

## Serenity Prayer: Ready-Made Prayer for Inner Turmoil Ken Wilson, Feb 18, 2018

First (of 6) Sundays in Lent, people! Getting baptism pool for Easter (April 1) for anyone who would identify (declare affiliation with) Jesus thru baptism. Just catch me/Emily/Caroline/Cassie. Can do it as a first-time thing...or as a renewal of infant baptism.

Lenten Prayer Sampler—today: ready-made prayers, feature of AA—a spiritual path to recovery. Extra-happy to invite Tabitha to share her experience. Then introduce Serenity Prayer (half sheet.)

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Offer wisdom from Anthony Bloom, whose book *Beginning to Pray* is a gem. A physician, who served in French resistance WW2, then became a bishop in Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Bloom orients us to “Ready Made” prayers. He says **spontaneous** prayers (from the heart on the fly) are good for, “**peaks & valleys** when hearts are desperate or full to overflowing. Something great happens, you bust out with “THANK YOU GOD!” Or you’re in dire straits and cry, HELP GOD! Words themselves not elegant, but erupt like a geyser. Example, re talking to NCW re health concerns, after counseling session, in car on way home, said out loud, not planned, “God you’ve got to help me, I don’t know what to do!”

Most of time, not on a peak or in a valley—hearts not bursting with anything. But still need God—and a personal God all about connections. **Step 11:** “*we sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God.*”

God is the **source of all being** — “*in God we live and move and have our being.*” But not always conscious of our contact (like fish in sea don’t feel wet.) Prayer: way to improve our conscious contact

One of tried & true prayers adopted by AA is Serenity Prayer. About it Bill W. said, “*Whenever I find myself under acute tensions, I lengthen by daily walks and slowly repeat our Serenity Prayer in rhythm to my steps and breathing*” (As Bill W. Sees It 250).

Many variants floating around. Composed by **Reinhold Niebur**, a theologian-ethicist. Led a church in Detroit in 1920’s (grew from 66-700). KKK prominent in Detroit

politics...Niebur organized against Klan during a key city council election [Obama's favorite]

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen*

Most use first few lines, but longer version is good too (AA's motto "one day at time" comes from longer form)

Recommend **memorizing short or long form** if serenity is some-thing we need help with. [Distress of past week]

Lack of serenity—anxiety, distress, fear, envy, resentment, moldering anger—is cause of much daily-nightly suffering...fuels behaviors we aren't happy with and make things worse

Prayer is a tutorial in serenity. Serenity (calm in middle of storm) doesn't come naturally, so we turn to a Higher Power for it: "*God grant me the Serenity...*". Jesus freely offered peace: "***Peace be with you! My peace I leave with you!***" Just as fear/anxiety is contagious, peace is too—we can catch it from others.

***God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can;*** Some things are within our control, other things beyond our control. Which it is matters. Many of us have an exaggerated hope control—a fiction we maintain to keep us facing how vulnerable we really are. In this stage we don't naturally realize, "Oh this is beyond my control." Serenity bids us to face those things with acceptance, while not making acceptance a cop-out. Acceptance when it's something we can't control, action when it's something we can.

***God grant...wisdom to know the difference*** in messy muddle of life, not always clear. Need wisdom. In Bible Wisdom (Sophia) is gendered as female attribute of God. Personified as **Lady Wisdom**, described as a **lover**. Her **femininity isn't 18<sup>th</sup> C. dainty** Victorian. Lady wisdom **calls out in the streets**, throws banquets, builds a house (hews her own pillars) and mixes own wine. Let's do series!

If your image of God is hyper-masculine, pray for wisdom and picture wisdom as a woman who is a lover, builder, pillar-hewer, party thrower, wine-mixer.

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. **Living one day at a time...***

Much inner turmoil is a function of **projecting fear-driven future scenarios**.

Psychologist: “**catastrophic thinking**” You notice an ache or pain (mildly negative thing) ...but then your brain hops on the **calamity train**. First stop: picture needing a biopsy; next stop: bad news from oncologist: then dying a miserable death (if your good at it, loved ones won’t survive loss or nobody will miss you).

Antidote: “**living one day-at-a-time**” (Jesus — “*each day has troubles enough of its own*”).

**enjoying one moment at a time** I eat desserts too fast—while eating one bite, thinking of next. If an enjoyable moment is a dove chocolate, savor it. Even when life in general sucks, always some simple pleasure to be enjoyed in moment. GOD HELP US ENJOY THE MOMENTS.

**accepting hardships as the pathway to peace** Hardship happen (“in this world you will have trouble”) but how we frame them matters. If we frame them as a hostile universe (or worse, God) punishing us, we empower them to further torment us.

If we frame hardships as a path to peace, we reduce their power to bully us. Years of small children getting sick—their ear infections, colds, flu, croup, colic, teething, food allergies had a rippling misery affect (lost sleep, increased irritability, cabin fever, worry, doctors visits). But as long as they survive, all those infections are necessary to build a robust immune system to fight off stronger threats. A number of us who started this church went through a weird-religious ordeal together, and while the suffering was real, and leaves its scars to this day, it led to something better.

That’s a framing—seeing hardships as a pathway to peace. “*We must through many hardships enter the kingdom of God*”

**taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world, as it is, not as I would have it** Difference between wanting to improve the world and imposing our will on it. If Jesus is God-in-

flesh appearing (with rights over the world) it's instructive he didn't whip the world into shape.

Yes, once he prophetically overturned tables of the money-changers in temple, but the next day they were no doubt back up. For the most part, he was patient-tolerant of much that was wrong with the world. Yes, he did extraordinary things—healing, feeding hungry, etc.—but he did this on a small, not a grand scale.

Jesus saw more suffering up close than most of us do, and he did more to alleviate it, but he did not stew in frustration at world's resistance to change. He took time alone to recharge, observed Sabbath, enjoyed parties—and did what he could to make things better. He took the world as it is, not as he would have it be.

***trusting that God will make all things right if I surrender to His will; Not*** “trusting that God will make all things right, so I don't have to do anything about it” ...but trusting that God will make all things right if I surrender to His will. God has his BIG PART, but I have my necessary small part—surrender to his will.

***that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next*** Since 1970's everyone tells everyone to dream big dreams—mantra from pre-school on is “you can be anything you want to be!” Serenity Prayer offers a more modest expectation, ***“that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy in the next”***

Not wildly happy, reasonably happy. Not happy all the time, but happy enough given constraints we're all under...but never letting go of the hope of a future supreme happiness...because the little joys we experience are just a hint of an inexhaustible storehouse of joy just beyond our present capacity to absorb...

Modesty and moderation of expectation combined with go-for-broke hope...that's a potent combo.

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Bill W., founder of AA, had this to say in AA Big BOOK: “we sometimes **select** and **memorize** a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discovering” (BB 87).

Is this a prayer you want to **select** and **memorize**?

Think of prayer as a way to shape the desires of your heart. We find ourselves wanting things that don't lead to happiness, joy, well-being. We need help shaping the desires of our heart. Think about this prayer—is it the sort of prayer that would shape the desire of your heart in a desirable direction?

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QUIET REFLECTION