

Breath Prayer has been practiced in the church for millennia. It is a form of contemplative prayer linked to the rhythms of breathing. Contemplative prayer is prayer that is focused on being with God, awakening to his presence in all things. Contemplative prayer in some forms can be prayer without words, or few words. This allows us to be released from thinking too much about praying the “right words,” being in our heads too much as we pray, and being released into praying with our hearts instead. This is why breath prayer is also called “prayer of the heart.”

The purpose and desire is to pray a simple, intimate prayer of heart-felt desire before God. It is another way to practice the presence of God, or staying present to God in the moment. God is close to you, closer than your breath. The more you practice breath prayer, the more you learn to pray without ceasing. Breath prayer is one way to do full and embodied prayers with your whole being, which brings to mind Acts 17:28: “For in him we live and move and have our being.” It is also a critical reminder that just as we can’t live without breathing physically, we can’t live without breathing spiritually with God as the source of oxygen to our souls.



How to Start

Practice by taking full, deep breaths, sometimes called belly breathing. Most of us only breathe with our chests, a very shallow form of breathing. Fill your chest, your ribs, and your belly with a full breath. Take 10 full breaths. What do you notice about your body? How do you feel? Maybe you notice that you carry tension in your chest and you feel anxiety. Or maybe you notice that your heart is beating strongly and you feel healthy. Pay attention to what your body is feeling.

Breath prayer links your rhythm of breathing in this way:
Breathe in, calling on a biblical name or image of God.
Breathe out, sharing a simple God-given desire.
And repeat

Here is one breath prayer:
Breathe in, “Be Still and Know.”
Breathe out, “That I am God.”
Breathe this breath prayer 10 times.
Breathe slowly, taking your time, there is no rush.

After some time in this reflective kind of prayer ask yourself these questions for better understanding.
What do you notice right now?
How easy is it for God to get your attention?
When are you able to hear God’s still, small voice best?
In what ways has God been inviting you just to be with him?
When is God most present with you and you most present to God?
How is God inviting you to be in this posture of being still and knowing that he is God in the coming months?

What Do You Notice?

There are many examples of breath prayer. Maybe you are drawn to a certain name or image of God, and longing or desire. Take some time to examine what those might be, and perhaps what comes to mind will form your personal breath prayer for a season. It is amazing how simple a practice can bring about so much transformation holistically. As you breathe and pray, may you find new life.