

## Breath Prayers for Our Life

For many, a common barrier to prayer is the discipline of maintaining a regular time and place when they pray. For others, it is being mindful enough — getting out of the details of life and remembering to pray as they go throughout the day. Today we will sit with a simple prayer practice that is short but intentional, neither requiring a set time nor asking us to leave the details of life.

In a Benedictine monastery, a bell ringing seven times each day is a “call to prayer” for the monks and guests. It signals prayer at set times and with set liturgies. For us, the everyday experiences of our life at work, at home, and in various relationships can be this kind of bell ringing. Regular life events can become triggers to remind us of the “with God life” and draw us into a brief moment of reflective prayer — a breath prayer.

When Paul said to “pray without ceasing,” that phrase in Greek means *without omission or intermittently, but regularly*. Breath prayers are a traditional way to capture that spirit. They are simple, one-sentence prayers that are repeated many times a day or even a number of times in a row during a time of prayerful meditation. Examples of breath prayers from the Bible are “His love endures forever” repeated in each verse of Psalm 136 or the Jesus Prayer — “Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, a sinner” — which combines the words from Luke 18:13 and 39.

Often people pray breath prayers by speaking the first phrase of the prayer while inhaling, pausing, and then speaking the second phrase of the prayer while exhaling. This adds a calming physical integration to the prayer.

Beyond the above examples, other breath prayers adapted from Scripture include the following:

- “Speak, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:10)
- “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)
- “My soul finds rest in God alone.” (Psalm 62:1)
- “My soul glorifies the Lord.” (Luke 1:46)
- “In you we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)
- “Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift.” (2 Cor. 9:15)

We can also personalize Breath Prayers for everyday events:

- First sitting down to work: “All I do to glorify you.”
- Before a stressful meeting: “My soul finds rest in God alone.”
- When you want to over-control or micromanage: “You are God, and I am not.”
- During a moment of gratitude: “I receive Your gift” or “Father, I love you too.”
- When God seems absent: “In you we live and move and have our being.”
- When you feel stuck on a project or solution: “Speak, for your servant is listening.”
- When frustrated with children, roommates, or a spouse: “Who is the \_\_\_\_\_ you want me to be right now?” (parent, friend, wife, etc)
- While experiencing hurry: “Be still and know that I am God.”
- Interacting with a challenging coworker or client: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
- At moments of completion or success: “All of my work is your gift.”
- At moments of impasse or failure: “All of my work is your gift.”

*15 minutes*

Consider some of the major tasks or key experiences of your week where you would like to be more intentionally mindful of God's presence to you. You might identify those elements of your work (people, projects, events, etc.) which are most stressful or challenged. Perhaps you could identify the times when you feel anxious, alone, angry, or overwhelmed at home. Note the times of deepest enjoyment and gratitude during most days.

Choose a breath prayer from the list above or write your own simple breath prayer, and then connect it to some of those elements of a typical day that you've identified.

*5 minutes*

In silent prayer, reflect on one of these aspects of your day above. Imagine it. Ask God if he has anything to share with you about that. Continue to repeat that breath prayer associated with it in a meditative prayer response. Write down any impressions from your prayer time.