



WAY OF LIFE | PRACTICE TOOLKIT

BREATHING BREATH PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

◆ Background

Breath Prayer is a form of contemplative prayer linked to the rhythms of breathing. Each day, we take about 26,000 breaths. Our breath is so essential for life that we often don't think about it until something is wrong. It is simply part of who we are. In early Christianity, many monks and nuns started to combine a phrase of prayer or blessing with their every inhale and exhale as a way of being present to the sacred. In earliest tradition, the words used were:

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, (inhale)
have mercy on me, a sinner. (exhale)*

◆ Summary of the practice

As you focus on your in and out breath, someone will slowly read out a passage from Scripture or a simple prayer.

This *Breathing* practice is an embodied form of prayer which requires us to slow down and as such can calm us physically as well as emotionally. It allows us to foster an awareness of God's presence with us wherever we are and whatever our circumstances.

◆ Ways to use the practice

When used as a communal practice, Breath Prayer can be integrated into a service or meeting, to settle into a session or to pause and bring those participating back to an awareness of God's presence. It can also be used as an act of resistance or justice, praying phrases that remind us of a specific cause or purpose and our shared identity in Christ.

As an individual practice, Breath Prayer is a way of punctuating our day with an awareness of God's presence. This can be practiced wherever we find ourselves: at work, in the car, at the school gate, while boiling the kettle or washing our hands. Our breath becomes an ally for slowing down, for touching stillness. Even if our mind continues to fill up with distractions, we gently bring ourselves back to our breath.

◆ Time

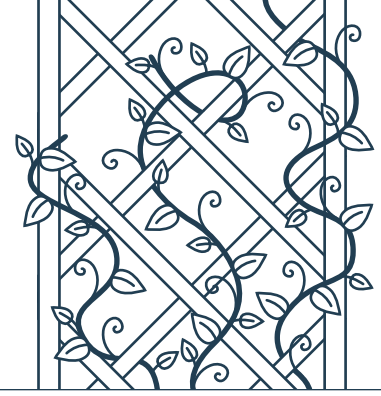
Whether used to help us settle into or pause during a meeting or service, or to punctuate our day, breath prayers are short, but repeated several times for 1-2 minutes.

Breath Prayer can also be used over an extended period of time as part of other contemplative prayer practices.



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BREATH PRAYER



OUTLINE

1 Find a phrase

Look up a simple verse from Scripture, a prayer, poem or write your own phrase. Ideally, it is short and fits easily into one inhale and exhale. It might be useful to stick with a specific phrase for an extended period of time and learn it by heart.

Examples:

*The breath of God, (inhale)
gives us life. (exhale)*
Job 33:4

*The LORD is my shepherd; (inhale)
I lack nothing. (exhale)*
Psalm 23

*Nothing can separate us, (inhale)
from the love of God. (exhale)*
Romans 8:38-39

*You are before all things, (inhale)
in you all things hold together. (exhale)*
Colossians 1:17

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, (inhale)
have mercy on me, a sinner. (exhale)*
Desert Fathers and Mothers

*I breathe in peace, (inhale)
I breathe out love. (exhale)*
Christine Valtner-Paintner

*In freedom, I lie down. (inhale)
Exhaustion is not my calling. (exhale)*
@BlackLiturgies

Another common formula is a name for God followed by your desire, for instance:

*Spirit. (inhale)
Peace. (exhale)*

2 Still

Stop what you are doing and take a moment to be still, whether physically, emotionally or both.

3 Breath

Notice your breathing. Use the natural contours of your in and out breaths to pray your chosen phrase. As you inhale, you whisper or say in your mind the first line of the phrase. As you exhale, you whisper or say in your mind the second line of the phrase.

When in a group, one person can gently lead others through the prayer: slowly saying the phrases aloud; encouraging everyone to inhale when the first part of the phrase is spoken and exhale when the second part of the phrase is spoken.

4 Repeat

Repeat step 3 at least three times, or for 1-2 minutes.