

Prayer for Anxious Times*

Given the heightened anxiety that many of us may be feeling, I also wanted to share a quick reflective practice that I find to be helpful, particularly at times like these. It is way of praying with your breath. It does not magically make all of this go away or serve as a cure or a substitute for talking to a medical professional, therapist, or spiritual guide. But it can offer us a moment of quiet, rest, and calm...an opportunity to re-focus and re-center ourselves and our hearts. Like all things, you may find some of these suggestions helpful for you, some not. Take what you need and leave the rest. On a side note, this is also a wonderful practice to do with children.

How to Practice Breath Prayers

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 the air in your lungs.

*And then say: **Lord Jesus Christ, son of God,***

*Exhale slowly and fully. **Have mercy on me, your beloved child.***

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

Now let's begin:

A Centering Practice

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, you and God, being gathered to God's self as a hen gathers her chicks under her warm, kind, capable wing.

Within that sanctuary, begin to breathe through The Jesus Prayer written above or one of the Scriptural options below. You can also use your own words or lines from a poem or a song.

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

Try to breathe through this prayer for five quiet minutes.

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

Transition slowly from prayer to rising and pray the following:

**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.**

Scriptural options for the Breath Prayer

(From Matthew 11:28-30)

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

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

**borrowed and adapted from Sarah Bessey*

(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 Psalm 103: 4-5)

Inhale: You surround me with love

Exhale: and tender mercies.

Inhale: You fill my life

Exhale: with good things.

(From Philippians 4:7)

Inhale: Peace of Christ,

Exhale: guard my heart and mind.