

# Breath Prayer

## *September*

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. This month we will sit with a simple prayer practice that is short but intentional. And the “call to prayer” that reminds us will be the everyday experiences of our work.

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 & 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 aspect to the prayer.

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

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

For this week, consider some of the major tasks or key outcomes of your work. Or identify those elements of your work which are most stressful. Choose a breath prayer from the list above or write your own simple breath prayer, and then connect it to that element of your work. Consider beginning the day (at the desk or while driving in) by taking five minutes to pray this prayer while reflecting on that aspect of work. Then throughout the day, silently repeat it as the situation, task, or stress comes back to mind.

Stick with this practice for the week, perhaps changing your breath prayer for each day. At the end of a week, you could have five simple prayer prompts connected to five common experiences at work.

## Examples Breath Prayers for Work 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.”
- When you feel stuck on a project or solution: “Speak, for your servant is listening.”
- 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.”

## Breath Prayer as an Extended Meditation

If you find this simple, portable method of breath prayer helpful in refocusing you on God’s presence, consider an extended breath prayer meditation for outside of work. In the Ignatian spiritual tradition, learning to name and trust our desires becomes a way for us to sense God’s connection to us in them. You can connect a reflection on your pressing desires to a breath prayer response.

- **Attend to God’s presence.** Pause to remember that God is already present to you, knows your desires, and loves you without conditions.
- **Sit with the question, “What do you want?”** Jesus often asks this question of his followers (John 1: 35-38, Mark 10:51). Imagine Jesus sitting with you and asking you this question, by name. Be honest.
- **Reflect on that want.** Keep reflecting on the deeper desires beneath what you want. Instead of just “less anxiety about finances,” perhaps you want to know that God provides for you or you want peace and courage.
- **Breath prayer.** When you feel like you are close to your truest desire before God, turn it into a simple breath prayer. Spend two or three minutes simply praying it while breathing. God wants us, not the complexity of our prayers.
- **Carry the prayer into your day.** Remember that breath prayer and pray it in several moments of meditation upon God’s love for you during the day.