

***From the companion guide of John Mark Comer's "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry"***

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**Exercise #1: Breathing Prayer**

**Overview**

*In silence and solitude, we attempt to quiet both external noise, and internal noise. But internal noise is by far the hardest to quell. Often, when we come to quiet, our mind just runs wild, as Henri Nouwen once said, "Like monkeys in a banana tree." In this first exercise, we focus on our breathing to calm our mind, and let it "descend into the heart" in God.*

1. Put away your phone and any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable. You may want to take a short walk first, or light a candle, or stretch, as a way of easing your soul into a new mode.
2. Watch your breathing.
  - Sit in an upright, but relaxed position.
  - Close your eyes.
  - Take slow, deep breaths.
    - Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
    - As you inhale, breathe all the way in until your stomach distends (this fills your brain with clean, clear oxygen).
    - As you exhale, shape your lips like you're breathing out through a straw, and push all the air out with your stomach muscles (getting all the carbon dioxide and toxins out of your system).
  - Feel the sensations in your body – stress, heart rate, tightness, calmness, pain, lightness, etc. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and it's a good gift. By becoming present in our body, we become present the moment, and eventually, in God himself.
  - Just "watch" your breath enter and exit your body. Pay attention to it and nothing else.
  - Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. It's used to constant chatter, not stillness. Don't judge yourself, feel like a failure, or give up. Just let each thought go as quickly as it comes. When you notice your mind start to wander, just re-center with a quick prayer, like, "Father" or "Jesus" or "Peace" or the ancient, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner," and come back to your breathing.
  - Let the Spirit generate from deep within you a compassionate heart toward yourself and each thought that you gently release.
3. Pray.
  - This isn't new age, hypnosis, or magic; it's just a way of resting in God's love, being present to him, slowing down to let Jesus set the pace and agenda of our day.
  - Once you settle into a rhythm, begin to turn each breath into a prayer. One breath at a time, imagine yourself breathing out:

- Anger
  - Sadness
  - Anxiety
  - Despair
  - Fear
  - The Need to control
  - Discontentment
- And then imagine yourself breathing in its opposite:
    - Love
    - Joy
    - Peace
    - Hope
    - Trust
    - Detachment
    - Contentment

#### 4. Abide.

- Before you end this exercise, spend a little while just “abiding in the vine;” simply sit in loving attention on God. Watch God watching you in compassionate love. This is the core of all transformation into Christlikeness. Through resting under God’s loving attention toward us by the Spirit, we are transformed.
- As St. John of the Cross once said, “What we need most in order to make progress is to be silent before this great God... for the language he best hears is silent love.”

*Note: In the beginning, just 2-3 minutes of this is a win, and 10 minutes is a home run. Like many practices, at first you may well feel awkward, or even anxious, but give it time. It will likely come to feel deeply enjoyable in time.*

## Exercise #2: Feeling and Listening Prayer

### Overview

*Emotional pain isn't something to avoid or deny. Rather, emotions are a place to meet God and open ourselves up to him in new ways. Emotions are the language of the soul. Often, they are God's way of coming to us with direction or discipline; or they are our way of drawing near to God, meeting him in our aches and pains.*

1. Put away your phone and any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable. You may want to take a short walk first, or light a candle, or stretch, as a way of easing your soul into a new mode.
2. Let yourself feel.
  - What emotions rise to the surface of your heart, big or small? You might feel joy, gratitude, sadness, emptiness, fatigue, worry, guilt and shame, conviction, anger, lust, optimism – any number of positive or negative emotions.
  - Don't run away from your "negative" feelings. In the Father's presence, face each emotion head on, the good, the bad, the ugly. And don't just think about what you are feeling. Rather, let yourself feel each one, deeply.
  - Name each emotion and then let it pass through you.
3. Pray.
  - Get it all off your chest. Give whatever you are feeling over to God - the good, the bad, and the ugly. No filter. The point here isn't to be good, but to be honest. Different emotions call for different kinds of prayer.
  - If you're happy – celebrate, sing, dance!
  - If you're grateful, express your appreciation to God.
  - If you're anxious, give your worry over to the Father and ask for his peace in return.
  - If you're sitting in unanswered questions about your life or future, hold that tension before God. Tell him how it feels not to have an answer. Don't force clarity where there is none. Just be patient before God with all that is unclear in your life and unresolved in your heart.
4. Listen.
  - The Spirit of God has direct access to your mind and imagination. He's more than able to implant thoughts, images, feelings, and desires into the core of your being.
  - Now that you're quiet before him, ask him to speak into your life.
  - Here's a few ideas of what to ask:
    - Is there anything you want to say to me today?
    - Is there anything you want me to do today?
    - Is there anyone you want me to bless today? In what way?
    - What would be pleasing to you today, Father?
    - What lies am I believing? Then, after you wait and listen, ask the follow up question: What is the truth you want to replace that lie with?
    - How do you see me, Father?

- Sit in questions like these before God, and just see what comes.
- If nothing clear comes to the surface of your mind, simply meditate on a Scripture that speaks of God's compassionate love for you, such as Psalm 23, John 15 or 17, or Ephesians 1.

5. Close with a prayer of gratitude and commit your day (or if it's evening, your rest) to God.

### **Exercise #3: Lectio Divina**

#### **Overview:**

*Lectio Divina (Latin for "spiritual reading") is a way of reading Scripture with the specific aim of hearing God's voice over your life. There are four basic movements (from four Latin words), but the mechanics are not as important as many people think. It's less of a technique, and more of a heart posture and pace. The basic idea is simply to find a quiet place to read Scripture slowly with your ear open to God's voice through the text. Unlike Bible study (another wonderful practice) the goal is less to hear what he was saying to them (the original audience), but to take the next step and hear what he is saying to you.*

1. Put away your phone and any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable. You may want to take a short walk first, or light a candle, or stretch, as a way of easing your soul into a new mode.
2. Pick a Scripture to read.
  - If you're on a Bible reading plan, just open to whatever is next, but pick a short section of Scripture. One chapter at most.
  - If you're not on a reading plan and nothing comes to mind, here's a few recommendations for Scriptures to start with: - Psalm 23 or 37 or 40 - John 15 or 17 - Galatians 5 - Ephesians 1
3. Slowly work through the four movements of Lectio Divina:
  - First, come to quiet. Turn your attention and desire over to God. Feel free to rest for a few moments, as you slow your mind down to the pace of the Spirit. Then...
  - Read/lectio: Read the passage slowly and pay attention to each line. Take your time. As you move through the text, pay close attention to what "shimmers," what words and ideas draw your attention in a special way. When your heart is drawn to a word or phrase or idea, pause for a few moments, and let it expand in your mind.
  - Reflect/mediatio: After you finish reading the passage, return to the beginning and read it again. On your second time, focus even more on the words or phrases that resonate with your heart, life, or whatever you're wrestling with today. Listen for what God is saying to you through the text.
  - Respond/oratio: Talk to God about what you're hearing.
  - Rest/contemplatio: Pause to sit in God's presence before you return to the noise of life. Express whatever is in your heart to God—wonder, awe, joy, hope, or gratitude.
  - Some teachers add a fifth movement: incarnate/incarnatio—where we ask the Spirit to illuminate our mind with a clear action step to incarnate the passive we've been sitting in.