

Breath Prayer

Breathing is a rhythmic activity that we often take for granted. We breathe continually. We breathe all night while asleep. Without breath we could not live.

The oxygen we take in surrounds us and just as we cannot live on one single breath of air, our souls cannot live on just one moment with God. To pray and to live with Christ is also a rhythmic activity that takes us through our days and our nights. To pray continually is to make prayer a regular part of our daily existence.

Breath prayer, or Prayer of the Heart, is an ancient practice dating back centuries. Historically, it is associated with the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Breath prayer is intended to be a very short, simple, easily repeated prayer that flexes and adjusts to where you find yourself with God at any moment along your journey. A breath prayer is usually said silently, but you can also consider sharing this prayer with a community or group who repeat it together.

How to pray a breath prayer

1

Begin with silence.

Sit before God and consider the state of your soul at that moment. Are you tired? Agitated? Restless? Anxious? Content? Pensive? Doubting? Rejoicing? Consider your deepest desires and take that desire (or praise or thanksgiving) and pair it with the reality that God is present to you in that moment, that you are a beloved child of God.

2

State your reality.

You will have two thoughts become clear to you in this moment. The first is that you have a need, praise, or a celebration to place before God. The second is that God will meet you in your place of need or will receive your praise.

You may want to write down a few words that state your need as well as a few words about your understanding of how God loves you.

*“Be joyful always;
pray continually;
give thanks in all
circumstances,
for this is God’s will
for you in
Christ Jesus.”*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

3

Pick an attribute of God.

Choose a word or phrase that will serve as a title for God in your prayer. Some examples are: *Almighty, Authority, Encourager, Lamb of God, King, Holy, Redeemer, Peacemaker, Healer, Protector, Glorious One, Counselor, Defender.* Look through the Psalms or other places in Scripture and notice how people speak of God. Which word or phrase resonates with you?

4

Add your need/praise/thanksgiving.

Sum up what it is you want to say to God or ask of God in two to four words. This could sound like, "grant me peace," "heal my body," "thank you for life," or "give me clarity."

5

Create your Breath Prayer.

Put these two thoughts together into a short, one sentence prayer.

Some examples are as follows:

- *Great Healer, restore my body.*
- *Peacemaker, bring me your peace.*
- *Lamb of God, you are holy.*
- *Wonderful Teacher, show me your ways.*

6

Pray your Breath Prayer often.

Breathe in your name for God then breathe out your praise or petition.

You can do this as you work, walk, fall asleep, enter into a tense space in your life, as you head to school, or go about your daily activities. Your prayer may change from day to day or even hour to hour. You may even pray the same prayer for years.

Just as we breathe all day long, Breath Prayer is a way to bring a normal, often unconscious activity to a place where you can use it to pray to God often.

For more information on Breath Prayer, please refer to *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele A. Calhoun.