

**Advent Retreat, Atomic Habits of Prayer
Fr. Brendan McGuire**

Week 4 Handout

Prayer Exercise: Nine Breaths

This is a simple and quick way to be attentive to God’s presence in our lives and simply slow down enough to silence our minds. Here’s how to do it:

1. Make ourselves comfortable in a place that is as free from interruptions as possible.
2. We close our eyes and begin to focus all our attention on our breathing in and out.
3. Inhale and exhale slowly 3 times
4. Inhale and exhale slowly another 3 times inaudibly saying,
 - a. Jesus—as we inhale
 - b. I love you—as we exhale
5. Inhale and exhale slowly another 3 times without words
6. Open our eyes and continue with our prayer or activity

Praying Through Distractions: Logs on the River

It is often the case that when we sit to pray that we have many thoughts that go through our mind. Thoughts about your spouse, children, friends or about your work situation or the many other concerns that pass through our minds. It is sometimes hard to settle these thoughts and we can get consumed by them. This methodology should help deal with the more routine distractions.

1. Pray the exercise of nine breaths to relax and invite God into our space.
2. When the distractions appear, and they will not leave or lessen.
3. Then imagine ourselves sitting on the side of a river watching the water flow by.
4. Notice the large logs floating down the river.
5. Each log represents one of our distracting thoughts.
6. We may look at the log, examine it and even name it if we want but do not attempt to take the log out of the water.
7. We might even want to briefly stop the log to examine it, but we must kick it back out into the fast-flowing river.
8. There are other logs behind it and if we stop it then the logs will pile up into a logjam and the water will eventually stop flowing freely.
9. Now imagine ourselves sitting at the bank of the river, watching all these logs floating on by, each representing one of our thoughts.
10. Now notice the flowing river and the power of the water and see that the logs are carried by the power of that river.
11. In the same way, the power of the Holy Spirit will carry our thoughts and distractions away down the river of prayer.

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Adapted from "Armchair Mystic", Fr. Mark Thibodeaux, SJ

Praying With Worthy Distractions

Sometimes it is the case that our distractions are so persistent that we cannot seem to let them go. It may be because we are particularly consumed with some person of significance in our life dealing with a health issue or other major trauma. Or we find ourselves consumed with some future event such as a test, talk or presentation for which we are preparing.

1. Pray the exercise of nine breaths to relax and invite God into our space.
2. When the persistent distractions appear, and we have determined that they are significant and need our attention now then change strategies and now focus on it.
3. Person
 - a. If the distraction is a person (that we are worried about because of illness, or angry with because of a fight or we are in love with) then focus all our attention this person.
 - b. Ask God to show us that person through God's eyes.
 - c. Allow God to walk us through some other perspectives of that person from God's point of view (POV).
 - d. For example, if we feel angry at our boss over the way he treated us, then we ask for God's impression of our relationship and is our anger righteous. Are we being fair with our assessment? Ask God is this the right way to deal with this matter. Do we have any fault in the deterioration of the relationship?
 - e. We spend some time thanking God for the life of this person (even if our present feelings towards that person are very negative) and ask God to help us to carry God's POV of this person throughout the rest of our day. If we feel called to act a certain way today, then we ask God for courage to act that way today.
4. Future distraction
 - a. If the concern is about the future, then ask God if we are right to be concerned about this potential issue? Do we have our priorities well placed? How can we promote gospel values in this future event?
 - b. Ask God to show us God's point of view (POV) and put this future event into the context of our life and how God sees it
 - c. We ask God to help us see any spiritual pitfalls or traps in this situation. Could we be too focused on success or failure? Are we being fair and just in this upcoming business deal? Etc.
 - d. We ask God to show us what we can do to avoid the pitfalls and to give us the strength and courage to do what needs to be done in this situation.
5. We close with the exercise of nine breaths and thank God for the gift of this prayer today.

I Feel Sorry for Jesus

by Naomi Shihab Nye.

I Feel Sorry for Jesus

People won't leave Him alone.
I know He said, wherever two or more
are gathered in my name...
but I'll bet some days He regrets it.

Cozily they tell you what He wants
and doesn't want
as if they just got an e-mail.
Remember 'Telephone', that pass-it-on game

where the message changed dramatically
by the time it rounded the circle?
Well.
People blame terrible pieties on Jesus.

They want to be his special pet.
Jesus deserves better.
I think He's been exhausted
for a very long time.

He went into the desert, friends.
He didn't go into the pomp.
He didn't go into
the golden chandeliers

and say, the truth tastes better here.
See? I'm talking like I know.
It's dangerous talking for Jesus.
You get carried away almost immediately.

I stood in the spot where He was born.
I closed my eyes where He died and didn't die.
Every twist of the Via Dolorosa
was written on my skin.

And that makes me feel like being silent
for Him, you know? A secret pouch
of listening. You won't hear me
mention this again.