

PRAYING
— In The —
MIDST OF
LIFE

*A Guide to Prayer
in Six Sessions*

*With
Ron DelBene*

Study Guide

“Many of us believe it's up to us to pray in a way that reaches God.

I believe we are in the presence of God at all times and prayer is being attentive to that presence.”

—Ron DelBene

The Leader

Ron DelBene has been doing spiritual direction and leading programs in the areas of prayer, spirituality and personal development since 1963. Ron holds a Master's degree in Theology and a Doctor of Ministry in Spirituality and Organizational Systems. He has done additional postgraduate work in education, psychology, and counseling. He is an author, poet, artist and Episcopal priest. He was an assistant professor of theology, director of a campus ministry center, and national consultant in religion for an education division of CBS.

Since 1980, Ron's organizational system's leadership has been primarily in churches, empowering them in understanding their mission, goals and structure for effective and creative ministry. Ron and his spouse, Eleanor, reside in Trussville, Alabama, and have two grown children and two grandchildren.

Series Overview

This is a series of six video programs designed to help you strengthen your life of prayer.

Each program is about 23 minutes in length. Through a process of conversation and reflection, the Reverend Ron DelBene guides viewers along a path which can lead to a richer understanding of prayer and a more satisfying prayer life. In each of the programs, Ron addresses a different aspect of prayer, while continually building on the idea that God is always present in our lives and prayer is our way of being attentive to God's presence.

At the end of Programs 2 through 6, Ron poses two or three specific questions for your reflection. These provide ideal "jumping off points" for group discussions.

Note that the first program is an introduction of the entire series and has a somewhat different appearance. Here Ron leads a group discussion about the participants' own early experiences with prayer, how that has changed, and how they help children to understand the nature of prayer.

For those wishing to do further study, we suggest several books written by Ron DelBene. A specific book for each of the six programs is listed below. All are available at www.delbene.org.

Program 1:	<i>The Hunger of the Heart</i>
Program 2:	<i>The Hunger of the Heart</i>
Program 3:	<i>When You Have a Decision to Make</i>
Program 4:	<i>Alone with God</i>
Program 5:	<i>The Breath of Life</i>
Program 6:	<i>Alone with God</i>

For Each Session

Each of these programs is designed for use as a presentation for a discussion group or class. Some may also wish to view the series on their own. If you are planning to use the programs as part of a class discussion, you will probably find your time more satisfying if you follow a few basic suggestions:

- Preview the video before using it with the class.
- Make sure a VCR and TV are available for the class. Set them up ahead of time.
- As the class begins, take a few minutes for the class to set aside some of the demands of their lives, and focus on the subject. If the group is comfortable with silence, let this centering time be a quiet one.
- View the tape in its entirety.
- Use the questions which Ron poses to move into the class discussion. It is important to encourage openness and trust.
- You may wish to close the session with a centering experience. It may be a time in which members can share what the session has meant to them or perhaps a time to acknowledge God's presence in your midst.

1 Our Questions About Prayer

About this session

In this introductory program, Ron leads a discussion about prayer. A couple of things should be immediately clear in this program. First, prayer means different things to different people. Also, prayer and our understanding of prayer is not static. It changes and grows as we change and grow in our relationship with God. And as Ron says, children's questions are often our questions. Watch and listen for ways in which your understanding of prayer is reflected in the comments of the participants in this program. A final note: keep in mind this program is different in form from the remaining five.

My whole focus is how to become attentive to God's presence.

Questions to consider

Throughout this program, Ron poses several questions for the participants to consider. You might discuss these as well as others suggested below:

- What are your own early memories of prayer? How would you describe your early understanding of prayer?
- How has your understanding of prayer changed over the years?
- Ron says, "My whole focus is how to become attentive to God's presence." What are the times when you have been attentive to God's presence? Would you usually describe that attentiveness as prayer?
- What are your hopes and expectations for these six sessions?

About this session

Where is God? It is a simple question, but its answer shapes much of our spiritual journey. In this program, Ron explores the many different places in which God "resides" in our lives—where each of us locates God in our "universe."

As you watch the program, look for the images which represent where we find God. You'll notice personal as well as Biblical images of God's relationship to us. Keep track of these for reference in the your class discussion after the program is over.

The Participants

Vince, Jim, Barbara...Anne, Garland...Don, Ted, Janet...Barbara, Vince...Janet.

"Where is God?" is one of the greatest influences on how we pray and on our whole spiritual life.

Ron's questions to you

- ⊙ Have you experienced a shift in your understanding of God over the years?
With which image of spiritual growth — the ladder or the tree — do you most identify?
- ⊙ What are some concrete ways you experience Jesus "pitching his tent" — being present — in the midst of life?

Other questions to consider

- ⊙ As you listen to the participants discuss their continuing spiritual journey, with whom do you most identify?
 - ⊙ Is there something you heard or saw today that you would like to borrow and incorporate into your own prayer life?
-

About this session

Sometimes our “faith words” become like old kitchen knives — familiar and comfortable, but somewhat dull— God’s “will” and “obedience,” for example. We almost instinctively reach for them to describe the “work” of our faith journey and growth, but the sharpness of their meaning has dulled over the years. In this program, Ron examines these two words, and in the process, gives their meaning a restored sharpness. Ron then leads us to consider some ways in which we can discern God’s will.

The Participants

Vince...Sandra, Don...Carola, Vince.

*The question I am asked most often is,
“What is God’s will for me?”*

Ron’s questions to you

- What is the difference you see between the questions, “What is God’s will for me?” and “What is God’s yearning for me?”
- What are the ways you discern God’s yearning for you?
- How are you obedient — how do you “listen toward” God through scripture and other people in making your decisions?

Other questions to consider

- At one point, Ron suggests that the more we know “self,” the easier discernment (and obedience) becomes. Why might that be the case, and how do you feel about the implications of such a statement?
 - Is there something you heard or saw today that you would like to borrow and incorporate into your own prayer life?
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About this session

In this program, Ron introduces a concept which may be new for many of us: praying the scriptures. Rather than emphasizing a study of scripture, Ron suggests that we can seek out those passages which relate stories which echo and reinforce our own stories and experiences of faith. In the course of the program, Ron talks with several people who share their differing experiences in "praying the scriptures."

The Participants

Barbara...Terrence...Sandra, Viki...Viki...
Arthurine...Terrence, Don.

*...the scriptures are stories of people just
like you and me.*

Ron's questions to you

- What is your favorite scripture story?
- When have you moved from knowing something from "the outside in" to "the inside out?"
- How can you pray the scriptures in your daily life?

Other questions to consider

- At one point, Ron talks about "revisiting and living with" scripture. Have you had or do you know anyone who has had a similar experience?
 - Is there something you heard or saw today that you would like to borrow and incorporate into your own prayer life?
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5

Learning the Breath Prayer

About this session

In this program, Ron introduces us to a simple technique to ensure we always have a way to be attentive to God's presence in our lives. Ron offers the "breath prayer" as a way to incorporate prayer into our everyday lives. As you listen to others tell of their experience with the breath prayer, it is almost inevitable that you will consider ways of creating your own breath prayer.

The Participants

Vince...Terrence, Pablo, Vince...Barbara, Ted...Ted, Janet.

The breath prayer is a simple way for us to be continually aware of living in the breath of God.

Ron's questions to you

- What do you think about praying in this way?
- When, during the day, could you remember to be aware of God's presence?

Other questions to consider

- Much of what we hear in programs such as this often provides wonderful food for thought, but we do not always expect or wish to take something practical away from such a program. The breath prayer, however, is a very concrete action which each viewer can include in his or her daily life. Is this something you are definitely going to try; something you would possibly consider; or will you probably dismiss it as something not for you? Take a moment to reflect upon the reasons for your response.
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About this session

In addition to needing to find time to pray, it is helpful to find a space in which we can pray — a sort of “sanctuary” in the midst of life. In this program, Ron talks with the participants about the places they’ve reserved for their “retreat.” From annual vacations to walks along a city street, Ron holds up the sacred spaces that may exist within our lives. Pay particular attention to his comparison of time to a rubber band. Consider this image in the context of your own life.

The Participants

Pamela...Terrence...Barbara, Garland...Sandra...
Viki

*...it's important for many of us to find —
within our busy life — some Sabbath
time...*

Ron's questions to you

- ◇ Do you have a need to retreat?
- ◇ What are some ways that you can retreat?
- ◇ What scripture can you use as a focus?

Other questions to consider

- ◇ Do you remember times in your life — perhaps many years ago at a church youth retreat — when you felt a special kind of restoration and energizing in your life? In reflecting back on that experience now, what were the factors that led you to feel that way? Do you hear anything in Ron's discussion of retreating that helps to recapture those feelings for you?
 - ◇ Is there something you heard or saw today that you would like to borrow and incorporate into your own prayer life?
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For Further Exploration

You may find the following resources useful. All are written by Ron DelBene with Herb and Mary Montgomery.

The Breath of Life Series

The Breath of Life

The Hunger of the Heart

Alone with God

From the Heart

Christmas Remembered

The Into the Light Collection

Into the Light

When I'm Alone

Near Life's End

A Time to Mourn (also on cassette)

Study Guide

The Times of Change, Times of Challenge Series

When You Have a Decision to Make

When You Want Your Wishes Known

*When You Are Living with an Illness
that Is Not Your Own*

When You Are Getting Married

When Your Child Is Baptized

When You Are Facing Surgery

When an Aging Loved One Needs Care

When Your Son or Daughter Divorces

All are available through www.delbene.org.

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