



Summer Playlist

Part 8 – Take a Deep Breath

Dr. Travis Brawner

Today we're talking about breathing – something that just naturally happens, you don't have to think about it, and it's necessary for life. You have to breathe to live. There are few basic things that you have to have to live in the relatively short term. For instance, one of them is eating. You have to eat to live. If you haven't eaten in a while, you start to feel it, and that hunger takes over. The fact is you can actually survive up to a few weeks without eating. It would be an uncomfortable few weeks, especially after a couple of days, but you can physically survive as long as you're drinking some water. You can survive for a few days without water. So, you can survive a few weeks without food and then a few days without water,

But then of utmost importance is that you're breathing. You can only survive a few minutes without air. That's how acutely important air is. And we know that if you hold your breath, suddenly you feel like you need to take a breath. Isn't that great how it breaks down the needs that we have in the short term. We can survive a few weeks without food, a few days without water, and just a few minutes without air.

I showed this to my family last week and I said, "Isn't it cool how it breaks down with weeks, days, minutes?" They're like, "Yeah that is pretty neat, but if we're being honest, you need to add, for yourself, a fourth one in there. So, I admitted that I can only last a few hours without sweets. It is a basic need, and it fills in neatly the weeks, days, hours, minutes. Anyone else out there with a really strong sweet tooth. Yes. We believe you that you can have a meal without dessert. It's called breakfast. And for that we prefer pancakes with maple syrup, which is nothing like dessert.

But these are our basic needs. We have to breathe to live. We can only survive a few minutes; it's of utmost importance. We know that breathing comes from God because God created everything that exists, right? When he created the universe, he created us, he created the air that we breathe, and he created the breathing that takes place.

I want to look for a minute about how specifically that took place. If you have your Bibles, turn to Genesis 2: 7 – ***Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and then the man became a living creature.*** So, when you put this in the context of creation, it's pretty neat because it says, "then he became a living creature." God created everything – the sun, moon, the stars, the oceans, the ground, the plants, the other animals, and insects and everything else. And then he created mankind.

He had one more thing to do in creation. And other than the formation of woman from man's rib, this was the last act of his creation. After that, he rested. He breathed life into the nostrils of man, making him a living creature. Isn't that pretty neat that his last act of creation is the very thing that we can only go a few minutes without, breathing?

So, we understand that God gave us physical breath, but it's important to understand that there is physical breath and there is also spiritual breath. God gave us physical breath when he breathed life into the nostrils of man that we still have today, but he also breathes out spiritual breath and both are important to understand, and both are necessary.

I want to talk about this spiritual breath for a little bit. We're going to do that by looking at a few passages in scripture. First is 2 Timothy 3: 16 – **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** What does that mean that scripture is God-breathed? How does that work? How does God breathe out scripture? How do words come from breathing?

Let's talk a little bit about voice. We're going to talk about voice here in a little while also, but I want to explain something to you that helps you to kind of understand what this means that words are breathed out. We'll do that by talking about voice. You see, your voice comes from taking a breath into your lungs through open vocal cords. Then you close your vocal cords together and you force air through those closed vocal cords, and that's what makes the sound. Then, you tighten and loosen the vocal cords to change the pitch of your voice. We can communicate different things by different pitch, that's your inflection in your voice. Also, you can change the volume of your voice by changing the force with which you push air through those vocal cords, those closed vocal cords. That whole process is called vocalization, the making of the sound in your throat.

Then there's another part of voice which is called phonation. That's the forming of words with your lips and your tongue. You put that all together, you get something like, "How are you today?" And those words have meaning. That is what voice is. The thing to understand that is very important is that your breath is the engine that powers your voice. You can still whisper without your vocal cords. Sounds like it's not a voice; that's just simply making words with your lips and your mouth without closing your vocal cords. It still requires breath. Words require breath. Your breath is the engine that powers your voice. So, that helps us understand a little bit about how God breathes air, breathes life into the nostrils of man, and he also speaks out his Word. All scripture is God-breathed.

Matthew 4: 4 comes from the passage where Satan was tempting Christ in the wilderness after he had been baptized and is about to start his earthly ministry. He had been fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. That's a long time. By then, I'm thinking pancakes and syrup. Satan says, "If you're the Son of God, turn these rocks into bread so that you can eat." **4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"** His Word... You see, they are one in the same – His breath and his Word.

Job 32: 8 says, **8 But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding.** Look at that word *understanding*. It's not just the knowledge of scripture, but wisdom and understanding that come from the spiritual breath that God offers through his word. So, he gives us physical breath with which to breathe, air to breathe, and he also gives us spiritual breath.

I first want to talk a little bit about physical breath, and particularly in physical breath, the role of the heart, like literally the blood pumping muscle inside of your chest, the heart as it pertains to physical breathing. What happens is you breathe in air and your lungs take the oxygen and put it into your blood stream inside the lungs. Your heart then pumps the blood that has oxygen in it to the tissues in your body. The tissues in your body, a process called aerobic metabolism takes place, which converts that oxygen and uses a process to make that oxygen into usable energy in the tissues for living. There is a byproduct of that process called carbon dioxide that the tissue then put back into the blood that gets pumped by the heart back to the lungs and in the blood into the air of the lungs and expelled.

Now, there are two interesting things here to understand. One is there is a distinction between the right side of the heart and the left side of the heart. You have four chambers within the heart – two on the right and two on the left. The ones on the right are responsible for taking in the blood from the tissues of the body and pumping that blood. All the blood in your body goes through the tissues of the lung for this process. The left side of your heart is responsible for receiving that blood from the lungs and pumping it to the rest of the tissues and the body. And then it repeats itself constantly.

The other thing is because all of the blood filters through the lungs, the lungs become a place where you can expel waste. Carbon dioxide is a waste product of the metabolic process. There are a lot of metabolic processes which can expel their waste through the lungs. There are different ways that you can expel waste. Some of them are obvious when you go potty, right? When you sweat, but also very important is the expelling of waste through your lungs when you breathe out. That's the process of physical breathing and the importance of the heart in that process. You notice that the heart is central to that because without it, none of this can take place. If the heart stops pumping, it can't circulate things to occur as they need to, to sustain life.

Now let's talk about spiritual breath, particularly as it pertains to the heart. But now, we're not talking about this blood-pumping muscle inside your chest. We read that there is a heart besides that muscle, and we read that we should love the Lord our God with all of our heart, that we should guard our heart, trust in the Lord with all of your heart. What does all that mean? If it's not that blood-pumping muscle, what is it?

Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 5: 23 to understand this. **23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** You see, that's how we exist. You see the three parts there – spirit, soul, and body.

Now, let's look at an illustration to understand how we exist. I've put this up front here before. Maybe you've seen it, maybe you haven't. But these are three concentric circles. You see that they are all contained in one being. God created man in his image, three in one. We are three in one.

We have, according to 1 Thessalonians 5: 23 – body, soul, and spirit. The orange here is the world outside of us. The body is obviously our physical being. Inside of that and inseparable until death is our soul. What's inside of our soul? Things like our mind, our thoughts, our will, our desires, our emotions, which we can also call the heart. So, there we have the spiritual heart. Inside of all that, we have this space called our spirit. When I was growing up, I heard the phrase a lot that we have this God shaped hole inside of us. Maybe some of you have heard that. This is a depiction of that. There is a space which only God can contain, only God can occupy that. For those that have received Christ and the salvation through him, we receive the Holy Spirit who is contained within our being. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit of God within us. And that's how we exist. Three parts, one being. And the soul is central to it.

Proverbs 27: 19 says, ***As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart.*** From that illustration, you see the heart is on the inside and there are things that we can take in for our senses that will affect our heart. That's why scripture says guard your heart because everything you do flows from it – your words and your actions come from inside. Your mind, your will, your emotions come from your heart. You see, in the same way that the physical heart is responsible for circulating the breath that you take in throughout your body, your spiritual heart will circulate the things that you take into your soul through your senses – the things you listen to, the things you believe – and it will reflect as water reflects the face, one's life reflects the heart. It will come out in your words and your actions.

I want to talk for a minute about one particular breath, physical breath that has a really big impact, and that is the first breath that a baby takes when he or she is born. When you think about the fact that the baby in the womb is in a fluid environment, not an air-filled environment, it becomes reasonable to think that this gas can't take place right there. So, that baby inside the womb is relying on gas exchange from the mother in her lungs and in her heart pumping blood. The baby's heart is pumping, the lungs are moving because that heart needs to pump things for the baby's circulation system. The lungs need to get ready because here before long, when baby is born, he or she needs to move air his or herself. And while that's going on, it goes from mom's blood into the placenta and the umbilical cord and into the baby and then through the baby and back out the umbilical cord, placenta and into the mother. The mother is supporting that baby with her heart and her lungs as well. Because of that, a baby's heart circulation is different from one who has been born. You see, a fetal heart circulation doesn't need all the blood to go through the lungs because there is not this gas exchange taking place.

So, there are two structures called the foramen ovale and the ductus arteriosus which allow what is called shunting of blood from the right heart to the left heart to bypass the lungs because that's not critical at this point, the flow through the lungs. Now, when that baby is born and that baby takes his or her first breath, something phenomenal happens. The baby is born, takes a deep breath, fills the lungs with air, pressure gradient changes within the lungs, within the blood vessels, and within the heart. And in that moment, the foramen ovale and the ductus arteriosus close as a result, and that baby's circulation therefore moves all of the blood through the lungs. In an instant, a single breath, the baby's heart literally changes. A complete, new configuration, a new function, new circulation, completely different from one single breath.

And then, for those of us who have had many breaths, we know that there are other very important breaths that we take. Obviously, every breath is important, but there are some that can be a little more impactful than others. You see, breathing happens naturally. It's going to happen because the urges of survival are going to make us breathe. But there is a physical deep breath that is different from others. You breathing normally just happens, but you can also take control of it. You see, breathing is a critical, automatic, or autonomic function in the body. There are others that are autonomic like your heart rate, your blood pressure, digestion, secretion of different hormones that just happen. But the difference in them is you can't directly think, *I'm going to slow my heart rate and just slow your heart rate down. I'm going to secrete more or less stress hormones and make that happen.* They just happen.

But your breathing is one that you can take control of. Isn't that interesting. The one process you can take control of. Now, what does a deep breath do and why is it so important? All of those other processes that you can't directly control – your heart rate, your blood pressure, hormone secretion - you can't directly control them, but guess what? Taking control of your breathing, deep breathing, can actually have a downstream effect on those things. I can't control all of those things, but I can control my breathing. And if I control my breathing, I control those things. Isn't that phenomenal? It's pretty neat the way God put us together like that.

Now let's talk about a spiritual deep breath. When we talk about spiritual deep breath, I could sit here and try to explain to you what a spiritual deep breath is, but I think the word of God does it better, so I'm going to read to you a couple of passages.

Psalm 1: 1-2 – ***Blessed...*** Think about how you exist – your body, soul spirit – your spiritual condition, your soul heart. Think about that as we read this. ***... is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way of sinners in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord...*** What is the law of the Lord? It is the Word of God, scripture. ***...and who meditates on his law day and night.***

[Travis inhales deeply] You feel that? Scripture into your soul. A spiritual deep breath.

Philippians 4: 4-8 – ***4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*** That's pretty restoring. That's a deep breath, isn't it? ***6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** That's pretty restorative, isn't it?

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Remember, your mind was in there with your spiritual heart in your soul. Think about such things. What's the role of the spiritual heart? To circulate the things that you let in. Meditating on the Word of God. Thinking about all of these things out of Philippians.

Psalm 23: 3 says, ***He restores my soul.*** And there we have it, the restoring deep breath, the deep spiritual breath we take in that can restore our soul.

There are a lot of things you can't control around you. Usually and often, you can't control your circumstances around you. You can't control your kids' behavior, parents. You can try, but you can't control your kids' behavior. You can't control your spouse, right? You can't control your boss. You can't control your employees. You can't control your colleges. You can't control your professors, your teachers. Teachers and professors, you can't control your students as much as you try. Administrators, you can't control your teachers or your students. You can't control your coaches, players. And, coaches, you can't control your players as much as you might try.

You can't control the economy, amen? You can't control gas prices, amen? There are many, many things that you can't control. You can't control Satan's schemes. And he's coming at you with them, I promise. You can't control that. You can't shut off the valve so he takes a break. He's coming at you with them, and you can't shut them off. As a matter of fact, as God is trying to breathe spiritual life into your soul, Satan is right there with his soldiers, the demons, trying to breathe lies into you, trying to force feed air into your nostrils and into your lungs. And you can't control that Satan in going to try to do that. You can't control your enemies. You can't control the gossips and the liars.

There are a lot of things around you that you cannot control. But, you can control your spiritual breathing. You can control what you let into your soul, your mind, your thoughts, your emotions, your will. And in the same way that I can't directly control my heart rate, my digestion, the secretion of hormones in my body... I can't control those things, but I can control my breathing. I can stop and take some deep breaths and control those things and the way they affect me. In the same way spiritually you can't control all of these circumstances around you, what can you control? Your spiritual breathing. In doing so, you can control the way that all of these circumstances and things around you affect you.

You may have heard the word *apnea* before. The word *apnea* translates from the Greek literally a pnoia with a silent p. A means no or not and pnoia means breath or breathing. So, it means no breath or not breathing. Some of you may have heard of it because of something called obstructive sleep apnea, which is a pretty common thing. It's where when you're sleeping, your throat obstructs and you don't breathe, so you have to wear a device to hold the throat open for that and that's what apnea is.

I'm concerned because I believe a lot of Christians are suffering from spiritual apnea. Not taking the deep breaths that we need to be taken. Take a deep breath into your soul. But we have to be careful because some of the breaths that we take can sustain us and some can asphyxiate us. That's another big word. Asphyxiation literally means crowding out the oxygen. Physically speaking, the process there is as I'm breathing in, I'm breathing in about 21% oxygen in the air that I'm breathing, in the room air here. And if there are other particles or other things that are added to the environment besides normal air, then it crowds out the oxygen, and that percent of oxygen particles in the air gets crowded out. And as I'm breathing in, my tissues down stream are not getting the oxygen that they need to create the energy to sustain life. That's called asphyxiation. An example of that is exhaust from a car like say in a closed garage or something. That can be tragic, and it can be deadly because of the asphyxiation that takes place. Carbon monoxide replaces the space of the oxygen.

So, question. Are the breaths that you're taking sustaining, the deep breaths... maybe you don't have apnea, maybe you're breathing deep, but are the breaths that you're taking sustaining or are they

asphyxiating? And it depends on the air that you're breathing in. Guard your heart; what are you bringing in? Physically speaking, this is what this looks like – asphyxiating breaths, suffocating. You can just look at that picture and feel like you can't catch your breath.

So, what does that look like, spiritually speaking? Breathing in the foul air that is asphyxiating. Things like breathing in self-reliance. Breathing in achievement, deep breaths of achievement, academic, athletic, financial, locational. And those aren't bad things, but the question is, is that what you're relying on to sustain you. Is that what you're breathing in spiritually, breathing in deep breaths of pride, of political righteousness. I may be right and you may be wrong or we may be right and they may be wrong, but the question is: Is that what you're relying on, your righteousness and your politics, to sustain you. Sustaining or asphyxiating. Are you taking in deep breaths of comfort? Are you taking in deep breaths of good health? "As long as my physical health is good, everything's okay." Deep breaths of hard work and checking of a to-do list, getting things done. Taking in the deep breath of well behaved and successful kids. Again, parents, that will let you down, it will suffocate you if that is the deep breath that you're taking to sustain you.

And then the enemy, again, is trying to force feed you air into your lungs with many schemes. And many of his schemes involve lies, lies that say you're too old or your too young to accomplish what the Lord is calling you to do. Lies that say nobody cares about you or nobody wants you. The enemy's lies that he's trying to force feed your spiritual lungs says what you're doing doesn't matter at work, in raising your kids, at home, in your service to your church, in your service to your community. Lies about the values of others that you disagree with. Just remember, every person is a human being with eternal value, created in the image of God, knitted together in their mother's womb. Any lie that Satan is trying to feed you into your lungs can make its way in, if you let it. That is taking deep breaths of asphyxiating air, suffocating, crowding out the oxygen.

So, then, what does this look like? You can look at that after that other picture and you feel like you can breathe. Show of hands. Whose yard actually looks like that right now. All I see is brown and it crunches under my feet. But you get the idea here. You see that you can breathe the fresh air that is life giving and sustaining. And what is that? Number one is scripture. All scripture is breathed out by God. That is literally God breathing into your spirit when you take in scripture. Breathing in the comfort that the Holy Spirit offers that you have inside of you. Breathing in encouragement from fellow believers.

Breathing in (this one's hard) helpful correction from brothers and sisters in Christ. Do you let that in? Do you breathe it in and let the Lord work when people point out sin in your life? That call out something they see that needs correcting, do you allow that to sanctify you? Breathing in restorative fellowship with other believers, spending time with like minded believers. Breathing in the commitment that comes with understanding that this earth is not our home. Breathing in hope that this light, momentary affliction is simply preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Breathing in, not looking to the seen, but to the unseen because the seen is transient, but the unseen is eternal. One day we will depart from this earthly body and, for those who have received Christ, we will be with Him in heaven in a glorified body. Are you breathing that in whenever you face a diagnosis from

a doctor's visit or something that makes you realize that? Breath that in. That is the clean air that restores and sustains. When you take a deep breath, what you breathe in matters.

I want to talk for a minute about voice. I told you we were going to talk about it again. I told you how a voice works and the thing that's important for what we've already talked about is that your breath is the engine that produces your voice. Your voice relies on your breath as an engine. Therefore, what you breathe in determines what you speak out. Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. Everything you do flows from it, your words flow from it.

We know and you can tell when you have breathed in something besides good, fresh air, right? Because what you breathe in determines what you speak out. And sometimes, what you speak out can sound kind of funny. [Travis breathes in helium] because you can tell when someone has breathed in something that makes them sound funny. And it is silly and you see how it's still there a little bit, right? The subsequent breaths. If I take a few deep breaths in, I sound more like I should. You can tell when someone breathes in something they shouldn't that makes them sound funny.

You can also tell when someone breathes in something that makes them sound a little scary. If it's not what God desires us to breathe in, sometimes we breathe in something that makes you sound a little scary [Travis breathes in a different gas] You can tell someone has breathed something in that makes them sound scary, can't you? No that it was not... See... it's still there. That was not Russell, I promises. No, I'm not telling you what that is; it's a secret. But parents of toddlers, everyone gets a balloon when you leave today. "I said stop arguing!" We could spend a lot of time there.

Is it sustaining or asphyxiating? It's safe for me to take a breath of that. It sounds scary, it sounds funny, but if I were to breathe that over and over and over, what's the word? It starts with an A? Asphyxiation – it crowds out the oxygen. You see, what you breathe in determines what you speak out.

Proverbs 15: 4 says, ***A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.***

So, question for the follower of Jesus. Are your words a tree of life or are they breaking the spirit? Careful if you're going to ask your friends around you to answer that question for you because they might be honest. And if your words are breaking to the spirit then I would encourage you to do some reflection about what you're breathing in.

I want to use another illustration to make this point. A little while back, Kari and I were shopping for a toilet. If you are in your middle age, you can appreciate the fact that this is what date night has come to. What's worse is that we don't lament it. We're like this is kind of fun shopping for a toilet on date night, which means we are certifiably old.

But we are walking through the toilet aisle, and I come across this toilet with golf balls in it and it says, "Flushes a bucket of golf balls in a single flush." Wow! Okay, that's a powerful toilet. But I keep walking and I come across this and it says, "Flushes 7 billiard balls in a single flush." Again, wow! My first thought was these are some powerful toilets! My second thought is, If you're going shopping for a toilet and the first thing you have to say to the sales person is, "Yeah, I need something that can almost flush

an entire rack of nine ball; what do you have?" Let me make a suggestion. Your toilet is not the issue. We need to talk about fiber. We need to talk about water. Your toilet is not going to fix your issue. What you breathe in determines what you speak out, In the same way, what you take in determines what comes out, right? Waste in waste out. So, we understand that what you breathe in determines what you speak out. I can try to alter my vocal cords with this stuff, I can do everything I want, but what I've breathed in is going to make it sound funny and it's going to make it sound scary.

As we close today, I want to ask you, follower of Jesus, what deep breaths are you taking? Are they sustaining? Are they asphyxiating? Are your words a tree of life or are they breaking the spirit? And if it is asphyxiating and breaking of the spirit, that you reflect on what it is that you're breathing in, the deep breath that God intends for you to take in spiritually.

For my final point, for those that have not placed faith in Christ, I showed you that picture earlier, that illustration. I want to show you this one. There is a space which only the Holy Spirit can occupy in your life. That comes through salvation through Christ. And if you have never confessed that you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he lived a perfect life, that you need salvation because of a sin condition, and you have placed faith in that and confessed in him, than this is your condition.

But let me tell you, in a moment, it can look like this with Christ in your life. Remember earlier I talked about that baby and that first breath that the baby took ? That first breath changed everything, it literally reconfigured the baby's heart, the way things circulate, the way the whole anatomy is, the way things work. If you have not placed faith in Christ, in an instant, your heart can change. Your spiritual heart can completely change, it can reconfigure, it can change how your life circulates. It can change everything about you. If that's you, we would encourage you to come forward and speak with a member of the prayer team when we're finished here.

In closing, just mentioning a few deep breaths that took place that are pretty amazing to think about. That Jesus, when he was born, fully God, fully man, his heart did the same thing. That's pretty cool, same as yours and mine. That Peter, when he was about to drown in the sea after walking on water, he finally reached up and grabbed the hand of Jesus who pulled him out. He probably wasn't up to here and breathing just fine. I'm guessing grasping for breath, he reaches up, takes the hand of Jesus. Jesus lifts him up out of the water...

Follower of Jesus, do you need that first breath again when you focus back on Jesus?

And then, Christ died, he was buried, and three days later, his dead body... we sang it this morning, "your buried body began to breathe". That first breath filled his lungs, brought him back to life, proving that he is God and his sacrifice and his raising from the dead are adequate for our salvation.

Father, we love you and we're grateful for your breath in our lives. For your physical breath that you gives us, each breath, one after another, that you don't promise, Lord, but your spiritual breath that you do promise, and we take that. Father, we commit as a church and as individuals to take the spiritual deep breaths that are reviving, that are sustaining, Lord, that breathe life into others and don't' break the spirit.

We pray for this church and all that you're doing, the members and the families involved, Lord, and how you allow us to glorify you in everything that we think, say, and everything that we do.

It's in Christ's name that everyone agreed and said... Amen