

Breathe

... **BECAUSE I AM**

In this season of uncertainty, one thing is certain. Jesus is alive and the only answer for our time. His death and resurrection prove he was who he said he was and that everything he said was true. Through the power of his Spirit, Jesus is with us. He is our help and our hope. Whatever concerns we may have or circumstances we may find ourselves in, Jesus invites us to come to him, breathe, and embrace his words: I AM.

As we enter into this week of prayer, each day focuses on one of Jesus's I AM statements with reflection questions to draw us closer to Jesus and listen to what he may be saying to us about who he is, who we are, and how he is inviting us to respond to his nudging.

A guided breath prayer and an image for visio divina are included to provide sacred space for us to be still with Jesus around each day's I AM prayer.

May you meet Jesus in a special way this week.

ABOUT BREATH PRAYERS

Nothing is more refreshing than a deep breath to refresh and calm the body, mind, and spirit. When prayer is added to this practice, we create a holy moment where we can become aware of how close God is to us.

Followers of Christ have been saying breath prayers for centuries. These prayers turn our hearts and minds toward God, allowing him to restore our souls in a moment of meditation or petition.

To practice breath prayer, breathe in as you whisper the first part of a phrase or verse (or silently say it in your head), then breathe out as you whisper the rest of the phrase or verse.

For Example:

SPEAK, LORD (*inhale*) ... your servant is listening (*exhale*).

JESUS SON OF GOD (*inhale*) ... have mercy on me (*exhale*).

I AM ANXIOUS (*inhale*) ... but my trust is in you (*exhale*).

ABOUT VISIO DIVINA

Visio divina, or “sacred seeing,” is another prayer practice that has been around for centuries. It involves allowing our hearts, minds, and imaginations to prayerfully enter into an image to see what God may stir or wish to say to us.

The steps for this practice are simply:

- Open your heart and mind, and ask God to guide your experience.
 - Take a first look at the image.
 - Notice what you notice, what stirs within you.
 - Take a second look and look more deeply.
 - What do you notice about your reactions? What draws you? What repels you? What intrigues you? What emotions are stirred?
 - Reflect on or journal what has surfaced for you before God.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you consider what God may be saying to you.
 - Is there an invitation or something you wish to say to God?
 - Thank God for your time together.
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Bio | **Tammy Long is co-lead pastor of South Bay Community Church in Fremont, California.**

She is an ordained minister with the Evangelical Covenant Church, a trained spiritual director, and a writer. She has a master’s degree in education from Cal State East Bay and a master’s degree in Christian formation from North Park Theological Seminary.



Tammy is passionate about seeing people connect with God and grow deeper in love with the Trinity, both individually and in community. Whether through preaching, teaching, spiritual direction, facilitating a small group, or leading a retreat, Tammy finds her deepest joy in walking alongside others as they draw closer to the heart of God to experience spiritual transformation.

She enjoys reading, movies, traveling, yoga, being in nature, and spending time with her husband, adult children, and grandchildren.



BREATH PRAYER

Jesus, you are
my vine

I abide in
the warmth
of your love.

I AM THE VINE PRAYER

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." JOHN 15:5, NRSV

Did you know every branch of a vine grows directly from the main stem? Branches that have produced fruit are pruned back to remain close, or to "abide," near the stem for most of the year. Then, in season, branches grow out quickly again to bear fruit. Non-producing branches are cut and burned.

Just as vine branches are to bear fruit, so are we. Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8, NIV). But branches cannot produce fruit on their own. To produce fruit, the branch must abide, or remain connected, with the stem.

And the same is true for followers of Christ. **We are completely dependent on Jesus for the fruit he desires to produce in us.** Apart from him we can do nothing. Apart from him any fruit we think we are producing decays and dies.

Have you ever noticed pruned branches from a fruit tree? When they are first cut, the branch looks alive. The fruit doesn't die right away. Even on the ground, the branch appears to be alive because the leaves are vibrant and the fruit fresh. Externally all looks well, but internally the branch is already wasting away. It is no longer abiding with the tree.

The same is true when we fail to abide with Jesus. From the outside it may look like we are doing well, producing fruit even, but there is growing decay of the soul. For a while, our fruit may appear to be alive, but decay becomes evident as we realize something is not quite right.

Instead, Jesus invites us to abide in him and he will abide in us in a mutual relationship of love. Jesus tells us to remain in his love by obeying his commands which leads to fullness of joy (John 15:9-11). For us to live into that joy and produce fruit to the glory of God, we must abide in Christ. Jesus said, "I am the vine."

For Reflection

- What is the health of your fruit?
- What rhythms and practices help you remain in Christ's love?

Contemplate the image and reflect.

_____ **CENTER** your body and mind to be with Jesus.

_____ **IMAGINE** you are sitting in the sun, feel the warmth.

_____ **SLOWLY INHALE**, "Jesus, you are my Vine."

_____ **SLOWLY EXHALE**, "I'm abiding in the warmth your love."

_____ **REPEAT** the breath prayer until you feel Jesus's peace.

_____ **LOOK AND LISTEN** for opportunities to bask and abide in Jesus's love today.