

How to Practice Breath Prayers

by Sarah Bessey

Breath Prayer is an ancient form of prayer and it is easily adaptable. Simply choose one or two lines to meditate on and inhale and then exhale through them.

*The most common form of breath prayer is known as **The Jesus Prayer**.*

So with that as an example, you would do this:

Inhale. Fill your whole self with breath.

Feel air in your lungs. And then say:

Lord Jesus Christ, son of God,

Exhale slowly and fully.

Have mercy on me, a sinner.

And simply repeat this practice. Start with ten good breaths in and out, with the words.

(Consider switching the word “sinner” for “your beloved child” and notice how your body and soul responds to the change.)

Try to breathe through this prayer for five quiet minutes. Now let’s begin.

A Centering Practice to Begin

Become aware of your body. Sit in a way that is comfortable for you, a position that will allow you to take a deep breath in and out. Close your eyes.

Then imagine a room or a place where you feel safe, your own sanctuary: it can be a real place or one that exists in your imagination. Imagine yourself in that sanctuary. Imagine the way the air smells and the way the light feels.

Breathe slowly and deeply while holding that place in your mind for a few moments, until you have all the details of it around your soul.

You’ll enter into your time of prayer or meditation from within that sanctuary.

This is where you are now, with a God who is as strong as a fortress, and being gathered to God as a hen gathers her chicks under her warm, kind, capable wing. (Psalm 91)

Breath Prayers for Anxious Times

Within that sanctuary, begin to breathe through a prayer you've chosen as we discussed above. These are a few lines from Scripture that I have prayed over the years. You could also use your own words or lines from a poem or a song.

(From Matthew 11:28-30)

*Inhale: **Humble and gentle One,***

*Exhale: **you are rest for my soul.***

(From John 15)

*Inhale: **True Vine and Gardener,***

*Exhale: **I abide in You.***

(From Romans 8:38-39)

*Inhale: **Nothing can separate me,***

*Exhale: **from the love of God.***

(From Psalm 46:10)

*Inhale: **Be still***

*Exhale: **and know you are God.***

(From Matt. 6:10)

*Inhale: **On earth***

*Exhale: **as it is in heaven.***

(From 2 Cor. 12:9)

*Inhale: **Your grace***

*Exhale: **is enough for me.***

(From 1 John)

*Inhale: **There is no fear***

*Exhale: **in your Love.***

(From Psalm 23)

*Inhale: **I will not be afraid***

*Exhale: **for You are with me.***

(From Psalm 46:1)

*Inhale: **You are our refuge***

*Exhale: **and our strength.***

(From Psalm 74:16)

*Inhale: **Both day and night***

*Exhale: **belong to You***

(From Psalm 91:1)

*Inhale: **I find rest***

*Exhale: **in Your shelter.***

(From Philippians 4:7)

*Inhale: **Peace of Christ,***

*Exhale: **guard my heart and mind.***

Start with ten good breaths in and out, with the words that are most meaningful or steady to your soul.

And then:

When you are finished, imagine yourself slowly leaving that sanctuary.

Transition slowly from prayer to rising.

May the peace of God give you renewed hope and wisdom,

May you find the strength you already carry within you to be enough,

May the grace of God be sufficient,

May you find a deep breath when the air around you is thin,

May you grow in compassion in these days,

May you love well, not in spite of these anxious times but because of them.