Spiritual Practice for November: Breath Prayers

One of the questions many people have is how to follow Paul’s instruction to pray without ceasing. Most of us have a hard enough time praying regularly. How are we supposed to manage praying without ceasing?

One of the spiritual practices that helps with this is breath prayers.

Breath prayers help us pray without ceasing by focusing on something else that we all do without ceasing, every moment of our lives: breathing. But rather than just focusing on our breathing, breath prayers bring our attention to the source of our breath and life: God.

Breath prayers can be any short phrase or word that helps us focus on God. One of the oldest prayers of Christianity, the Jesus Prayer **(Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me)** can be a breath prayer, silently saying the first part as you inhale, the middle as you hold your breath briefly, and the last part as you exhale.

This Trinitarian prayer could also be used:

Lord have mercy (inhale)

Christ have mercy (hold)

Lord have mercy (exhale).

Favourite Bible verses are popular as breath prayers as well.

Years ago I read something that has become a breath prayer for me, although I can’t even remember where I read it. The author was talking about the Tetragrammaton. This is the 4-letter sacred name of God that God tells to Moses when he asks, “Who shall I say sent me?” God replies: YHWH.

This name is so sacred that Jews are forbidden to say it or write it. It is why you may have seen some writing by Jewish people use this form: G-d. It is also what is actually in the Hebrew text of the Bible when you see ‘LORD’ written this way, rather than like this: Lord.

What is unique about the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) is that it contains no vowels, so it is actually impossible to pronounce. It is translated into English by the terms Jehovah or Yahweh. But the vowels don’t actually exist in the name.

This led the author I was referring to earlier to note that the name itself is more of a sound, and the sound is like breathing: inhalation (YH) and exhalation (WH).

And so this has become a breath prayer for me. Several times throughout the day I will breathe deeply and think: YH – WH. I find it brings me peace and helps me experience God’s grace.

I hope that using the spiritual practice of breath prayer will help you experience more of the presence of God. I pray that you will be blessed by using this technique to help you pray without ceasing.