

Our Daily Breath
DEVOTIONAL



A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

365 Prayers & Practices
That Whisper Peace in a Shouting World



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Our Daily Breath Devotional: 365 Prayers and Practices That Whisper Peace in a Shouting World

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INTRODUCTION

Snowy days in the Midwest can be breathtaking—and bitterly cold. I know winter has arrived when I can see my breath forming small, wispy clouds against the dark cover of night. It's not a new phenomenon, yet I'm mesmerized by seeing what has been there all along—a vapor formed in my lungs and sent into the world, the invisible made visible.

I usually notice this as I'm letting my dogs outside before bed. I continue to exhale, now with intention, watching my warm breath float into the cold abyss of my backyard as I whisper-shout to my oversize goldendoodle to stop barking.

In the comings and goings of our days, it's easy to forget our breath. To take the many daily inhales and exhales (around twenty thousand) for granted. It's like that with our experiences of God too.

We want to connect with God, but we can barely catch our collective breath.

We're bombarded with digital noise, family needs, work demands, and heart-breaking headlines. Making time, summoning energy, and finding space for prayer can feel impossible. If you're tired, overstimulated, or stretched thin, you're not alone.

When the world swirls outside of us, our pulse quickens. Breathing becomes shallow. Our minds race. Our bodies ache. Our souls feel empty. We were never meant to live like this.

You've been holding your breath far too long.

What would it look like for you to exhale?

AS YOU LIVE AND BREATHE

This book is a collection of prayers and practices that whisper peace in a shouting world. Each day offers a simple way to pause, breathe, and awaken to the presence of God. It's for anyone who longs to breathe again—to pray in real life. It invites you into a rhythm of contemplation and action: inhale and exhale.

Breath prayers are simple phrases as you pray with your inhale and exhale. These short prayers match the rhythm of your breathing, helping you focus your body and mind on the One who gives each breath.

Do you have one minute to spare while commuting to work or standing in line at the grocery store? Then you have enough time to borrow a breath prayer.

For me, practicing simple breath prayers like “You are with me” on the inhale and “In every breath” on the exhale has been a powerful part of my spiritual journey.

By simply praying (silently or aloud) the *inhale* words as you breathe in and the *exhale* words as you let your breath go, you can find solid ground for your body and your soul. These simple prayers can return you to the Spirit of God, who is always with you (even when you forget that sacred truth).

SAMPLE BREATH PRAYER

Inhale through your nose for four seconds, hold, exhale for six seconds.

INHALE: You are with me

EXHALE: In every breath.

When you integrate breath prayer into your day, you don’t need the perfect place or the perfect words to pray. Anyone with breath in their lungs and a heart that beats can pray alongside their breath.

In Isaiah 42:5, we read that our breath is a gift from the Creator, “who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it.”*

No matter who you are or where you are, whether you’re aware of it or not, you have your breath. And that’s all you need to awaken to the presence of God in you and around you. Breath prayers help us stay mindful of God’s loving presence, which permeates every nook and cranny of our busy days. They are a grab-and-go practice, an offering to tuck into your heart and unfold throughout the day.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul encourages the people of God to “pray without ceasing.”† As we pray with our inhale and exhale, we become more awake to the presence of God in our messy, holy lives—our real lives, not the lives we wish we had, the ones we feel like we should have, or the ones we shine up for social media.

As we breathe deep the presence of Christ and then release our worries and fears with each exhale, we open ourselves to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

Prayerfully breathing into your day is one way to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And in God’s generosity, it’s a way to receive the grace of God too.

* NIV.

† NRSV.

GIVE US THIS DAY

The Lord's Prayer is perhaps the most well-known Christian prayer, spoken across languages, countries, and traditions every day. Jesus invites us to use it as scaffolding for our prayers—a structure to help us stay rooted and grow in faith.

Prayer is a way to enter the ongoing conversation our Creator has been having with us all along.

In Acts 17:24-25, we're reminded that God draws near to us: "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need." The One who gives life and breath satisfies every need.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prays, "Give us this day our daily bread." We can't hoard our daily bread (it would turn into croutons!), just as we can't hoard our breath (we'd die of carbon dioxide poisoning!).

We must rely, day by day, on God's provision to nourish both body and soul.

When my daughter was in the hospital with pneumonia, her pulmonologist got creative to help us understand what was happening. He grabbed a thick black marker and began sketching lungs on the glass wall of her room in the intensive care unit. "In your lungs, the main airways are called bronchi. They branch off into smaller and smaller passageways," he explained. "Your daughter is experiencing bronchospasms, which are making it hard for her to breathe."

I absorbed this information as I watched a machine breathe for my little girl, praying for her life. I stared at the drawing, struck by how much the lungs he drew resembled a root system—spreading, growing, sustaining life.

By the grace of God (and the help of modern medicine), my daughter began to breathe on her own again. Years have passed, but when I close my eyes, I can still see that hospital drawing. I can still hear that prayer I held on to when I didn't know what else to pray.

Give us this day our daily breath.

It's a prayer of the heart that asks God to give us roots, to help us grow, and to nourish us—mind, body, and soul.

What would it look like to trust God to care for you with every breath you take?

PRACTICING PEACE

The pages that await you offer daily words to borrow, prayers to exhale, and space to connect with God right where you are. This collection offers breathing room to rediscover spiritual practices through meaningful (but short) daily readings.

They take the same time to read as it would to watch a viral video of a cat riding a robot vacuum. (I can't promise I'll be as hilarious as a hairball on wheels, but I think the hope we unearth together will make up for it.)

* NLT.

In times that seem increasingly turbulent with each passing breath, my prayer is that these short readings will serve as compassionate companions on your journey of learning to know and love yourself, God, and your neighbor more fully.

There's no shame in missing a day (or week, or month), but if you can (and you can!), you'll find spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical benefits to intentionally getting into a daily rhythm of prayer.

Along the way, you'll find scientific discoveries, poems, art, and words of wisdom. Each entry follows the natural and liturgical rhythms of the year, day by day, season by season. You'll journey through Ordinary Time, Lent, and Advent, and you'll also find holy days that have been celebrated by the church over the centuries, which I've included because they remind us we belong to a wider story.

Each day, you'll find the following:

- **Scripture:** an anchor for your reflection
- **Breath prayer:** a short phrase to pray with your inhale and exhale
- **Reflection:** a brief devotion to help you awaken to God's presence in everyday life
- **Concluding thought:** simple tools and reflections, such as facts about breath, short takeaways, wisdom from others, invitations for self-reflection, prayerful practices and exercises, prayers to borrow and make your own, and prayerful poetry.

HERE'S HOW TO BEGIN

1. **Pause:** Rest your hand on your heart.
2. **Breathe:** Pray the inhale/exhale lines once or twice.
3. **Carry:** Borrow that prayer throughout your day.

You may pray alone, but you're never praying by yourself.

Across neighborhoods and nations, people are inhaling mercy and exhaling peace. This is our shared daily breath.

May each day be an invitation to a new rhythm—where contemplation meets compassion, where prayer becomes practice, where we inhale God's presence and exhale love. May each breath prayer help you listen for God's whisper and live it out in the noise of the world.

May the days to come offer an exhale for the breath you've been holding.

A PRAYER TO BEGIN

God who breathed life into being,
Creator of all,
Nourisher of souls,
Redeemer of life,
Who exists in and beyond all things,
We marvel at who You are
And pray that every breath we take
Would be an overflow of adoration,
Would honor and glorify You,
That every breath would whisper Your ways.
Holy God, bring the rhythms of Your grace
Into our daily comings and goings.
We belong to You;
No other comes close.
Reorder our realities
To reflect Your goodness and grace.
Creation groans, out of breath,
Gasping for air under the weight of us
Trying to do it our own way
Instead of shaping the way of our world
To bear Your glory.
O cosmic Christ, give us this day
Our daily breath.
Spirit, remind us that You
Dwell deep inside us,
That each inhale, each exhale,
Is a sacred gift from You alone.
Amen.

JANUARY 1

The Spirit of God made me what I am,
the breath of God Almighty gave me life!

JOB 33:4 (MSG)

INHALE: You were with me then;

EXHALE: You are with me now.

Excited. Overwhelmed. Unsure. As you look to this New Year, how are you feeling, *really*?

When we pray alongside our breath, we signal to our brains and bodies that, whatever the circumstances, at *this* moment, we are safe.

Inhale for four seconds. Hold for another four, and then slowly exhale for six to eight seconds.¹

Rest, even for a moment, in the truth that God's grace holds you now and will hold you in the future. With each breath, remember that you aren't alone in this big, terrible, beautiful, complicated world. You don't have to know what the future holds to rest in the promise that the One who holds the future holds you.

Breath by breath, God is writing your story. You aren't alone. Take heart.

This is only the beginning.

SACRED ECHOES

The grace of God means something like:

"Here is your life. You might never have been, but you *are*, because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you."²

Frederick Buechner

JANUARY 2

SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

The best thing you can do right now is to finish what you started last year and not let those good intentions grow stale.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:10 (MSG)

INHALE: I trust your unfolding work;

EXHALE: You're not finished with me yet.

At the beginning of a New Year, enthusiasm comes easily. We jot down resolutions. We vow to do more, to work harder, to just *be better*. (Whatever that means.)

But as time passes, distractions creep in, real life hits hard, and the work we meant to continue—whether in our faith, in our relationships, or at the gym—begins to stall.

Thousands of years ago, the church in Corinth was going through a similar struggle. They'd started strong in their generosity, eager to give and support others, but their follow-through was crumbling. When Paul wrote to them, he didn't come at them with shame or guilt. He just pointed them back to the truth that they didn't need to prove anything to God. They just needed to keep moving forward.

Saint Basil the Great, who is remembered today, embodied the spirit of perseverance Paul wrote about. A thoughtful theologian and fierce advocate for the poor in the fourth century, Basil moved beyond good intentions. He faithfully followed through, founding hospitals, caring for the forgotten, and shaping Christian thought for future generations. His life was a testament to the belief that faith is what we profess *and* what we continue to live out, step by step, breath by breath.

God isn't measuring your progress with a checklist or tallying up your failures. What

God began in you, God will be faithful to complete.*

What would it look like to stop chasing after some unattainable perfection? To release that breath you've been holding as you look ahead to the New Year?

• • • • • LET IT LINGER • • • • •

All you have to do is keep going—to let God's slow, steady work in you unfold as you continue showing up in love. The good work you bring into your home, your community, and your world isn't wasted.

As you live and breathe, God is moving in you, through you, and ahead of you.

Small steps still get you where you're going.

• • • • •

* See Philipians 1:6.

JANUARY 3

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

PSALM 51:10 (NRSV)

INHALE: Create in me

EXHALE: A clean heart, O God.

Every breath proves that God is still at work in us. Each heartbeat is an invitation to begin again—not through our own effort, but by receiving the renewal offered by the One who gives each breath.

The self-improvement industry is projected to reach \$86.54 billion by 2034.³ But Psalm 51 offers a way to a deeper kind of peace—a way that *surrenders* instead of *strives*.

David doesn't declare, "I will fix my heart." Instead, he asks God to do what only God can do: "Create in me a clean heart."

The same Creator who formed the heavens and the earth is still shaping you.

You don't have to force transformation. Renewal unfolds in the quiet moments: a deep inhale before rushing ahead, a moment of pausing to truly listen, a release of what no longer serves you.

Richard Rohr says that at the dawn of a New Year "we celebrate the rebirth of time. We wait for our God to do new things. We wait for who we are. We wait for the coming of grace, for the revelation of God. We wait for the truth. We wait for the vision of the whole. But we cannot just wait. We must pray."⁴

Take a breath. Let your inhale become a prayer. And as you exhale, release the pressure to fix yourself and instead, like David, ask God to do what only God can do.

RHYTHM OF BREATH

Every fresh heartbeat
Is an invitation to begin.
Each exhale holds promise
That new life is here.
As you wake,
You have breath—
A gift,
A reminder
That you are not alone.

JANUARY 4

Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.

PROVERBS 3:5-6 (MSG)

INHALE: I listen for Your voice

EXHALE: In every place, in everything.

As much as we crave clarity, some questions simply don't have answers. In a culture that constantly pushes for certainty and control, it can feel impossible to let go of the pressure to make everything *figureoutable*.

What if hearing God is simply listening with your heart in the everyday corners of life?

In everything you do, everywhere you go, God is already there. Not just in the obvious places. Not just in the quiet moments you manage to carve out. But in the *everything*—the exhaustion of work, the weight of the world, the breaking news, the unanswered prayers, the dinner dishes, the things you wish were different.

Take a deep breath.

As you exhale, listen to what God might be whispering to you.

SACRED ECHOES

Christian mindfulness is a practice of listening to God's voice as well as to the internal narrative that warps God's voice.⁵

Regina Chow Trammel and John Trent

JANUARY 5

When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

MATTHEW 2:10 (NLT)

INHALE: Breath of life,

EXHALE: Light my way.

In times of division and upheaval, it can seem out of touch to hold on to hope. But the darkest times are when we desperately need glimmers of goodness.

Poet Jan Richardson writes,

*Blessed are you
who bear the light
in unbearable times.*⁶

Her words serve as a gentle reminder that we're not just searching for the Light of the World, but we are also called to carry this Light. In the shadows of our lives, the Light hasn't disappeared; it's simply waiting for us to notice it again.

The One who illuminated the sky thousands of years ago continues to guide us today. When darkness closes in, it's easy to lose sight of that truth.

What does holding on to stubborn hope look like right now? How might you open your heart a little wider to make space for Light to get in, even when everything seems dark? And how can you embrace joy in your life?

As you take a deep breath, picture the shimmering light of Christ meeting you in the shadows—a sanctuary shining upon you and reaching out to you, even here, even now.

RHYTHM OF BREATH

Darkness is near,
This is true.
But the candle you hold—
The tiniest flicker—
Can illuminate
More than what you can see.
The whole world
Held in the palm
Of the One who lights the way.
Don't you think
That God can hold you too?
Don't be afraid.
Watch for the Light.
Inhale, exhale
Divine love for humanity,
Breath of life,
Breath of Light.
Let your breath be more than a wish,
More than a prayer.
Hope hides in the shadows.

JANUARY 6

EPIPHANY

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the
glory of the LORD rises upon you.

ISAIAH 60:1 (NIV)

INHALE: Light of the World,

EXHALE: Lead me in Your love.

Epiphany honors the moment when the magi, following the brilliance of a star, arrived at the feet of Jesus. When the radiance of heaven broke through the darkness of the world and those who had been searching finally found what they were longing for.

It's easy to think of Epiphany as something that happened long ago, but the invitation still stands to set aside what we're told will fulfill us—popularity, prestige, power—and move toward the Light that gives us life.

Maybe you're still waiting for your own epiphany, for something to change everything. But here's the truth: The Light has already come.

Even when the night is long. Even when clarity feels out of reach. Even when you are still searching.

The same God who placed a star in the sky illuminates your path. The same God who guided the magi guides you today.

God is still revealing, still illuminating, still leading the weary traveler home. Take a breath.

The Light will meet you where you are.

To find out more about Epiphany, see the liturgical calendar in appendix A.

PAUSE AND PONDER

In what areas of your life are you carrying
doubt or exhaustion into the New Year?

Where does the path ahead feel uncertain
or unclear?

JANUARY 7

Let us consider how we may spur one another
on toward love and good deeds.

HEBREWS 10:24 (NIV)

INHALE: You made us

EXHALE: To move toward love.

After all, if no one tends the flame, even a
candlelight service would go dark.

My son's kindergarten teacher gave out a cookie at the end of the day to anyone he noticed being a "smart cookie." I can still hear my son's excitement bubbling over as he climbed into the van, proudly proclaiming, "I got a 'smart cookie' cookie!"

We have to call out the good we see in others. Like a Christmas Eve candlelight service—one flame passed to another until the whole room glows—when we light a fire of encouragement, it spreads.

It's easy to fixate on what's wrong with the world, to spiral headfirst into cynicism and despair. Honestly, it takes very little effort to be a critic. The harder (and I'd say holier) work is to notice love alongside the hate.

If all we ever see is what's wrong, we'll never help create what's right.

The book of Hebrews reminds us, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." The word *spur* isn't passive—it means "to stir up" or even "to provoke."

We're not called to slap a spiritual bandage over the world's wounds. We're called to actively disrupt the evil of the world and point one another toward love, to help one another keep the flame alive. And that takes knowing one another. It takes choosing community when isolation is easier.

PAUSE AND PONDER

Like a teacher noticing the goodness of a child, where might you offer encouragement today? Whose flame might you help ignite?
