

# Walking Cycling Running

*"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you..."*

(Phil 1:3-4)

Paul's prayer practice seems to happen everywhere. The "constantly" of these phrases (similarly in 1 Thess. and 2 Tim.) invites us to also be active in prayer in a wide variety of circumstances. In these days, many people are finding their prayer practice is supported and enriched as they exercise.

During times of restriction and social distancing, we may be confined to home for much of the time. Opportunities for exercise outdoors are anticipated with pleasure. We all seem to value and appreciate our freedom to move in fresh air. When circumstances restrict us to isolation, we are particularly grateful for this freedom to be outdoors.

In stepping out into the world, whether on foot or bicycle, we have the opportunity to pray for others in a focussed way, and to give thanks for creation. As we pass our neighbours' houses, whether we know those people well, or just by sight, or have never met them, we can pray for them. As we pass people on the path, in the parks, or by the river or creek, we can exchange a smile, a wave, or ring our bike bell....and bless them with silent prayer as we pass.

When we are attentive to creation, we may observe and mourn litter, and notice beauty for which we can be thankful. This prayer practice is something we may have done before the pandemic, but now is a time to be more intentional in our prayers for neighbours and the world around us.

**Note:** On the last page is a resource for gathering your prayers and observations at the end of the day

As you prepare for your walk, run or ride, put on your walking boots, running or cycle shoes and take a moment to be grateful. As you pull on your jacket, and fill your water bottle, pause to give thanks to God for these gifts of water and clothing. As you cross the threshold from inside to outside, commit your walk, run or cycle to God with this prayer by Julie Perrin:

*As I step outside  
awaken me, O God -  
to the gifts of earth and sky  
to the paths on which I walk  
to companions I may meet.*



Photo Credit: Lara Bardsley ART



# Walking Cycling Running

## WALK

Before you set out on a walk, consider your intention. Do you need intense physical exercise for fitness, or a head-clearing stroll to relax, reduce stress and return to focus? Are you walking with a human or canine friend, for companionship and (socially distanced) connection? Are you being led to pray for your community or our world? Select one of the following suggestions for the prayer practice which will best fit your intention.

### Local Pilgrimage - Pray for your local community

Hampton Uniting Church has a [small booklet](#) available for people to undertake a local pilgrimage, starting and ending at the church. As walkers pass the school, post office, shops and police station, for example, there are invitations to stop and pray. You may like to make your own pilgrimage. After you have developed such a route in your locale, you could create such a resource for members of your faith community, inviting them to walk the pilgrimage route, and pray for the local community.

You might compose prayers for people to pray at each site, or simply write a sentence or two for reflection and an open invitation to pray.

### Aerobic Walk - Prayer of awareness of others

Perhaps you and your partner, or dog, intend take a fast, daily walk for fitness. The challenge in these times of social distancing is to walk with purpose and clarity of intention. For everyone's safety we need to be aware of others as we share urban pathways, and popular walking tracks. Our desire for a clear path for our own aerobic walk needs to be balanced with acute attention to maintain physical distance from runners, cyclists, and other walkers. Be aware that this hyper-vigilance may create more stress and irritation, and potential injury, as people step off the path and fall. This is another place we can practice grace and care with ourselves and others. Social researcher, Hugh Mackay, [recently](#) encouraged us to greet every person we pass on our outside walks during this time of pandemic. Whether with a wave, a smile, or a spoken greeting we offer God's grace and, says Mackay, we build and maintain social cohesion.



Photo Credit: Lara Bardsley ART



# Walking Cycling Running

As Christians consciously using this walk to pray for others, let every such greeting lead you to offer a silent prayer, a blessing, a passing of the peace of God toward each person you pass.

### Sensory Meditation Walk - Wordless prayer

Here is a suggestion for a solo head-clearing stroll, particularly helpful to reduce stress and anxiety. If you are in strict isolation you may need to adapt the instructions as you take this stroll around your own backyard. You are invited to focus on your senses as you walk, not necessarily trying to frame words for prayer. Rather, allow your responses to sensed experience to be directed to God in wordless gratitude, joy, sorrow, or compassion. Take a slip of paper in your pocket the first time with the headings to remind you of the process: Breathe, Look, Pause (breathe), Listen, Return (breathe)

**BREATHE** Before you set off on your walk, physically shake out the everyday tasks and responsibilities you've been carrying. Breathe deeply through your nose, and exhale through your mouth a few times.

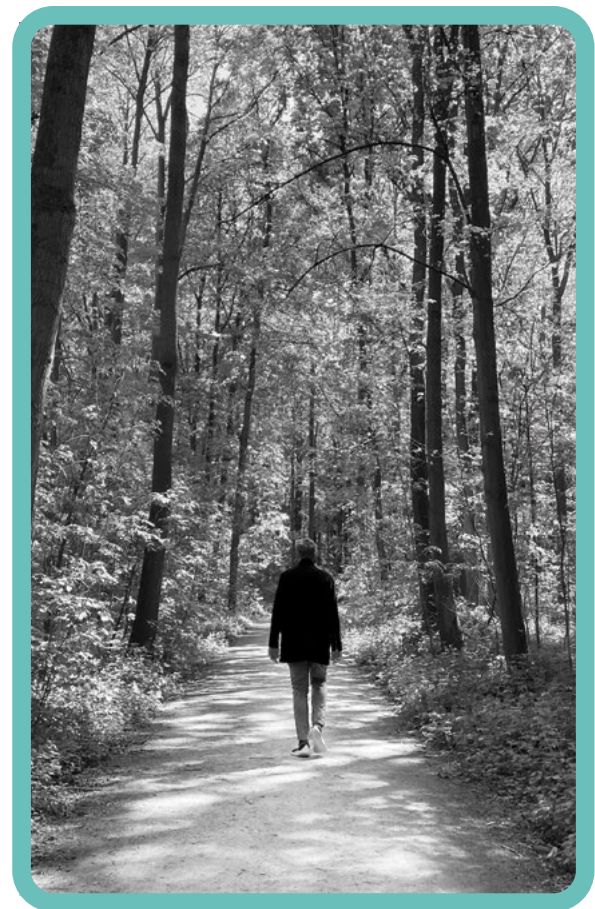
**LOOK** Now, focus your attention on your sense of sight. As you walk, allow your gaze to rest on colours. Stay with the colours you observe, noticing the gradations of green, or blue in the landscape. Allow their "coolness" to calm you. Notice the flashes of hot colours as you walk. Allow their "warmness" and vibrancy to lift your spirit.

**PAUSE** At the halfway mark on your stroll, perhaps where you would turn towards home, stop and look up. Gaze on the sky, noticing the movement of clouds, the wind in trees above you, the flight of birds, and be grateful. Breathe deeply. Look down to the ground; the pavement, the track, the sand, and your own two feet. Give thanks. Take some deep breaths.

**LISTEN** On the return journey, focus your attention to the sense of hearing. Listen for the sounds of life and community as you walk. Allow the sounds to lead you in the same wordless state of prayer; whether you respond to those of human activity, the "harshness" of traffic noise and machinery, or the sounds of the more-than-human world; birdsong, leaves rustling in the wind.

**RETURN** Before you step through your doorway, stretch your arms and back, breathe deeply again and close your time of prayer as you cross the threshold.

Now, a cup of tea and time to journal? or perhaps straight back to working from home.



# Walking Cycling Running



## CYCLE

*Practicing the Presence of God* is a deliberate way of including prayer in everyday life, helping us become aware of God's presence in each moment – in the ordinary as well as the extra-ordinary moments. What opportunities might cycling offer to practice the presence of God? A threefold structure can help: preparation, presence, and prayer.

### Preparation:

Before riding, prepare yourself and the bicycle.

**Decide** – drawing on your morning prayers or reading, consider what word, image, thought or person you choose to cycle with today. Perhaps an image from a photograph, a word from a poem, or you may choose to recall the face of a person you would like to hold at the forefront of your mind today – someone to be grateful or thankful for, to love or express compassion towards, or perhaps a person in need of advocacy or intercession.

Commit that word, image, thought or person to memory - being aware of what informs your choice.

Visualise as many parts of it as you can - shape, sound, taste, touch, smell, or the person's name. Perhaps write your choice on small card and tape it to the bicycle handlebars.

**Choose** your route. Rehearse the route in your mind several times so that it can be easily recalled. Be aware of potential hazards, surface conditions, and intersections, etc.

**Rituals** – conduct your daily pre-cycling check: tyre pressure, brakes, chain oiled, lights working, cycling computer ready to go. As you dress and fill your drink bottle, be grateful for your cycling clothes: shoes, helmet and gloves. Remember again the item or person for whom you will pray today, as you practice God's presence. Perhaps now is the time to tape your reminder list to the handlebars. Now, you are ready to ride!

### Presence:

Practicing the presence of God is about noticing what is happening around and within you in all the experiences of daily living, and then exploring your observations as a form of communication between yourself and God. Following are four ways to notice what is happening as you cycle.



# Walking Cycling Running



**Presence in rhythmic breathing:** Regular, rhythmic breathing can trigger consciously practicing the presence of God as you cycle. Cadence, the regular revolving of the pedal powered chain ring, dictates your breathing. Everyone has a different 'sweet spot' - the pedalling speed at which you can comfortably breathe and talk. Breathe in on one revolution. Breathe out on the next; Repeat this pattern. At a normal cadence, two to four words is the right number of words for use with cadence-patterned breath prayers. Matching the pedal rhythm, repeat aloud a word or phrase, e.g. grace, or love; or faith; or healing. Or say aloud the person's name, using one word to associate their name with your prayer for them – for example. 'Rob, thanks'; or 'Nguyen, peace'; or 'Hine, blessings' or 'Mary – company'.

If you are praying with an image, simply hold it in your imagination for two or four revolutions of the pedals, perhaps exploring some aspect of it that invites closer scrutiny. Commit any insights to memory for action or further prayer following the ride or inclusion in evening prayers.

**Presence in observation:** While cycling, there will be many environmental prompts to notice God's presence. Cycling through parks and along trails can trigger awareness to God in creation. Road cycling can stimulate awareness of other people's activities, everyday grace that sustains daily living. Hill climbs slow the cyclist's speed but increase the intensity of smell and taste, arousing awareness of soil and plant odours of bushlands and gardens.

**Presence in community:** Cycling through various settings might ignite thoughts of friends who form part of communities - family and friends with whom you belong. Perhaps recalling the family member or friend will bring to mind a need or joy they have. Remember, the words will need to match the pedalling rhythm. For example: 'Dan's ill – heal him', or 'Sue's gift – bless her', or 'Sione's

family – encircle them'. These simple prayers can be repeated according cadence, or used several times during a cycling session.

**Presence in shared reflection:** When appropriate to do so, two (or more?) people might cycle together, of course, observing physical distancing at all times. It is recommended we maintain a distance of 15 to 20 meters while cycling, to avoid the vigorously exhaled and lingering breath of other riders. Rest stops, while observing social distancing, also provide opportunities to briefly share insights and awareness from practicing the presence of God during the ride. Doing so can enrich the sense of contributing to and belonging with a prayerful community.

### Prayer

At day's end new insights, or deeper awareness, or fresh experiences arising from practicing the presence of God as you cycled during the day, may be drawn into the discipline of evening or end of the day prayers. For example: These might be included in The Examen, a form of prayer that invites raising awareness of and reflecting about the presence of God during the day. Typically, the Examen includes reviewing the day and listening with God so that the insights gained from the reflection deepen one's knowledge of and relationship with God.



# Walking Cycling Running

## RUN

Runners are blessed to be able to access some of the beautiful and picturesque parts of our world – whether in a city, suburbia or in the country. We run in supportive communities, and we experience the best (and worst) that weather and our bodies can throw at us.

As you prepare for your run, consider whether this will be a time when you will be intentional about prayer, or whether the run needs your full attention. Your workout may not lend itself to a focus on prayer (e.g. a sprint session). Either way, use the prayer in the introduction of this paper to prepare your heart as you leave the house.

After you have laced up your shoes, stand and stretch to your full height, pausing to notice your heart rate, breathing, the feeling of your shoulders, hands and feet. Take a couple of slow, deep breaths, and as you exhale give thanks for the strength in your body, the place where you run, and the home to which you will return.

The first ten minutes or so of your run will be the time when your breathing, heart rate and focus will adjust to your exercise and its rhythms. Use this time to settle into your rhythms of breathing and stride cadence, paying attention to the moment you are in.

Following are three different prayer practices you may want to consider – though maybe not all on the one run.

### Place

Consider the land you are running on. Give thanks for those who have gone before – the traditional owners and custodians of the land, the pioneers and travellers and traders, the trades people that built the road, path or trail. Maybe you can name some of them. If your route has historical or place markers, you might take time to read them prayerfully. Taking time during or outside your run to learn about this place can provide more meaningful connection with your spirit.

### Breath prayer

The movement of running has a cadence that is particularly suited to breath prayer. Coaches often suggest a rhythm of 3 breaths in and 2 out, 3 in and 2 out, in sync with our stride. If you can, breathe in through your nostrils and out through your mouth.

Be aware of your breath as it enters your lungs (on a cold day, you may want to wear a buff over your nose and mouth). Be aware of the increased effort that breathing takes and give thanks for the functioning of your body and the way it converts breath to energy to movement.

Give thanks to God for the life that breathing indicates, for the fresh air we breathe, and for the trees that purify our air.



Image: Kyeema Memorial, Mt Dandenong  
[www.marvmelb.blogspot.com/2012/12/the-kyeema-plane-crash.html](http://www.marvmelb.blogspot.com/2012/12/the-kyeema-plane-crash.html)



# Walking Cycling Running



After a few minutes of noticing your breath, give thanks for the Spirit – that breath of God with our spirits, the One who hovered over creation at its dawn, and the One who also translates the prayers we cannot find words for (Romans 8:26).

Once your breathing has settled, you may want to practice a breath prayer – a form of words that prays words in the rhythm of the breathing. As suggested earlier, a practice of 3 breaths in and 2 breaths out is good physiologically for runners. You could mouth, whisper, or say these aloud – or use it as a silent prayer if you wish. Here are some examples with breath markers.

Com'pan'ion' / Je'sus'  
In' this' place' / find' grace'  
In' this' place' / see' Christ'  
Dave' is' ill' / heal' him'

### Focussed prayer

If you are running for a long time and need an alternative focus distraction, you may have a list of people to pray for on each km of your run. Over a marathon, that's at least 40 people getting 4-8 minutes of prayer each! Use the distance markers, or splits on your watch, to indicate the change in focus.

### End of the day

After a few days take some time to reflect on your experience of combining prayer with movement. Ask yourself one or more of the questions that follow. Allow yourself time to respond. Note any signs of God's presence in your life and in the lives of others. Consider any blessing you have become aware of.

List any concerns for further reflection and prayer. Include your responses in a 'close of day' prayer.

You may want to take time every few days to use [the Prayer of Examen](#), along with the following questions.

### Questions for reflection

- ▶ How has your prayer practice changed?
- ▶ What, if any, changes have you noticed to your level of motivation for exercise?
- ▶ Have you noticed any changes in where your attention has focused or widened?
- ▶ What changes do you sense to your emotional state or sense of purpose?
- ▶ What do you sense of new ideas or plans that the Spirit might be leading you to?
- ▶ What changes have there been to your sense of connection to and belonging with a community or your neighbourhood?
- ▶ What news or stories do you have of your prayers for others being answered?



Note these in a journal, and include them in your prayers. You may even want to include them in your time of worship on Sunday – however you engage in that.

*This paper was created in friendship between Christina Rowntree, Gavin Blakemore, John Emmett, Nigel Hanscamp. We would appreciate your feedback on this resource. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to*

[chris.rowntree@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:chris.rowntree@victas.uca.org.au)

