

practice

breath prayer

Jane Colling takes us
through the ancient
practice of breath prayer

Illustration: Sarah Louise Bedford

Breath prayer is an effective and easy method of prayer that brings us closer to God, making us aware of his presence. For he is closer than our breath, and helps bring peace and regain perspective.

Some say breath prayers originated from the contemplative way of life led by the Desert Fathers and Mothers as long ago as 200AD. One approach they used was repetition of confession on the exhaled breath, and acceptance of forgiveness on the inhaled breath. In the New Testament, Paul stirs us in 1 Thessalonians 5: 16 - 18 to '*pray without ceasing*'. We can do this by making prayer part of our everyday natural rhythm - just like breathing.

We wake - we pray, we eat - we pray, we travel - we pray, we work - we pray, we sleep - we pray. May the breath/spirit we breathe be the breath that God first breathes into us. We aim for prayer to become as natural as breathing. Using a biblical truth or a verse from a hymn as a breath prayer is a meditation that God finds sweet and acceptable (Psalm 19: 14) and brings us into communion with him.

putting prayer into practice

Imagine when you were young, sitting close to a good friend and whispering something special to them. Try lowering your voice and imagine sharing a treasured secret with God. This is the privilege of breath prayers, repeating with confidence to our loving Heavenly Father the truth of his living Word.

'Lord, I love you; Lord, you love me.' 'Father, I am yours; Jesus, you are mine'

In clinical practice sometimes we know the challenges ahead of us: having to break bad news, a poorly child, a person in pain. In these situations, breath prayers can help us slow down and gather strength from the Holy Spirit. You will not only go into the problem better equipped, but '*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*'. (Philippians 4:7)

phrases of truth

Think of a couple of short phrases of truth, repeat them under your breath God-ward as you prepare yourself.

(Inhale) Lord, you're near me

(Exhale) Lord, you hear me

(Inhale) May the light of your presence...

(Exhale) shine through me to others

(Inhale) Peace and joy of God...

(Exhale) flow through me to others.

Breath prayer is a tried and tested method of prayer. Why not make it part of your spiritual toolkit? God will honour your simple actions and make his presence more tangible to you as you meditate on his truth. 🌿

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