

Prayer Exercise: The Mantra

The word "mantra" means "quieting the mind." It is a secret word or phrase repeated several times over in order to quiet oneself and become focused on God. Here's how to do it:

1. I find a comfortable sitting position. I sit quietly for a few moments, allowing my breathing to slow down on my body to relax.
2. I close my eyes and begin to focus all my attention on my breathing in and out. Many spiritual guides say, "Become aware of your breathing," because most of the time I don't even notice it. I observe it as though I were a scientist who has just discovered to his astonishment the strange and wondrous act of respiration. I note that as a further relax, my breathing gets slower, quieter
3. I choose a word or phrase that expresses my desire for God to be present. Some favorite mantras are "Jesus," "Maranatha" (or English translation, "Come Lord Jesus") and "My Lord, My God." I begin to call on God slowly and reverently repeating my mantra over and over in my mind.
4. I noticed that my mantra is gradually coming in sync with my breathing. Using the word, "Jesus," as I inhale I say the syllable "Je" and as I exhale I say "sus."
5. I continue this practice for several minutes. Over time (and it does take time), I will notice myself reaching a state of quiet.

Prayer Exercise: Linking the Many Me's and others

A way to pray ready-made prayers is to allow the prayers to link myself with the past and/or with others who prayed this particular prayer throughout the years. Doing so allows me to bridge across rifts between myself and my past.

1. I choose a prayer that I have prayed since my childhood and throughout my life
2. I pray it aloud very slowly and reverently, as I might imagine cloistered monks do.
3. I pray it a second time, imagining all of the me's of my past standing before God, praying it together in one voice. I pray with a happy six-year-old, an awkward 15-year-old, the idealistic 18-year-old and so on. I might pray it over and over again, each time bringing in a new (old) me from the past.
4. I pray it another time, imagining this motley crew being joined by future me's (a 50-year-old me, a 70-year-old me and 80 year old me) all fervently praying this prayer, each with its own motivations, dreams, and failures. I imagine that, despite the diversity within the many me's, my prayerful voices are in perfect unison as they reach out to God.
5. I pray it another time, imagining the me's slowly merging into one another. As this happens, I keep praying the prayer but slow it down as the me's merge.
6. I keep slowing down the prayer and imagining the merging until there is only one me praying softly. I allow the prayer to quietly slip away and allow myself some time in the stillness.
7. Repeat the exercise by imagining other people important in your life, alive or dead.