

# **Praying In The Midst Of Life: A Guide to Prayer 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 area of spirituality and pastoral care since 1963. A primary focus of his work in spiritual direction is dialoguing with individuals about their relationship with God and the meaning of that relationship in their daily life. He is particularly committed to the empowerment of leadership in prayer and justice.

An Episcopal priest, Ron is the author of two pastoral care programs and five books and is the featured presenter in another DVD series, *Exploring the Sacred in Death and Dying*, also available from EcuFilm (1-888-346-3862, [www.ecufilm.org](http://www.ecufilm.org)). Ron and his wife, Dr. Eleanor McKenzie DelBene, direct the Hermitage, a nonprofit corporation devoted to providing spiritual growth and pastoral care. Ron and Eleanor live in Trussville, Alabama. For further information about Ron DelBene and other related books and programs, see [www.delbene.org](http://www.delbene.org).

### **Series Overview**

This is a series of six 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, 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 further exploration of several of these programs, there are books and workbooks related to specific programs:

Program 2 *Finding God* is used with *The Breath of Life Workbook*.

Program 4 *Praying the Scripture* is used with *Alone with God Workbook*.

Program 5 *Learning the Breath Prayer* is used with *The Breath of Life Workbook*.

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## **For Each Program**

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 discussion, you will probably find your time more satisfying if you follow a few basic suggestions:

- Preview the program before using it with the group.
- Make sure video equipment is available for the class. Set them up ahead of time.
- As the time together begins, take a few minutes for participants 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 each program in its entirety.

- Use the questions Ron poses to move into the discussion. It is important to encourage openness and trust.

You may wish to close the program with a centering experience. It may be a time in which members can share what the program has meant to them or perhaps a time to acknowledge God's presence in your midst.

## **Program 1: Our Questions About Prayer**

### **About this Program**

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 are 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 our 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 programs.

*My whole focus is how to become attentive in 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 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 programs?

## **Program 2: Finding God**

### **About this Program**

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 your 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 of 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?

## **Program 3: Knowing God's Will**

### **About this Program**

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?

## **Program 4: Praying the Scripture**

### **About this Program**

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...Terrance...Sandra, Viki...Viki...Arthurine...Terrance, 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?

## **Program 5: Learning the Breath Prayer**

### **About this Program**

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.

## **Program 6: Retreating at Any Time**

### **About this Program**

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 walk 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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