

Fear Fighters

Life is full of seasons of uncertainty, which can turn into seasons of fear when we fail to take hold of God's promises and live in the reality they offer us. Whether you are getting ready to speak on a stage to thousands or simply watching your children walk out the front door, fear can sometimes dominate life.

This was true for my husband, Pat, and me until we invited the breath of God into our lives at a deeper level. God has given us a promise in Psalm 23:3 (MSG): "True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction." God wants to refresh His children to protect His reputation.

Just Breathe

Have you ever been in a situation where you or someone you were with couldn't breathe? If you have, you know it can be scary. Whatever the issue—whether it be asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—watching someone struggling to breathe creates immediate feelings of helplessness.

When our daughter, Abby, was very young, she battled asthma, especially in the fall and winter months. If she caught a cold or any other ailment, it would always trigger an asthma attack. Doctors placed her on a daily inhaled steroid and an emergency inhaler. During that season, there were many times she could not catch her breath, and the emergency inhaler seemed to be of no help. Those were fearful moments for all of us. Our only recourse was to take her to the hospital, where they would use a nebulizer to help her breathe. We can remember saying to her, "Calm down and try to relax, Abby, and just take a deep breath." Thankfully, Abby was healed of asthma and has not had any issues in many years.

When I began to struggle with asthma myself, I realized my

words of comfort and instruction during Abby's attacks were not as helpful as I intended them to be. I was plagued with constant coughing and often felt as though I could not breathe. At that point, I realized the answer is not as simple as just relaxing and taking a deep breath.

Fear tries to overtake you when life-giving oxygen is not accessible. That kind of fear only exacerbates an already panicked situation. You become frantic, making your breathing even more erratic. Over time, I learned to center myself in the presence of God when I was in the middle of one of those attacks and allow Him to calm my spirit and help me to see past my fear. This became life to me as God's breath would begin to fill my lungs and slow my breathing so I could take in more oxygen.

Have you ever been so frightened it took your breath away? One of the first responses to fear is to hold your breath. The problem is when you do, you don't take in enough oxygen. This can result in several physical responses such as disorientation, confusion and loss of balance.

Interestingly, the same is true in the spiritual when we do not take in enough of God the Father's life-giving breath. Daily time in His presence fills up our spiritual oxygen tanks. Without regular filling with God's life-giving breath, we become disoriented in our thought processes and lose our balance and focus. When this happens, it is hard to make sound, biblical decisions.

In those fight-or-flight moments, God's breath will bring light and life to the situation. In moments of fear, it is vitally important to remind ourselves to stop, return to God's presence and breathe. As the beloved of God, we are created to do more than merely survive. God intends for us to live in the abundance of His presence where fear cannot have the upper hand.

During a season of great uncertainty brought on by my leukemia, God began to deal with me on the issue of creating an atmosphere for His breath to flow freely in our lives and our home. Pat and I realized we did not want a mere visitation from Him in moments of fear and need. Instead, we desired a habitation of the very breath of God.

You see, God should never be just a visitor in our lives, allowed entrance only after we put our best image forward for Him. God should be given complete ownership to reside in our lives and our homes as His primary residence. He always has full access to see the good, the bad and the ugly, so why not give Him full permission—through our submission—to intervene and take control of every aspect of our lives?

Allowing God to fully own your house so you can fully reside in Him enables you to submit fully to His will. In this way, we are truly His children under His loving care.

When we are faced with fearful and uncertain situations, we must remind ourselves that God's breath gives us life and life abundantly: "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life" (Job 33:4, MEV). In life, we do not merely want to survive; we want to live in the fullness God has for us. If we allow it, fear can penetrate every area of our lives, even to the point of loss of life-giving breath.

Yet here's the great news for children of God: He wants to breathe new life into us daily, to comfort and strengthen us with the ability to fight the battle against fear. When we are faced with the fight-or-flight response to the enemy, the breath of God gives us the strength to stand firm and fight rather than take flight and run.

The Breath of God

We must understand the breath of God to realize how it impacts our lives and separates us from fear. The world and our very being were formed by the breath of God.

Look at Genesis 1:2-3: "The earth was formless and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water. God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

This Scripture is so powerful. God spoke, and breath went forth. He said, "Let there be light," and there was light! Words take form through breath. God spoke, breath came forth, and what God spoke was formed.

If we just use the English word "Spirit," we will miss the impact of the Genesis 1 passage. The Bible describes a scenario where breath is involved—the breath of God. The word "Spirit" in the Hebrew is *ruach*, which is often translated as "wind" or "breath." The Greek word translated "Spirit" is *pneuma*, which means "air in motion," "wind" or "breath."

Knowing the meaning of "Spirit," we can safely translate and understand Genesis 1:2-3 in this manner: "The earth was formless and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit [breath] of God was moving over the surface of the water. God said [or breathed] 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

God breathed, and His breath lit up the heavens and the earth. His very essence lights up every dark place. His Spirit, or breath, always brings life!

Think about the last time you felt as though fear had taken your breath away. Think about when you felt anxiety over an important task. Maybe you have feared failing or being inadequate. Have you ever been overwhelmed by fear of tragedies taking place throughout the world? Have you ever experienced fear that your future was uncertain? The apostle Paul strongly believed in the Word of God's ability to strengthen, guide and teach us everything we need to stay the course and walk in faith.

The Bible contains two letters Paul addressed directly to his

protégé, Timothy. One of those letters specifically describes how to defeat fear. Paul wrote that letter during a period in history when Christians were being persecuted in cruel and torturous ways. But this letter contained even more guidance for Timothy. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:14 (NIV), "Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it."

In writing those words, Paul acknowledged he would not be around much longer to lead and guide Timothy. He wanted to be certain the younger man knew where his strength came from, how to defeat fear and where life would come from when trials and tribulations would cause him to become weary and out of breath. No wonder this letter included a powerful truth and source of encouragement. Paul reminded Timothy of God's breath. He told Timothy all Scripture is God-breathed. That is why when we feed on the Word and digest every part of it, we will never be out of breath or out of life.

Let's jump down to 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

The word "God-breathed" is *theopneustos* in the Greek. It directly relates to God's Spirit, or *pneuma*, which we know can also be translated "breath." This is the only place in Scripture where we find this word. But it is definitely not the only place where we find the image of God breathing.

We see God breathe life into the nostrils of man in Genesis 2:7. Without the actual breath of God, we cannot truly live. We were created to protect the breath of God in our lives. Fear is a means by which Satan intends to rob us of life.

This same breath of God is also demonstrated in Acts 4:31 (MEV): "When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."

Again, the word Spirit is the Greek word *pneuma*, which is God's breath. Did you catch the meaning here? When the new believers prayed (spent time with God), God's Spirit (His breath) filled them, and the result was a boldness they did not possess before. Fear is the thief of boldness, but the breath of God breaks through fear and equips us to be bold.

Before God breathed on the disciples, they were a bunch of misfit nobodies. It was His breath that made them heroes of the faith and paved the way for Christians around the world today. This small group of people changed history after God filled them with His breath. They were hiding in an upper room for fear of man until God made them bold by breathing upon them. He will breathe upon us in the same way today, giving us boldness to withstand any trial.

There are few sounds as beautiful as the sound of a newborn baby wailing in announcement of his grand entrance into the world. Why does a baby cry when he is born? Even though there are scientific explanations for this, I like to believe the baby is giving thanks to God with the breath given to bring him life. In that first moment when oxygen fills a newborn's lungs, that baby is declaring to the world, "I made it!"

This birth cry is a victory shout, acknowledging the one who breathes life into all creation, the one who brings the breath of protection and deliverance to all who will receive it. We should create an atmosphere where the breath of God flows freely at all times in our lives!

I believe God is about to give CPR to some of you reading this today. You have been gasping for air and reaching for your spiritual inhaler for too long. It's time to take a deep breath and breathe in the life God has given you. This life is designed to be lived free of fear but full of the roar of the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

If you feel out of breath today and are struggling to see past

the darkness that has overtaken you, I encourage you to receive God's breath. Romans 8:11 (TPT) tells us, "Yes, God raised Jesus to life! And since God's Spirit of Resurrection lives in you, he will also raise your dying body to life by the same Spirit that breathes life into you."

The breath of God defeats all fear. Just breathe! {eoa}

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