

# When I'm Alone

*Thoughts and Prayers  
That Comfort*



Ron DelBene

WITH

Mary & Herb Montgomery

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This booklet is part of a series of resources which also include:  
*Into The Light: A Simple Way to Pray with the Sick and the  
Dying. Near Life's End: What Family and Friends Can Do*, and  
*A Time to Mourn: Recovering from the Death of a Loved One*.

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## *Contents*

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The Prayer Within	7
"I Am with You Always"	11
A Psalm of David	13
Whatever This Day Brings	15
Personal Prayers	16
Gifts We Can Give	21
A Different Answer	23
O God, Our Help, Our Hope	25
Thoughts to Reflect Upon	27

A black and white photograph showing two hands clasped together. The hands are positioned to hold a small, dark book. The book's cover is visible, with the words "HOLY BIBLE" printed in white, capital letters. The top hand is positioned above the book, with fingers curled around it. The bottom hand is positioned below the book, with fingers curled around it. The skin on the hands appears aged and wrinkled. The background is dark and out of focus.

HOLY  
BIBLE

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## *The Prayer Within*

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When we're alone, sick, and uncertain about tomorrow, we may find that traditional prayers aren't as satisfying as they once were. Thoughts wander. Medication may dull the mind. Pain might make it hard to focus. We may feel that God is distant and not much concerned about us. Perhaps we have prayed for a healing and gotten nothing but bad news from nurses and doctors.

Will anything help? In the midst of distress and discouragement isn't there something that will comfort in long, lonely hours? something that will focus the mind? something that will keep us in closer touch with God?

Many of us who have asked these questions have found the breath prayer to be that special "something." This prayer is nothing we are taught. Rather it is one we discover for ourselves. It lies within us like a tiny seed that, when nurtured, will grow and flower into a new closeness with God. Perhaps the person who gave you this booklet has already helped you discover your prayer. Here are the five easy steps to follow. If reading is difficult, ask someone to read the steps to you.

### **Step One**

Sit or lie in as comfortable a position as possible. Then be calm and quiet. Close your eyes and remind yourself that God loves you and that you are in God's presence. Recall a favorite passage from scripture that places you in a restful frame of mind. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) is a line people often find helpful.

## Step Two

As you keep your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Listen carefully and hear God asking you: "*Your name*, what do you want?"

## Step Three

Answer God with whatever comes honestly from your heart. Your answer may be a single word, such as *peace* or *love* or *forgiveness*. Your answer may instead be a phrase or brief sentence, such as "I want to feel your forgiveness" or "I want to understand your love" or "I want to be with you." Whatever your response is, it becomes the heart of your prayer.

## Step Four

Choose your favorite name for God. (Choices people commonly make include God, Jesus, Christ, Lord, Spirit, Shepherd, Creator.)

## Step Five

Combine your name for God with your answer to God's question "What do you want?" and you have your prayer. For example:

<b>What I Want</b>	<b>Name I call God</b>	<b>Possible Prayer</b>
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.

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. Thus the question you need to ask yourself is: What do I want that will make me feel most whole? Once you achieve a feeling of wholeness, peace of mind and heart will follow.

When you have gotten to the core of your needs, search for words that give it expression. Then work with 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 placed at the beginning, but try it at the end as well. One way will feel better than another. When your prayer seems right for you, write it down. Then use it often throughout the day. Whenever you think of it, repeat the prayer several times. You can whisper it. You can say it aloud. You can think it. In time, your breath prayer will become as natural as breathing. Even when you are not consciously praying, the words will play in your heart like a refrain from a favorite song.

**This is my breath prayer:**

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## — “I Am with You Always” —

There often comes a time when we get so sick of being sick that we look for anything that might help us focus on something other than illness. This is a time when the breath prayer can be especially comforting.

How can prayer—any prayer—bring order and a measure of comfort out of the chaos that often accompanies illness? To pray is to raise the mind and heart to God, to respond to our God who promises, “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). The promise has special meaning when we are sick. It says to us that we will never be alone with our anxiety or fear or suffering. Through it all, God is with us. And it is through prayer that we are most likely to feel God’s caring, comforting presence.

The breath prayer helps us feel God’s presence in a special way. This ancient way of praying takes its name from the Hebrew word *ruach*, which can be translated as “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit.” It is the *ruach* of God that is breathed into all living beings. Because this way of praying reminds us that we share God’s breath, and because the prayer can come as easily and naturally as breathing, it is known as the breath prayer.

The breath prayer can be said effortlessly at any time or place. Through its use we are thus better able to follow the apostle Paul’s call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17, KJV).

There are many ways to pray, and the breath prayer is just one of them. This personal prayer that arises from within us is a way to unite and unify all the other ways we pray. Although the breath prayer is individualized and very personal, much of its effectiveness comes from sharing it

with others. When those who love and care about us use our prayer, it puts on their lips what is in our heart. It enables them to pray not just *for* us but *with* us.

In this book you will find other thoughts and prayers meant to help during times of distress. I trust that some of them will speak to your heart. Read the prayers (or ask someone to read them to you) as a source of comfort and spiritual nourishment. Remember that when you are steadfast in prayer—no matter what the prayer may be—you grow in your awareness of God's presence. And God, who has promised to be with you always, will sustain and strengthen you in whatever trials you face.

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## *A Psalm of David*

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Although we may at times feel out of touch with God, God is never out of touch with us. God is the Good Shepherd who never deserts us, the Shepherd who will see us through the darkest of valleys and whose love and care for us are everlasting.

The LORD is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
he leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil:  
for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.  
Thou preparest a table before me  
in the presence of mine enemies:  
thou anointest my head with oil;  
my cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.  
Amen.

—Psalm 23, KJV



— *Whatever This Day Brings* —

We are all part of a suffering world. Whatever our sorrows, they have been felt by others. So, too, has our pain. While a man awaited execution in a Nazi prison during World War II, he expressed his anguish in a prayer. The words speak for all of us when our burdens become too heavy to carry alone.

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.  
Help me to pray  
And to concentrate my thoughts on you:  
I cannot do this alone.  
In me there is darkness,  
But with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways,  
But you know the way for me. . . .

Restore me to liberty,  
And enable me so to live now  
That I may answer before you and before men.  
Lord, whatever this day may bring,  
Your name be praised.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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## *Personal Prayers*

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We each have our own way of talking to God, but sometimes what is in our heart needs help in finding its way to our lips. The prayers included here express anxieties and speak of yearnings we may feel. Such prayers are but starting points for our own. They encourage us to turn to God and express our innermost thoughts and deepest needs.

### **When I'm Afraid**

God, I have fears I cannot handle alone.  
I fear for my fate and for that of my family.  
I fear for the trials I face today  
and the uncertainties of tomorrow.  
So, like a child turning to a parent, I come to you  
and ask that I might feel your comforting presence.  
I believe that with you all things are possible.  
With your help, I will be able to face my fears  
and accept whatever lies ahead for me. Amen.

### **When I'm Weary**

I want to be thankful for the life  
you have given me, Lord.  
But lately I find it hard to face another day.  
The hours drag by. My body has no energy.  
I cannot remember what it was like to feel well.  
I am so weary, God. So very weary.  
I come to you asking for strength.  
I place myself in your hands  
and trust that you will hold me  
in your protective love. Amen.

## When I'm Discouraged

Another day is passing.  
I find it hard to eat. I find it hard to sleep.  
I am so discouraged.  
I feel my energy slipping away and  
am helpless to do anything about it.  
And yet, God, something good happens as I talk  
honestly with you.  
In the midst of discouragement,  
you and I are close.  
I thank you for that warm awareness  
that lets me know I am not alone.  
I pray that others who feel discouraged  
may sense that closeness just as I do. Amen.

## When I'm in Pain

God, you know there are days when my pain  
is like a cloud that blocks the sun  
and prevents me from seeing  
a bright side to anything.  
Was I short-tempered today?  
Mean-spirited?  
Hurtful to anyone?  
If so, I am sorry.  
Help anyone I offended to understand  
that I don't want to be difficult.  
Please grant me the strength to bear my pain.  
Please give me a restful, peace-filled hour.  
I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





### **When I'm Lonely**

I get so very lonely, Lord.  
Once I was able to go out to where people are.  
Now I have to wait for them to come to me.  
Help me guard against morbid thoughts  
that lead to self-pity.  
Guide me instead to recall pleasant memories  
and to think on those things that  
speak of life's goodness.  
When friends and family come to visit,  
prevent me from boring them  
with complaints and details of my ills.  
Instead, grant me the grace to share with them  
those kind thoughts and loving memories  
that bind us together.  
I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **When the End Seems Near**

I have enjoyed this world you created, God,  
and I hope to see yet another dawn.  
But if this should be  
my last day of earthly life,  
I pray especially for those who have loved me  
and for those who will mourn my passing.  
I believe that the ending of this life  
is but the beginning of a new life with you:  
a new life in a place of peace and love that  
is beyond anything I can imagine.  
I thank you, God, for all my blessings  
and ask that your will be done. Amen.

### When I Seek Forgiveness

Dear God, my heart is troubled  
and I yearn to feel at peace.  
There are things in my life for which I am sorry.  
There are the cruel words  
that should have gone unspoken;  
the good I could have done and did not do;  
the love I should have given  
that went unexpressed;  
the times I turned away from you  
by breaking your commandments.  
Please know that I am sorry  
for the wrongs I have committed and  
for my failures to love and care about others  
as you have called me to do.  
I seek your forgiveness, God,  
and ask also that you grant me the grace  
to forgive myself. Amen.

### When Evening Comes

As the light of this day ends  
and the darkness of night descends,  
I reflect on times gone by.  
In my life there have been peaks of joy  
as well as valleys of hurt and discouragement.  
Through it all, God, I have been glad  
that you gave me life.  
Please give special strength  
to those who worry about me.  
Help them to be thankful for their lives  
as I am thankful for mine.  
Bless others who are suffering  
and lead us all to a place of peace. Amen.

## *Gifts We Can Give*

No matter what our circumstance, no matter how ill or incapacitated we may be, we are still able to do some things. We can still be loving; we can still be forgiving; and these are the greatest gifts we can give one another. Through love and forgiveness, we bring light to dark places and heal the bruised spots in relationships with friends and family. With love and forgiveness, we become instruments of God's peace, a peace "which passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled, as to console,  
To be understood, as to understand,  
To be loved, as to love,  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

—Francis of Assisi



## *A Different Answer*

Each of us can remember times when we asked for something in prayer and did not feel that God answered. A prayer believed to have been written by a Confederate soldier during the Civil War shows us that blessings can be found in outcomes we did not seek.

I asked for strength  
*that I might achieve,*

I was made weak  
*that I might learn humbly to obey.*

I asked for health  
*that I might do greater things,*

I was given infirmity  
*that I might do better things.*

I asked for riches  
*that I might be happy;*

I was given poverty  
*that I might be wise.*

I asked for power  
*that I might have the praise of men;*

I was given weakness  
*that I might feel the need of God.*

I asked for all things  
*that I might enjoy life;*

I was given life  
*that I might enjoy all things.*

I got nothing that I had asked for—  
*but everything that I had hoped for.*

Almost despite myself,  
*my unspoken prayers were answered;*

I am . . . most richly blessed.

—Unknown Confederate Soldier

— *O God, Our Help, Our Hope* —

An old hymn speaks of the comfort that comes from God's abiding presence. As we read the words to the hymn, the familiar melody plays in the mind and sings in the heart.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years  
to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and  
our eternal home:

under the shadow of thy throne thy saints have  
dwelt secure; sufficient is thine arm alone, and  
our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood, or earth received  
her frame, from everlasting thou art God, to  
endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening  
gone; short as the watch that ends the night  
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all our  
years away; they fly, forgotten, as a dream dies  
at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years  
to come, be thou our guide while life shall last,  
and our eternal home.

—Isaac Watts





— *Thoughts to Reflect Upon* —

I learned that it is possible for us to create  
light and sound and order within us, no matter  
what calamity may befall us in the outer world.

—Helen Keller

I am serene because I know thou lovest me.

Because thou lovest me,  
naught can move me from my peace.

Because thou lovest me,  
I am as one to whom all good has come.

—Translated from Gaelic by Alistair MacLean

At some moment I did answer Yes to Someone—or  
Something—and from that hour I was certain that  
existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my  
life in self-surrender, had a goal. From that  
moment I have known what it means “not to look  
back” and “to take no thought for the morrow.”

—Dag Hammarskjöld

God, give us grace to accept with serenity the  
things that cannot be changed, courage to change  
the things that should be changed, and the wisdom  
to distinguish the one from the other.

—Reinhold Niebuhr



Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God,  
believe also in me. In my Father's house are many  
rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that  
I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and  
prepare a place for you, I will come again and will  
take you to myself, that where I am you may be  
also.

—John 14:1-3

I am the resurrection,  
and the life.  
Those who believe in me,  
though they die,  
yet shall they live forever,  
and whoever lives and believes in me  
shall never die.

—John 11:25-26, adpt.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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.

Mary and Herb Montgomery are full-time writers who have created numerous books and educational projects to help both children and adults grow in faith. The Montgomerys live in a Minneapolis suburb.

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This booklet is part of a program created to help people share more deeply with those who are sick or dying.

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