

STAY AWAKE BREATH PRAYER

KEEP THE FAITH

When we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words.
Romans 8:26b (CEV)

BREATHE. PRAY. SLEEP. 17

Richard Lawton [Adelaide, South Australia]

For years, before going to sleep, I have spent time breathing deeply, in and out. Somewhere along the way, I incorporated an ancient prayer—The Jesus Prayer—breathing in as I prayed, “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God,” and breathing out as I prayed, “Have mercy on me” (or more often, “on us”).

Later, I added a prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God” (as I inhaled), “thank you for loving me” (as I exhaled).

Since that one sounded a bit selfish, I added a third breath prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, thank you for loving us.”

Finally, I added this petition: “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, help me tomorrow to love and serve you”—still breathing in and out.

After those four prayers, I breathe deeply, in and out, until I am asleep. Often sleep follows quickly. If I wake during the night, I repeat the breath prayers until I fall asleep again.

The Holy Spirit is the breath of God at work in our world and in us. Breath is sacred. Breath is life. What better way to seek God's mercy, to give thanks, and to prepare for sleep and for the coming day than by holding our prayers as close as our breath. <

TRY IT: Each night this week, focus on your breathing and allow these breath prayers to carry you into sleep.

20 JULY>AUGUST 2018

july 16–22

STAY AWAKE BREATH PRAYER

[MAY 29–JUNE 4]

+breathe

In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Job 12:10 (NRSV)

HOLDING MY LIFE 29

Kate Underwood [Dekalb, Illinois]

Breathing should be the most natural thing in the world. In and out—it is effortless and continuous. Yet, the act of breathing can sometimes be difficult. When I am waiting for news about a loved one who is ill and I fear the worst, I find myself holding my breath. When I am worried that I have done something irreparable or unforgivable, breathing feels impossible. The weight of my troubles are overwhelming, and I don't think I can endure.

Breathing is a gift from God. However many days, months, or years we live, God alone gives us breath. God is our life.

When I am scared or anxious and don't know what else to do, sometimes I simply need to breathe, to pause and take a break. Even when I am so upset that prayer eludes me, I can breathe deeply and focus on God.

Job 12:10 offers us a reminder of whose we are. Even Job, who suffered more than I can imagine, found comfort. Knowing that God was holding his life and his breath in God's hand gave him peace. <



PRAYER: Thank you, God, for giving us breath.
Teach us to breathe in your grace throughout
the good days and the difficult ones. Amen.

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Try Body Prayer

Elizabeth J. Canham

In order to move the focus of our prayers from asking to listening, we need practices that enable us to still body as well as mind. If our bodies are tense or if we are agitated, it is likely that our minds will be unfocused. The Hebrew people prayed with their bodies; and many of the Psalms were written for processions, dance, and ritual drama. We too can embrace body prayer and discover how it leads us into stillness of mind. . . .

The following exercise can become a helpful, regular prelude to listening prayer.

- Begin with a few stretches reaching up, opening the arms, and then placing your open hands together in a posture of receiving. Repeat the stretches several times and pay attention to your breath. Allow your breathing to become deeper and slower.
- When you are ready, sit in a comfortable chair that offers good back support, and place your feet on the floor with your hands open in your lap. Continue to observe your breathing, and become aware of how your body feels.
- Begin relaxing by focusing on your feet and gradually moving up your legs, torso, neck, and head, consciously relaxing each area. Sometimes you will notice that tension or pain exists even after relaxation; in your mind go back to that place, tighten the muscles around the pain center, and then let go.
- By this time your regular breathing rhythm will help you to be still, and you can begin to repeat the phrase: “Be still and know that I am God.” It is helpful to speak aloud if it does not disturb anyone else. Be still. . . . Be. . . .