



calm, soulful

BREATHING

Made in the image of God, each of us contains three parts: soul, spirit, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Our physical body, spirit, and soul are interdependent in ways we may not recognize. God designed all parts of us to function together and impact one another. What we do with our physical bodies, including the ways we breath, impacts our inner worlds and vice versa. Science has discovered that slow, deep breathing works to relax our central nervous system and help bring calm to our bodies and inner worlds. A breathing exercise is one way that we can, like the psalmist in Psalm 131:2, learn to quiet our souls.

A calm breathing practice, combined with an awareness of the presence of God as the source of our breath of life, can bring a depth of peace that is beyond understanding. For some of us, slowing down in this way may take practice.

Before beginning this breathing practice, I normally place my hand on my chest and thank the Lord Jesus for being with me and for being in me. I let Him know He is welcome in me and thank Him for being my very breath of life. As I breath, I stay mindful of His presence and life-sustaining breath.

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

GENESIS 2:7

calm breathing **TECHNIQUE**

Calm breathing involves taking smooth, slow, and regular breaths. Begin by sitting or lying down in a comfortable position. If possible and if you desire, place your hand where you imagine God to be as He has come to dwell inside you and give life to your spirit.

1. Take a slow breath in through the nose, breathing into your lower belly until it rises (4 seconds)
2. Hold your breath (4 seconds)
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth (4-6 seconds)
4. Wait a few seconds to allow your body to relax before taking another breath

If we practice breathing three times a day for 5-10 minutes at a time for 30 days, we can help reset our nervous systems, according to neurotheologian Jim Wilder, PHD. When done, this has a profound impact on how we experience life and show up in relationships.

As I introduce this practice to people, I like to repeat the breathing sequence three times in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When finished, I invite people to scan their bodies and pay attention to how they feel different than before.

helpful hints

To avoid hyperventilating; it is important to pause for a few seconds after each breath.

Try to breathe from your diaphragm or abdomen. Our shoulders and chest area should be fairly relaxed and still. If this is challenging at first, it can be helpful to try this exercise by lying down on the floor with one hand on our heart, the other hand on our abdomen. Watch the hand on your abdomen rise as it fills our lungs with air, expanding your chest. (Our hand over our hearts should barely move, if at all.)

rules of practice

Try calm breathing for at least five minutes, three times per day for 30 days.

We do not need to feel anxious or overly excited to practice – in fact, at first, it can be helpful to practice while feeling relatively calm. When we train ourselves to be comfortable breathing this way when feeling calm, we can “strengthen” our nervous system to help us employ this practice when we feel the need to quiet from high levels of joy or difficult emotions. Remember, our central nervous systems functions much like a muscle and strengthen with training. Keep at this and you’ll gradually master this skill. Your relationships, and capacities will reap the benefits!

one last **TIP**

We don’t always need to combine this breathing sequence with prayer to reset or strengthen our nervous systems. This is a practice we can offer to anyone, not only followers of Christ. This is a life and relational skill that we all ideally learned as infants. Sometimes, though, our training didn’t get firmly established or our nervous systems were dysregulated for a number of reasons. Offering this breathing practice to our friends, family, neighbors, or coworkers is a kindness and could help them for a lifetime. We don’t need to be experts to share this skill with another, we can invite them to grow their abilities to quiet alongside us.

I have calmed and quieted myself like a weaned child with its mother...

PSALM 131:2