

Breath Prayer

There is a long history of Christian prayer that aims to move us “from head to heart.” Prayers of the heart are typified by short phrases. They are repeated first on the lips and then in the mind, until they take on a life of their own deep within us. When such prayers become embedded in our life awareness and daily activity, they have truly become “heart prayers.”

Ron DelBene, an Episcopal priest who developed a contemporary method of breath prayer, suggests the following to find your own breath prayer:

Visualize Jesus standing before you, asking you: “(your name), what do you want me to do for you?” Let your response surface from deep within. If more than one thing comes to mind, identify the root desire beneath all the others.

Next, identify how you normally address God in prayer: Lord, Jesus, Holy One, Living Spirit, Eternal God, Creator, Shepherd? Find your name for the divine being.

Combine your desire with your name for God in a single short phrase that flows easily in your mind. You may need to experiment with phrasing to find a comfortable rhythm.

Sit quietly and repeat the phrase gently in your mind for several minutes. Take a walk, repeating your prayer while you move. Note how the prayer shapes your perceptions. You can carry this prayer with you through the day. It fits well with many solitary activities from common household chores and routine tasks to standing in line and sitting in traffic jams! It is a good companion for rhythmic exercise such as walking, jogging, or swimming as well.

Repeated prayers tend to deepen and expand in meaning as they are used in various contexts of life. Over time, the repetition creates a space in which words fall away and we become more aware of the Presence they point to.

*Adapted from Marjorie Thompson,
Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life, pp.47-48*