

Now begin to express yourself to God, but without words, using your breathing... first expressing a yearning for God, "My God, I long for you", just be the way you breathe.... maybe by breathing in and out deeply

I invite you to express trust and surrender... without words, expressing "My God surrender myself to you" ... you may want to do this by breathing out more fully... as though sighing deeply... each time you breathe out, feel yourself letting go... surrendering your whole self into God's hands...

Now take up other attitudes before God... adoration ... thankfulness ... praise... joy

If you tire of this simply return to an awareness of your breathing and rest in the awareness of God in the breath all around you and in the air you are breathing...

Closing Prayers

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with thine,
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die;
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.

Repeat the opening prayer of Elizabeth of the Trinity

Learning to be Still

Leader's Notes - Session 3:

Breathe on me, Breath of God

Opening Prayer

I desire to be all silence,
all adoration,
to penetrate ever deeper and deeper into God,
and to be so filled with God
that I may by my prayer
give him to those who do not know him.

Elizabeth of the Trinity

Introduction

Remind people that these sessions are intended to help us pray with the heart rather than the head. This session we are focusing on our breathing to help us still our minds and be in God's presence. Explain that in order to derive the benefit from these breathing exercises we need to spend at least ten or fifteen minutes on each one. Begin by becoming aware of sensations in various parts of the body as in the first session. Spend up to five minutes on this preparation. You may also like to use the following quotations at an appropriate point:

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2.7

Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord." *Ezekiel 37.5-6*

From the writings of Theophilus of Antioch, a second century bishop: God has given to the earth the breath which feeds it. It is his breath that gives life to all things. And if he were to hold his breath, everything would be annihilated. His breath vibrates in yours, in your voice. It is the breath of God that you breathe - and you are unaware of it. Three Books to Autolytus, 1,7

Exercise 1

Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor and your back supported by the chair. Close your eyes.

I invite you to become aware of the sensations in your body at this moment ... Be aware of the touch of your clothes on your shoulders ... on your back... your back touching the chair... your hands on your lap... become aware of your thighs touching the chair... become conscious of your feet touching your shoes... now become aware of your posture ... Once again... your shoulders... your back... your right hand... your left hand... your thighs... your feet... your sitting posture...

Now become aware of your breathing. Become aware of the air as it passes through your nostrils, nothing else... don't attempt to alter your breathing, if it is shallow leave it that way, just observe it. If you become distracted return to the task of observing each breath...

Allow 10 minutes or so for this, then go on to the second part of the exercise for another 10 minutes.

Now begin to notice which part of the nostrils you feel the touch as you breathe in.... and what part of our nostrils you feel the touch as you breathe out. If you can, become aware of the coldness or the warmth as you breathe in and out... you may also notice that the quantity of air passing through each nostril is different... be sensitive and alert to the lightest touch of the air as you breathe....

Coffee

In silence. Weather permitting it would be a good opportunity for people to go outside and breathe the fresh air. Invite them to notice in what way this is different. There will probably not be time for them to spend a long period outside.

Gather for sharing of previous group exercise and the individual one. Remind people of the ground rules.

Exercise 2

Now that we are more aware of our breathing this exercise is intended to help us be aware of the presence of God in and through our breathing. Begin with the basic breathing exercise. Again some quotations:

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit".
John 20.21-22

Let your calling to mind of Jesus be continually combined with your breathing and you will know the meaning of silence.

John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, 27th step, 2nd part

Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor and your back supported by the chair. Close your eyes. Now become aware of your breathing again. Become aware of the air as it passes through your nostrils... As you breathe in, be conscious of God's Spirit entering your whole being... fill your lungs with the divine energy God brings... As you breathe out, imagine you are breathing out all the impurities... fears... negative feelings... imagine your whole body radiant and filled with God's life-giving Spirit... stay with this awareness... if distractions come, return gently to the awareness of the act of breathing, of the air passing through the nostrils

Encourage people to use these exercises at home, but not for long periods at a time over several days. This is unlikely, but it can lead to hallucinations.

The final exercise leads into the closing prayers and uses the breathing to express various feelings to God non-verbally. These verses from Romans may be useful here:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
8.26-27

Exercise 3

Sit comfortably, feet on floor, back supported, eyes closed.... Become still again... be aware of your breathing, not altering it, just becoming aware of the air passing through the nostrils... reflect on the presence of God in the atmosphere around you.... Notice how you feel as you become conscious of God's presence in the air you are breathing in and out...