

Prayer Guide – Week 5

BREATH PRAYER

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Breathing is an unconscious thing. And breath prayer reminds us that just as we can’t live on one breath of air, we can’t live on one breath of God. God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breathe Him in all day long. After all, it is in Him that “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Breath prayer reminds us that each breath we are given is God’s gift and that God’s Spirit is nearer to us than our own breath.

Breath prayer or “prayer of the heart” has been practiced in the church for a millennia. The Eastern Orthodox Church in particular has seen breath prayer as a way of living out Paul’s instruction to “pray without ceasing.” The “Jesus Prayer” is a breath prayer described in *The Way of the Pilgrim*:

Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bend your head, close your eyes and, breathing softly, in your imagination, look into your own heart. Let your mind, or rather, your thoughts flow from your head down to your heart and say, while breathing: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts. Be serene, persevering and repeat them over and over again.

The Jesus Prayer combines “Son of David, have mercy on me” (Luke 18:39) with “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Breathing in, you pray “Jesus, Son of God,” breathing out, you say, “have mercy on me, a sinner.” This short repetitive prayer frees you from linear thought and allows you to begin to pray in your body, not just your mind. It is meant to be a lived, breathing rhythm of surrender. And it is a constant reminder of the One in whose presence you stand.

To practice breath prayer, ponder the nearness of God. Settle deeply into the truth that Christ is in you. Deeply breathe in, repeating any name of God that is dear to you. As you exhale, voice a deep desire of your heart. The brevity of the prayer allows it to be repeated over and over throughout the day.

Prayer Invitations

These invitations are suggestions to help you pray. Remember to write your prayers and place them in your prayer box.

- Examples of breath prayers:

Breathe in “Abba,” breathe out “I belong to you.”

Breathe in “Healer,” breathe out “Speak the word, and I shall be healed.”

Breathe in "Shepherd," breathe out "Guide and lead me."

Breathe in "Lord," breathe out "Here I am."

Breathe in "Jesus," breathe out "Have mercy on me."

- Become comfortable. Breathe deeply, intentionally place yourself before God. In rhythm with your breathing, gratefully inhale the breath of life. Exhale remembering that Jesus gave His last breath for love of you. Gently and thankfully repeat, "Breath of life, breathe on me." Dear Jesus...
- Decide to pray the Jesus Prayer (Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) or some other scriptural breath prayer as often as you are able during one day. If you worry about forgetting, set an alarm at every hour to remind you or put the prayer on your car mirror. Reminders should be gentle and not forced. In the evening, spend time telling the Lord what it means to you to be able to return to Him again and again during the day with one particular prayer. Dear Jesus...
- Is there someone for whom you wish to pray ceaselessly? Listen deeply to what Jesus' desire for this person might be. Form a breath prayer naming God's adequacy and your desire for the person. Throughout the day as they come to mind, offer up your prayer. Don't allow yourself to be drawn into long prayer dialogues about what you want God to do in this person's life. Let the breath prayer carry all your desire to God. Write down your breath prayer and place it in your prayer box. Dear Jesus...
- Begin and end each day with your breath prayer. Let it be the word that comes to mind as you wake and as you fall asleep. Dear Jesus...

Prayer Advice

"Think often on God, by day, by night, in your business and even in your diversions. He is always near you and with you; leave him not alone."

Brother Lawrence

"In prayer we seek God. We do not seek peace, quiet, tranquility, enlightenment; we do not seek anything for ourselves. We seek to give ourselves...to God. He is the all of our prayer."

M. Basil Pennington

Resources:

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson

Spirit Windows: A Handbook of Spiritual Growth Resources for Leaders by Ann Z. Kulp

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives by Dallas Willard