

Breath Prayer | *Ruach*

In the Bible, Jesus' best friend and disciple, John recounts the very bizarre story of when Jesus first appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. As I read this, close your eyes and imagine being present for this incredible moment:

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear... Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

John 20:19-22

As if seeing Jesus alive after witnessing his death wasn't strange enough, Jesus does this really odd thing where he leans in and *breathes* on them. To make it even more weird, as He breathes on them, He tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. It's all pretty unusual, until you realize that what Jesus is doing is actually a little bit of theatre. He is reenacting a scene from the early part of the Bible, a line from the story of the creation of Adam. In Genesis 2:7, it says:

“God formed a human from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.”

Genesis 2:7

See, in the original language, the word for “breath”, “spirit”, and “life” are all the same word – the word, “*ruach*”. The *breath* or *spirit* of God was placed inside us, to give life to our dust-formed bodies. And when the resurrected Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, “*Receive the Holy Spirit*”, He was reenacting this story as a way of saying, “once again, I am inviting you to be filled with the *ruach* (or, spirit and life) of God, to be spiritually resuscitated into new life.

Maybe that's why the practice of breath prayer is so powerful for so many of us. It's a practice of aligning our own breathing with a word or simple phrase, in a way that turns our breathing into a prayer. The idea is that our breathing becomes that connection point to the *ruach* of God, and a recognition that the Holy Spirit flows through us just like the air we're breathing. As we breathe in, we prayerfully take something into ourselves – *God's love, joy, peace, etc...* – and as we breathe out, we release something – fear, shame, guilt, control, etc... and we simply repeat it over and over again – sinking the truth ever deeper in our bodies, in our minds, in our spirits.

This morning, we want to use the words of Jesus in this particular story – “*Receive the Holy Spirit*” – and, as we breathe in, simply say with our minds (and our breath) “I receive”. Then, as we breathe out, we'll say the words “I release” and use that part of the practice to release any fear, shame, guilt, or need for control, that might prevent you from fully *receiving* from God today. So, let's breathe in, praying, “I receive” and breathe out, praying, “And I release”.

Breathe in: *I receive...*

Breathe out: *...and I release* **[Repeat]**

At your own pace, keep going, concentrating your heart and mind on those two simple prayers.

[60 seconds personal practice]

CONCLUDE WITH A SHORT PRAYER