

Breath Prayer

Breath Prayers are short prayers, one phrase that can be either petitions or praises. They are usually no longer than 7-9 syllables. They help still our busy minds to focus on one thing—God.

Examples:

- “Lord, have mercy on me.”
- “Be still and know that I am God.”

Explanation

Breath prayer is a meditative prayer in which we pause, slow down and focus on God’s presence. The repetition allows us to ponder our words deeply, to mean them in the core of our being. The original breath prayers were taken from the Psalms, a single line or phrase reminding us of the whole.

The short phrase is prayed in rhythm with ones breathing so that, in a sense, we are praying our petition or praise with the very rhythm of life. Since before the 4th century the Breath Prayer has been the most common discipline for training to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

As our prayer becomes as natural as breathing, we may be able to pray without ceasing. Our breathing becomes prayer.

Steps

1. Choose a prayer

Choose a word or phrase, either from scripture or a personal prayer, or choose to pray a common breath prayer such as “be still and know that I am God” or the Jesus prayer, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner”. This step also works well after steps 2 and 3, inviting God in the stillness to bring a prayer to mind.

2. Posture

Position yourself in a way you can sit comfortably for the duration of the prayer. Quiet yourself inwardly, inviting God to meet with you.

3. Breath

Be aware of your breath—breathe deeply, filling your lungs, and naturally unhurried. Be aware of the still points of your breathing—the moment you are neither breathing in nor out—and be aware of how these are points of rest for your body.

4. Pray [and listen]

Pray the phrase you have chosen in rhythm with your breathing. Repeat the prayer over and over until you are able to pray it without having to focus on the words. Acknowledge any thoughts that come to mind, but then allow them to pass, keeping your focus on your breathing and your listening.

5. Close

When finished, slowly open your eyes and take a moment to reflect on how you’re feeling. Carry that with you, continuing the prayer throughout the activities of your day.

