

Life
as a
prayer

HOPE LYDA



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, Copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked TLB are taken from The Living Bible, Copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

Cover by Bryce Williamson, Eugene, Oregon

Select portions of *Life as a Prayer* appeared in *Tea Light Moments for Women*, copyright © 2009 by Hope Lyda

LIFE AS A PRAYER

Copyright © 2009/2017 Hope Lyda

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-6191-2 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6192-9 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lyda, Hope, author.

Title: Life as a prayer / Hope Lyda.

Description: Eugene Oregon : Harvest House Publishers, [2017]

Identifiers: LCCN 2016042141 (print) | LCCN 2016046702 (ebook) | ISBN

9780736961912 (pbk.) | ISBN 9780736961929 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Spiritual life—Christianity. | Prayer—Christianity. |

Spiritual exercises.

Classification: LCC BV4501.3 .L95 2017 (print) | LCC BV4501.3 (ebook) | DDC

248.3/2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016042141>

All rights reserved.


No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 / BP-GL / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Prayer: Breathe It. Live It. Be It.	5
Life as a Prayer for Awareness	21
Life as a Prayer for Healing and Hope	43
Life as a Prayer for Courage.	63
Life as a Prayer for Connection and Compassion.	87
Life as a Prayer for Joy and Creativity	103
Life as a Prayer for Faith	125
Life as a Prayer for Sanctuary.	143
Life as a Prayer for Purpose	165



*Prayer:
Breathe It.
Live It.
Be It.*

Life as a Prayer

“Why must people kneel down to pray? If I really wanted to pray I’ll tell you what I’d do. I’d go out into a great big field all alone or into the deep, deep, woods, and I’d look up into the sky—up—up—up—into that lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness.

And then I’d just FEEL a prayer.”

LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY, *ANNE OF GREEN GABLES*

How’s your prayer life?”

When I hear someone say this, first I hope they aren’t talking to me. Then my imagination and sense of humor team up and I envision myself existing in some parallel life where I wear a white frock, cinched in the middle with a satin sash, and go about my day enshrouded in a holy mist as I shop for cat food, scrub my bathroom floor, and emit prayers for world peace. This isn’t real. (And I know it isn’t real because I’m cleaning my floors.) In my journey of talking to God, however, I have experienced something that *is* real. Life is a prayer. All of life. Every moment is an invitation to experience God.

How have you encountered or lived out prayer in the past? How about now? Do you bow your head and kneel? Do you wait until you’re in sanctuaries or seated in pews to pray? Do you lace up worn hiking boots and head for the trail to have your most intimate conversations with the Creator? Is prayer still an ethereal idea that hasn’t yet taken on flesh and substance in your day-to-day existence?

As a shy kid who spent a good amount of time mulling over ideas and wandering the rooms of my mind, I was smitten with a God who is always available for talks and who is not only attentive but also creative about capturing *my* attention. I’d view situations through the lens of “God is in this” or “God is with me.” Even when I wasn’t sure about

myself, I was certain of God's presence. As I got older, I kept the dialogue going with God. Though, I know there were seasons when I did more talking than listening.

Every moment is an invitation to experience God.

The big shift in how I view prayer happened when I accompanied my husband through a long health journey. Initially I prayed frequently and fervently over decisions and for healing, resolution, next steps, and insight. But as months in the trenches of the unknown turned into years, speaking the same prayers added to the weariness. I found myself saying "Ditto" as my prayer because I had nothing new to take to God. The needs were the same. My gratitude for provision and care remained genuine. But I was tired. The kind of exhaustion that changes your brain.

I wondered if I was ending my perpetual thread of dialogue with God.

Had I lost my way into easy conversation with the Creator? The answer was no. I felt more in tune with him. I was encountering Christ in those trenches. So what was happening?

I wasn't losing touch with God. After years of talking to him and writing more than 20 prayer books and devotionals, I was expanding my view of what it meant to interact with Jesus. I was increasing my ability and willingness to lean into the Spirit and seek hope and leading.

I noticed that my gratitude wasn't saved for a specific time of prayer but was expressed in the moment and *through* the moment. God's responses and my understanding of them were unveiled in the everyday encounters and experiences that were and still are becoming profound and more vivid despite my fatigue. I'm learning to be with Jesus as I live, breathe, sleep, awaken, weep, laugh, connect, hope, fumble, eat, walk. . . . and yes, pray.

When we consider our lives to be ongoing interactions with God, we can do as Anne of Green Gables imagines and "feel" the prayer. We can

go about our day breathing, living, and being prayer as we offer our lives to God and experience Emmanuel, God with us—when we roll out of bed, roll our eyes at our to-do lists, or roll up our sleeves to prepare for challenges. A deep relationship develops as we willingly become vessels through which God’s love can flow upward and outward. From tip of toe to crown of head. From heart’s thrum to a dream’s hum.

We can go about our day breathing, living, and being prayer as we offer our lives to God.

LIFE as a Prayer

Being tuned in to God’s presence leads us to experience prayer as continuous intimacy with him and with our own lives because we’re given new perspective and a lens of wonder and wisdom. We are privy to holy nudges that point out what we would’ve otherwise missed. The splendid color in the blue jay’s feather left like a calling card in the garden. The baby in the stroller giggling and reaching toward us in a pseudo high-five gesture, as if to celebrate solidarity in the human adventure. I imagine the Creator leaning in to catch the whisper of our thoughts or the wisp of one of those most-assuredly genius ideas we have just before the alarm clock shocks us into ordinary routine. I anticipate Abba placing a hand on the small of our backs to guide us through terrain we face with our knees knocking. I sigh with gratitude, sensing holy fingers stroking our hair when we’re weeping or longing for a tender touch.

We experience life as a prayer when we begin a day willing to look at and respond to people, circumstances, questions, awakenings, and challenges with God’s heart. This devotional is a gathering of what I call “slice of life” meditations, along with prompts and offerings that invite you to look at and listen to your life in this new way.

I’m not a fan of spiritual shortcuts, because they usually end up at touristy and trendy emotional places. But you and I want to *live* in prayer, not just visit it. After my season of exhaustion, however, and

now during my unfurling back to life, I am grateful for travel companions who guide me with instruction and caring questions, and who create space for me to listen to God. I am thankful for those who, like my gentle-movement class instructors, remind me to seek “ease in the effort” so I can release agenda and experience my pilgrimage more deeply and authentically.

On your journey through these topical devotions, I hope to be this companion for you. I’ll settle into the passenger seat, and from that perspective I’ll locate the lookouts with breathtaking vistas and spot the roadside stands promising the juiciest spiritual nourishment. You might be tempted to turn up the volume on the radio when I ask what you’re thinking or suggest that you slow down; yet you’ll be glad you have me along because I always pack snacks like red licorice and Cheetos.

My most important role is to champion your desire to look at life and faith anew. In honor of this role, I offer the acronym LIFE to help us consider the different ways we experience life as prayer:

Longing
Invitation
Forward Motion
Embodiment

When we recognize longing, invitation, forward motion, and embodiment as unique conversation starters with God, we’re given new ways to understand our lives as they intertwine with the divine. Let’s spend a moment with each of these conversation starters. Consider which ones resonate with you the most right now. Which most draws you toward God? Does one spark a mini-epiphany about a current circumstance?

When we recognize longing, invitation, forward motion, and embodiment as unique conversation starters with God, we’re given new ways to understand our lives as they intertwine with the divine.

Longing

All my longings lie open before you, Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

PSALM 38:9

Longing can be the deep hunger for a missing part of life or self. It can be an ache to become courageous or healed. It can be painful during a season of emptying. It can be a wish for joy and intention. God knows our longings, but it might take us time and a bit of an awakening to know what they are. Yet even while they're hidden from our conscious view, longings often direct or drive our steps, choices, emotions, and endeavors.

My current longing is for a longing. Okay, that might be cheating, but I can't identify my void yet because I'm still working with God to excavate and understand my heart. I've given my longing different names over the past couple of years, but only because I felt pressure to produce a label—sort of the spiritual equivalent of what one blurts out when asked, “What do you want to be when you graduate from college?” So, for now, I experience my longing as a prayer to be drawn into a hope and a vision. I'm able to acknowledge the immediate longings I have in any given moment, from connection to healing to peace. When this is my perspective, my spirit is able to discern what God is doing and what I'm doing to nurture a holy way of being.

Even while they're hidden from our conscious view,
longings often direct or drive our steps, choices,
emotions, and endeavors.

What are your longings today? Do they echo what you've craved since you were ten? Or maybe they are just now being revealed because

of a hardship that has stripped away any pretense of having it all or having your act together.

Here are some words of “longing.” When these surface in your speech or your prayers, pay attention. Pause with God to identify what he is asking you to notice in your heart.

Hunger	Empty	Want
Wonder	Void	Need
Seek	Crave	Wish
Miss	Ache	Hope

When you walk through the devotions in this book, consider which speak to or shed light on a personal spiritual longing. Let that longing become a prayer, to be filled by God and to have your needs met by his limitless mercy.

Invitation

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.

FREDERICK BUECHNER

This Buechner gem is one of my life quotes. I encourage you to adopt it if you don't have one of your own, especially for our time together. It's a call to attention, a call to witness and experience life through the senses and as grace itself. In every situation, in every moment, you are extended an invitation. Think about it. Arriving at a four-way intersection is an invitation to make a choice. Or that could be considered two invitations: one to make a turn and one to go straight. Spiritual invitations, as prayers, compel us to know ourselves and God better, to seek God's prompting, or to observe our journey with eyes focused and ears tuned in.

If you want to consider where your invitations were over the past week or even the past year, ask yourself when you experienced a nudge to reflect on someone's comment or on the possible consequences of an upcoming decision. When did you feel called to view an issue from another person's perspective? Have you had to change jobs or face downsizing before you were ready? Each of these events is an invitation to experience or examine life differently.

While longings shed light on what might be missing, invitations shed light on where we might be going, who we are, and the condition of our minds, hearts, and souls. An argument can be an invitation to understand why we're so passionate about a subject or why we feel the need to always be right. An emotional response to a friend's

offhand comment could be an invitation to become aware of and tend to a wound we guard carefully.

While longings shed light on what might be missing, invitations shed light on where we might be going, who we are, and the condition of our minds, hearts, and souls.

These invitations-turned-prayers don't all make appearances as heavy decisions or trials. For example, a new friend's upcoming gathering could be your opening to step away from isolation and embrace prayer for finding community. The words on the following list represent situational invitations that can become prayers for discernment and awareness, leading you below surface thoughts and rote responses.

Beginnings	Challenges	Doubts
Decisions	Losses	Questions
Crossroads	Transitions	Choices
Obstacles	Possibilities	Endings

Every invitation to experience God can become a prayer for self-awareness and a deepening sense of God's character, faithfulness, and presence. In your every circumstance, I know God is present and engaged in the invitation it extends to you. As you read through these devotions, you'll be encouraged to reflect, pray, experience stillness and silence, and ask yourself questions you might not have thought about before or perhaps have avoided. Such times of exploration will beckon you to contemplate your life and faith...and will likely reap even more invitations.