

Breath of Life

Take a deep breath through your nose. Breathe in through your nose, and fill your lungs as full as possible. Allow your belly to extend as you fill your lungs. Hold that breath for four seconds, and then slowly exhale through your nose. Be controlled and deliberate as you breathe in and when you exhale. You just performed the most important healing activity that you can do for your body. (We'll discuss this aspect more later in the study.) While that fact in itself is reason enough to be more mindful of your breathing, scripture provides us with an even more significant reason.

1. Read *Genesis 2:7, Isaiah 42:5* and *Acts 17:25*. What is most significant about the breath in our bodies?

Do you realize that as you breathe, the breath of God fills your lungs and, when done properly, promotes healing within your body? Let's say that again: THE BREATH OF GOD FLOWS THROUGH YOU AS YOU BREATHE. Our life and spirit come from God's Spirit. For this reason alone, our lives have tremendous value.

In addition to giving life to humans on earth, God's breath also gave life to the heavenly hosts. (*Psalms 33:6*) In fact, without the breath of God, if He were to take back the breath he has given to life on earth, "all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust." (*Job 34:14-15*) God's breath holds all life together, and we are but dust without it.

2. In addition to God's breath giving us life, what else does His breath give us? See *Job 32:7-8*.

In this portion of Job, Job's friend Elihu acknowledges God as the only source of real wisdom; unfortunately Elihu failed to use that wisdom to help Job. He recognized the source of wisdom, but he did not seek to acquire it. Knowing about wisdom is not enough. It must become an ongoing, lifelong pursuit. The tie between wisdom and the air we breathe brings an interesting and poignant correlation which we explore in this lesson.

Like a Breath

Take a deep breath through your nose, hold it in for a few seconds, then slowly and with control let it out. One good, deep breath takes maybe 15 seconds, right? In light of eternity, that breath represents the length of our individual lives. It represents our mortality.

Not only is every breath we take a representation of the brevity of life, it also represents the single biggest element on this earth that we need to survive. Someone once said that a person can survive weeks without food, days without water but only minutes without oxygen. (See Lesson 2 for a study on the importance of water.)

3. Read *Psalms 39* to get David's take on the fact that life is so brief.

Verses 5 and 11 of *Psalms 39* specifically speak about man's life being but a "mere breath," but the entire Psalm really holds the theme of life being fleeting and empty apart from God. Because life is so brief, David is appealing to God for mercy. Really, a reading through the Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes produces a better understanding of how life is truly a blink of the eye. But isn't it ironic that we spend so much time obtaining security in this life where we spend so very little time in comparison to eternity? Grasping and being continually reminded of life being a "mere breath," can help us understand the gift of life on this earth that we are given but even more so the gift of eternity in Heaven that is offered to us.

So, not only is the air we breathe from the actual mouth of God, it is also endued with the wisdom we need to live a life this side of Heaven that will allow us to see the other side of Heaven one day. As much

as we require oxygen to live not only physically but also in order to receive true wisdom from God, we need God Himself even more as He is the giver of that breath!

And God, in His infinite wisdom, uses this connection we have to His breath for life and wisdom to help us understand so much more about him, and this is the focus of our next section.

Breath of God

The impact of God's breath is felt throughout scripture from the life-giving air we breathe to the wisdom that allows us to know God to the power of God seen throughout history. Let's take some time to explore the power that is found in a single breath from God to help us realize the power we are given because our life is sustained by that very same breath.

4. Read *2 Samuel 22* and note the power of God's breath described in *verse 16*.

This chapter on *2 Samuel* has been called "David's Psalm of Deliverance" because it was given by David after God had delivered him from the hands of his enemies and from Saul. (As a side note, it's interesting to notice that Saul is separated from being one of David's enemies even though he was the source of most of David's troubles at the time.) *Verse 16* speaks to the power of God's breath to alter nature, in this case to the advantage of David.

Not only does scripture speak of the power of God's breath to affect weather, it also speaks to its power to control fire and water, a feat yet unachieved by man. Just when we think we have control over these elements, a fire raging out of control or a torrential rain causing flooding waters that break a levy makes clear that control over fire and water is an illusion.

5. Read *Job 37:10* and *41:21* out loud and take a moment to realize the power that God's breath over these elements and how humans are often at the mercy of fire and water.

Let's take this idea of God's breath and the role that it plays in nature a bit further by exploring water in a way not covered in Lesson 2. The freezing of water is still somewhat a mystery, especially the fact that it expands when it freezes. In fact, scientists admit that they don't really understand the intricacies of how water works. ([The New Mystery of Water](#), Live Science, December 2004) As water freezes, it actually becomes strong enough to split steel. As we all know, frozen water also becomes strong enough that we can walk on it and even drive a car on it at times. It's also interesting to note that low-lying waters cannot freeze without a light current or wind to "ruffle" the surface. (The Adam Clarke Commentary)

6. How does *Job 37:10* tell us ice is formed?

What science has tried and failed to explain, the Bible provides clear understanding. Ice is formed by the breath of God. Nature has a lot to teach us, and it is one of the clearest evidences of our Creator God. As you spend time in nature, notice the glory of God not only in the spectacular things like thunder and lightning but also in more ordinary things like water freezing. (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible) His hand is in all creation, and His breath is within mankind. (*Job 12:6*) Do you realize that this very breath that commands nature also flows through YOU and gives YOU LIFE?

On the next windy day, be reminded of the omnipotence of God as well as of our own mortality. Windy days bring a sense of a loss of control. No matter what we do, we cannot escape the impact of the wind when we go outside. Hair blows all over the place. Leaves blow into our yard. Sometimes walking becomes difficult if the wind is strong enough. And those examples don't even get at hurricane and tornado winds.

Water covers approximately 75% of the earth's surface, and the immenseness of it provides us yet another example of the power of God over nature. If you've even had the chance to sit at the ocean front and watch the waves, you can't help but become overwhelmed at the power of God. Not only because of the vastness of the ocean at its endless appearance or the realization of its immense depth but also because of the realization that while we are seemingly at the mercy of the ocean, God is in control of it.

7. What appreciation does *Matthew 8:27* give with regard to the power of God?

Those individuals who have a lot of experience on or in the ocean know to "never turn your back on the ocean." What this means is that while we can enjoy the ocean and even obtain benefits from it, we are not in control of it. Many lives have been lost simply because people forgot that fact. No matter how much we've mastered them, the elements of nature continually show us that God is in control, not us.

The same God who controls nature has given us His breath so that we may have life and wisdom. That same power that controls water and fire flows through our lungs every time we breathe. This realization should make us want to get as much of that life-giving breath as possible as well as to have it fill us completely. Our lack of control over elements such as ice, water and wind can remind us of the control that the breath of God has on the elements of nature and beyond.

In addition to the power of God's breath being illustrated through nature, we can also experience that same life-giving breath through the power of scripture.

8. What connection does *2 Timothy 3:14-17* (NIV) indicate there is between scripture and the breath of God?

9. What word does the NAS version of the Bible use in place of "God-breathed" in *2 Timothy 3:14-17*?

The Bible is "God-breathed" (NIV) or "inspired by God" (NAS) and through its teachings we gain the wisdom to guide our conduct. Although the writers of the Bible used their own minds, talents, abilities, languages and experiences as well as from their own personal, historical and cultural contexts, they wrote what God inspired them to write. Interestingly, the *Merriam Webster Medical Dictionary* and the *American Heritage Dictionary* both offer similar definitions of "inspired" that basically say "to draw in breath; to inhale." The connection is obvious. The writers of the Bible were inspired to write what they wrote much like we are motivated to draw in breath. They were compelled to write what God inspired them to write just like they were and we are compelled to breathe because it gives us what we need to live. And, what's more, they come from the same source – the breath of God. Wow!

Air Quality

Not only did God's breath give us life, He also created an amazing system to create oxygen we need to sustain our lives. Plants and trees reproduce the air we need to breathe; unfortunately, the quality of that air is continually being compromised through pollution in a variety of ways. We won't take the time to study pollution and its impact in depth in this study, but we will take a few moments to raise awareness of the importance of the quality of the air that we breathe. First, we'll take a look at outdoor air and then we'll look at indoor air.

Air pollution is the contamination of the air by impurities such as dust, pollen, smoke, and burning fuels. Air pollution can seriously impact human health and contribute to diseases such as bronchitis, asthma, emphysema, and lung cancer. Air pollution also destroys plant and animal life.

(www.discoveryhealth.com)

While many individuals may feel like there is little that can be done on a small scale to positively impact air quality, that's really not true. As we know from the focus of our study, small changes can add up to a big difference; that being the case, everyone making small adjustments can add up to a large change in air quality. The types of changes individuals can make include biking or walking instead of driving whenever possible, choosing vehicles that operate more efficiently and on cleaner fuels, conserving energy, recycling, buying Energy Star appliances, attaching a timer to outdoor lights, keeping tires properly inflated on vehicle and making sure the vehicle itself is well-maintained, and carpooling if possible.

10. What is one area you can focus on that will make a difference with regard to air pollution?

The majority of people spend up to 90% of their time indoors making indoor air quality (IAQ) a serious issue needing our focus. If you have mini blinds in your home, are they covered with dust? The dust didn't just appear on the blinds; it got there through the air... the same air you are breathing. In addition to dust, a variety of other factors impact IAQ including cleaning products, gas stoves, fireplaces, carpets, candles, smoking and ovens. Scientific studies in the 1980s showed that air inside homes and office buildings is often more polluted than the air outdoors. In the article [How Indoor Air Pollution Works \(www.discoveryhealth.com\)](http://www.discoveryhealth.com) Jennifer Horton writes that "indoor air pollution, the degradation of indoor air quality by harmful chemicals and other materials, can be up to 10 times worse than outdoor air pollution." Obviously, IAQ is a factor that needs to be considered with regard to a person's health.

Symptoms commonly attributed to poor IAQ include: headaches, fatigue, shortness of breath, sinus congestion, coughing, sneezing, dizziness and nausea. Ear, nose and throat irritation are also indications of IAQ problems. People especially vulnerable to IAQ problems include those with allergies or asthma, individuals with a suppressed immune system, people with respiratory diseases, and contact lens wearers.

If you suspect that IAQ is a source of health-related issues, your first step is attacking the known sources of the problem. For example, asbestos needs sealed or removed, and pesticides need removed. Additionally, being sure to operate using manufacturer's instructions on items such as gas-cooking stoves and fuel-burning space heaters is another good step. Making sure your living space is well-ventilated is always a good idea too. Maintaining humidity levels of 30 to 50 percent can minimize biological contaminants in the home as well as discourage dust mites and mold growth. Changing cleaning products used to those made with benign ingredients is another step that many individuals take.

Air cleaners are another obvious step toward improving air quality. Do your research before buying to make sure you are choosing the best purifier for your needs. Note that some air cleaners clean the air well but can create high levels of ozone, which can worsen asthma and cause chest pain along with difficulty breathing. Again, do your research.

11. What one step can you take now to improve the IAQ in your home?

Improving your air quality can go a long way in improving your health. To multiply the benefits of having good air to breathe, look to increasing the quality of each breath that you take. For this, we look now at how to breathe better.

Breathe Better

God's breath gives us life and with every breath we take, God's breath is moving through us. His breath gives us wisdom, and it guides us through life. These realizations can help motivate us to make the most of every breath we take. This section will focus on two ways, air quality and how we breathe, that we can help increase the physical benefits of the breath of God within us.

First, let's discuss the specifics of the physical benefits that good, deep breathing can bring. Deep breathing can have many health benefits. When done properly and regularly, deep breathing can:

- Reduce stress
- Reduce blood pressure
- Increase energy
- Increase focus
- Relieve pain by releasing endorphins
- Ease problems with sleeplessness
- Relaxes muscles, a major source of neck, back and stomach pain
- Be beneficial to asthma sufferers
- Strengthen abdominal and intestinal muscles
- Help eliminate waste from the body
- Improve blood circulation
- Relieve congestion
- Increase oxygen to the heart, thus relieving strain on that important muscle
- Help increase blood and nutrient supply to muscles and bones
- Aid in digestive function
- Strengthen the immune system
- Reduce wrinkles
- Help increase flexibility
- Increase joint strength
- Decrease recovery time from stressful events

Breathing can really do all of this? Yes, it can. First, remember that the breath flowing through you is the actual breath of God. That in itself is enough. Second, deep breathing relaxes muscles and increases blood flow, which benefits our bodies in enumerable ways. Not only does breathing itself directly and positively impact most of our physical systems, it also directly impacts them by allowing our bodies to operate more efficiently. For example, as we breathe deeply, our muscles relax, and as our muscles relax, they are better able to function as they are meant to function. One quite well-known physician and restorative health expert, Dr. Andrew Weil, has this to say about the impact of proper breathing on our physical health:

"Improper breathing is a common cause of ill health. If I had to limit my advice on healthier living to just one tip, it would be simply to learn how to breathe correctly. There's no single more powerful – or more simple – daily practice to further your health and your well-being than breathwork."

Nancy Zi, a California-based breathing expert and author of the book and video set, *"The Art of Breathing,"* says that *"breathing incorrectly can produce tension, exhaustion and vocal strain, interfere with athletic activity and encourage aches and illness. Breathe correctly, however, and you can melt away tension and stress, improve energy or simply relax and unwind."*

According to www.discoveryhealth.com, breathing oxygenates every cell of your body, from your brain to your vital organs. Without enough oxygen, your body becomes more susceptible to health problems. One cardiac study found that patients who took 12-14 shallow breaths per minute (6 breaths per minute is considered optimal) were more likely to have low levels of oxygen in their blood. In contrast, deep breathing raises oxygen levels and promotes health by stimulating digestion and improving mental health and fitness.

12. What health benefits do you hope to gain from learning to breathe properly? What health concerns do you currently have that may benefit from proper breathing?

What's even more powerful about the impact of proper breathing is that IT'S FREE! There's simply no reason for us to not employ proper breathing techniques. The only reason we don't is because our bad habits have us locked into our current way of breathing. And, as we all know well by now, "small changes can make a big difference," and proper breathing is one small change that can have a tremendous impact. Dr. Weil understood the importance of small changes making a big difference over time. In his book "8 Weeks to Optimum Health" Dr. Weil says,

"By definition, habits are repetitive behavior; as such they are easy and familiar, the ruts we fall into while moving through life. Changing habits is hard, especially at first, requiring determined effort and time to make the changes stick."

While changing our breathing habits won't happen overnight, change will happen eventually, and this area is one that will produce quicker results than most other avenues for improving health.

As we studied earlier, the quality of the air we breathe is obviously crucial for good health. But to take full advantage of quality air, we must learn (or re-learn) how to breathe properly. In the book, *Chi Running* by Danny Dreyer, among other topics, the topic of breathing with regard to running is discussed. While many participating in this study will not apply their newfound wisdom about breathing to running, the ideas found in Dreyer's book are still relevant even if you are not a runner. *Chi Running* talks about the difference between "shallow breathing" and "belly breathing" and why knowing the difference is important.

"Shallow breathing activates the sympathetic survival instinct – the fight-or-flight response. This, in turn, stimulates stress receptors in the chest and increases your heart rate. The fight-or-flight response triggers the release of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline, causing the body to burn blood sugar and store fat. It also raises your blood pressure as a result of the lower oxygenation rate of your muscles, which ultimately overloads the adrenal glands and breaks down the body."

Belly breathing (diaphragmatic breathing), draws breath into the lower lobes of the lungs, thereby stimulating the body's parasympathetic response. As a result, the body releases a beneficial cocktail of hormones (namely, serotonin and beta-endorphin), lowers heart rate and blood pressure, improves circulation, and produces an overall calming effect and feeling of well-being."

So, how does one belly breathe? Follow the steps below for a simple way to reap the benefits of breathing deeply.

1. Slowly breathe in through your nose. Feel the air moving in through your nose and down into the bottom third of your abdomen. Feel the abdomen rise as you continue to fill the middle third and the top third of your abdomen into the lungs....hold very briefly.
2. Now slowly exhale your breath through slightly pursed lips as your lungs empty, then your abdomen - as your stomach muscles begin to squeeze all the air out.
3. One more time.
4. Taking another breath in. Feel the air traveling through your nose to the depths of the abdomen. Imagine all the muscles in your body filling with oxygen expanding with nourishing life force.

5. Now slowly exhale. Let your muscles relax and imagine your body becoming relaxed.
6. Again, inhale and feel the air moving through your nose and into the bottom of the abdomen. Imagine the abdomen filling with air from the bottom up. Fill the abdomen and lungs until you can't breathe in any more....hold...hold...
7. Slowly exhale and allow your stomach to tighten as you exhale.
8. Again, inhale and feel the air moving through your nose and into the bottom of the abdomen. But this time slowly count to 10. When you get to 10....hold for 3....and now breathe out for 12.
9. Do this one more time.

The web site www.healthmad.com provides additional tips on deep breathing, including placing one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest when doing deep breathing exercises to help you feel the difference between your regular breath and deep breathing. Keep in mind that you want to draw air into the lungs while expanding the stomach rather than your chest. Also, take breathes that are long and slow. This gives the body the ability to absorb more of the inhaled oxygen.

Author Nancy Zi explains that shallow breathers are likely to take a breath and pull in their stomach, which pushes the diaphragm up so air has nowhere to go, while deep breathers will lower the diaphragm muscles and expand the abdomen thus allowing the lungs to elongate and draw in air. You don't actually breathe into your abdomen, but you allow it to expand comfortably thus allowing you to take as deep a breath as possible.

How can you incorporate deep breathing into your daily routine? Of course, the answer is small changes. Practice deep breathing while driving to work, sitting at your desk working, waiting in line, or sitting while watching television. Not only is your body reaping enormous physical benefits, you will discover additional stress-relieving and relaxation benefits as well.

13. Into what daily routine can you incorporate the above deep breathing steps?

According to www.discoveryhealth.com, we breathe 20,000 times a day. Be aware of the fact that you are breathing right now (hopefully), and every day you have 20,000 opportunities to transform how you breathe and to enhance your health and well-being.

Small Changes

1. Do some research. The above breathing suggestions are a start, but don't stop there. There are a variety of internet resources as well as books that can give you additional suggestions on better breathing.
2. Research air cleaners and possibly purchase one for a room in your home.
3. Consider testing the air quality in your home.
4. Begin incorporating deep breathing into your daily routines.
5. Practice deep breathing the next time you are stressed.
6. Start practicing at least one of the suggestions provided for helping to improve the air quality of our environment.
7. Incorporate 5 minutes of deep breathing into your prayer time. Use that time to thank God for the life-giving breath He has given you.
8. If you exercise regularly, try incorporating deep breathing into your exercise routine. Note that different exercises might have a slightly different need with regard to breathing technique, so do your research first.
9. Read Psalm 150:6 and meditate on it in context of what we studied in this lesson.
10. Listen to the song "Breath of God" by Point of Grace.