

Body Scan with Prayer

A body scan is a tool that helps you pay attention to what is happening in your body from head to toe. You practice the body scan by moving your awareness up or down your body and noticing what you find.

Practicing the body scan has many benefits. Primarily, it builds self-awareness of what is happening inside your body. It can also help you notice how you physically hold stress or other emotions. Many people find that practicing a body scan helps them relax, reduce tension, and fall asleep. People who practice it regularly sometimes experience an increased ability to remain present and aware in all areas of life.

A helpful variation to the standard body scan is to incorporate prayer into your practice. Like any other body scan, this variation begins with paying attention to your body, but it ends with praying based on what you notice.

The following script can help you practice or lead other people through a body scan with prayer.

Body Scan with Prayer Script

In a moment, I'm going to lead you through a body scan with prayer. After I guide you to focus on each part of your body, I will then invite you to pray. This invitation to prayer will be open. I'm not going to tell you what to pray for and this is on purpose. Instead, I invite you to not worry about praying for the right thing or in the right way, but to simply pray as you feel led.

To begin our practice, take a moment to get comfortable. You might want to find a quiet place to sit or even a place to lie down. If it feels comfortable, you can close your eyes. Or, if you prefer to keep your eyes open, take a moment to mentally set aside any distractions.

Pause for a moment

We're going to begin by taking in a few deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose and slowly let it out through your mouth. If you want, you can breathe in deeply to the count of four and breathe out slowly to the count of six. Notice what happens to your body as you take in just a few deep breaths.

Pause to notice and pray

I invite you to move your attention to your head. What do you notice? What sensations do you feel? Do you notice pain or discomfort? Tension or warmth? Any pleasant feelings? For just a few moments focus on nothing but your head and what you find there. Then, pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Move your attention to your face. What do you find? Do you notice any tension? Any feelings of stress? The next time you breathe out, allow your face to soften. Open your mouth slightly. Focus on nothing but your face for a few moments. Then, pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Notice your neck and shoulders. What do you feel? Do you notice pain, tension, or tingling? If you notice stress sitting in your shoulders, allow them to settle downward with your next out breathe. Focus your attention here. Then, pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Pay attention to your chest. What do you notice? Do you feel stuck or free? Is the sensations in your chest could speak, what would they say? Focus on nothing but your chest for a few moments, and then pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Move your attention to your arms. Move them around if it feels comfortable and makes sense to you. Do your arms feel heavy or light? Warm or cold? Are the sensations you find strong or barely noticeable? Focus your attention here and then pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Notice your hands. Are they cold or warm? Do they feel pleasant or uncomfortable? If the sensations in your hands had a color, what would it be? For just a few moments focus only on your hands and what they feel like, and then pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Move down to your stomach. Is there pain? Discomfort? Does it feel hot, warm, or cold? Do the sensations in your stomach feel small, medium, or large? Focus on whatever you find and then pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Move your attention to your legs. What do you notice? Is there tingling, burning, or warmth? Coolness, tiredness, or pleasant sensations? If the sensations in your legs could speak, what would they say? Focus on nothing but your legs for a few moments, and then pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

Notice your feet. What do you find? Wiggle your toes if you are able. How do they feel? Focus on nothing but your feet for a few moments, and then pray as you feel led.

Pause to notice and pray

As you finish praying, take in a few more breaths to close your time. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you breathe in, remind yourself—*God made my body*. As you breathe out, remind yourself—*and my body is good*. In through your nose—*God made my body*. Out through your mouth—*and my body is good*. Rest in God's presence. And when you feel ready, open your eyes or bring your attention back to the room.

A Few Notes

- After leading someone through the body scan with prayer, check in with their experience. What sensations stood out to them? Did they notice anything surprising? How were they led to pray? Many people pray for healing or strength related to areas of physical pain or dysfunction their attention is drawn towards. Other people are moved towards prayers of gratitude for parts of the body that feel strong and pain-free. Prayer might center around situations in life that relate to stress they find in the body. Or, prayer might become more metaphorical, as people pray based on what different body parts represent to them. If someone feels completely lost, you can offer these examples, but typically praying through the body scan comes naturally to people.
- Incorporating prayer into the body scan can be especially helpful for people who experience chronic pain, chronic illness, or physical manifestations of stress and anxiety. Using the standard body scan to focus on physical sensations of anxiety can worsen those physical sensations. Similarly, focusing on parts of the body that feel intense pain or other physical symptoms can increase emotional distress. Inviting God into the body scan process through prayer can help alleviate some of these common challenges. Prayer provides access to the goodness, comfort, and love of God as people approach both the good and challenging things happening inside of their body. It also divides attention away from difficult bodily sensations, which can lessen associated distress.
- On some occasions, the standard body scan will be a more helpful option than this variation. Once you have practiced adding prayer to your body scan, you can incorporate prayer into some or all of the scan as it feels helpful or return to the standard practice when that feels more appropriate.