

Breath Prayer

About:

Breath prayer is an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. Known as the “Jesus Prayer” or “Prayer of the Heart,” early practitioners would repeat to the rhythm of their breath the phrase, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” In time, the prayer was shortened to, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy” or simply, “Jesus, mercy.”

Breath prayer is a good example of “praying without ceasing” and has the potential to become as natural as breathing. It is intended to be a very short prayer of praise or petition, just six to eight syllables. The words of the prayer can be easily adjusted to your heart’s desire.

Praise is expressed by calling on one of the Divine names such as God, Jesus, Lord, Father/ Mother, Christ, or Spirit. Or you may prefer another name of adoration. Your request or intention is comprised by the words following. The breath prayer is usually said silently within. But some people sing it; others chant it. It’s your prayer; use it your way.

You may also use the breath prayer for a focused time during a daily spiritual practice. Simply repeat the prayer over and over keeping your attention on the prayer. If your attention wanders, gently return to the prayer.

Begin with 5 minutes and gradually increase the time to 15 or 20 minutes as you become disciplined with the prayer. You may want to use a timer to free yourself from watching the clock. Some find it useful to write in a journal of their experience with the prayer.

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Instruction

Close your eyes and recall the line “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Be still, calm, peaceful, open to the presence of God.

With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Imagine that God is actually asking, “(Your name) what do you want? Like the blind man on the road to Jericho, Jesus kindly looks you in the eyes and asks, “What do you want from me?”

Give God a simple and direct answer that comes honestly from your heart. Write down the answer. If you have more than one answer, write them down. Your answer may be one word such as peace or love or help. It may be several words or a phrase such as “feel your presence” or “lead me into life.” Whatever your answers, they are the foundation of your breath prayer.

Select the name that you are most comfortable using to speak with God. Combine it with your written answer to the question God asked you. This is your prayer.

Breathe in the first phrase/word (generally your invocation of God’s name) and breathe out the second phrase/word (request or need).

Sometimes you may want to reverse the practice a bit by sitting in silence and letting the Spirit pray through you. Ask for God to reveal *your* name, and God’s desire for *you*. This can be a profound experience. You may wind up hearing something like, “Beloved, you are enough,” or “Mighty One, rest.” Wait on God and see how you may be renewed.

Sample Breath Prayers

Jesus, let me feel your love.

Lord Show me your way.

Holy one, heal me.

Jesus Alleluia, have mercy.

Holy Wisdom, Guide me.

Father/Mother (Abba/Amma), let me feel your presence.

