts describes God as more like a swimming pool in which we walk, swim, play around than as a king whose throne is in heaven.
- God enfolds us and surrounds us. Reflect on the lyrics of the worship song “Every Move I Make” by David Ruis. [<http://www.worshiparchive.com/song/every-move-i-make>]
- If Acts 17:28 describes God, then our approach to prayer, which usually begins “Dear” and ends “Amen,” almost implies that we control prayer, dictating the beginning and ending of our conversation. Maybe we should let God control the conversation.
- Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, talks about prayer as being submersed in the living presence of God.
- Maybe prayer is more like a place we go than something we do.

Ask:

How does this look at prayer make you feel?

What do you think? How do you respond?

What will you try in prayer during the coming week?

SHARING IN PRAYER

Say: “*When we pray without ceasing, prayer becomes part of the rhythm of our days. Prayer is a regular daily activity.*” Then recall the breathing activity at the beginning of the session and suggest that for the pioneers in the faith, to breathe was to pray and to pray was to breathe.

Distribute index cards and pens. Ask people to follow these instructions:

1. Write on your card your favorite name for God (for example: Jesus, Spirit, Peace, Lord, Abba, Father, Christ, Shepherd).
2. Write down one thing you need from God this week. Keep the description of your need simple—one or two words (for example: peace, love, warmth, calm, focus, kindness, strength and courage).

3. Combine the name of God you chose with your need to create a short sentence prayer asking God for help (for example, God of Peace, calm my spirit).

Then invite group members to practice saying a breath prayer by following these instructions:

1. Divide the prayer sentence into two parts. As you breathe in, pray the first half. As you exhale, pray the second half. For example, breathe in saying, “**God of Peace,**” and breathe out, saying, “**calm my spirit.**” (Or people may pray the Jesus Prayer, saying “**Jesus Christ Son of God**” as they inhale and saying “**have mercy on me a sinner**” as they exhale.)
2. Get comfortable. Close your eyes. Breathe in and out slowly.
3. Breathe in, saying the first part of your prayer. Breathe out, saying the second part of your prayer. Continue to pray your prayer several times.

Allow a few minutes for people to practice their breath prayers; then conclude this time of prayer by saying, “*Amen.*”

Bring the group together. Ask:

What did you notice?

What was praying with your breath like?

Did your prayer change as you prayed?

How would you describe the presence of God as you prayed? (Perhaps you might ask each person in turn to complete this sentence: “*God was like . . .*”)

TAKING IT FURTHER

- Invite group members to write their prayers on business cards or post-it notes and to place them in their wallet, notebook, backpack, locker, or on their bathroom mirror as a way of remembering to turn their attention to God and to pray as they breathe.
- Breath Prayers are also great to practice as you fall asleep. You might suggest that group members try this for one week. Be sure to talk about their experiences at the next session.