

.. . ✨ . . . INSPIRATION—PART 1 . . . ✨ . . .

Over the last few days we've been discussing the creation-wide impact of Jesus' death and resurrection. Our Savior died to take the consequences of our sins, and he rose from the dead to give us new life. His death and resurrection also reversed the process of death and decay that the sin of Adam and Eve introduced into creation. Today I would like to show you another Scriptural connection between the pure state of Eden prior to sin and Jesus' power to restore creation to that perfect state.

Yesterday, we read a portion of Ezekiel's "dry bones" prophecy. Although he spoke to the nation of Judah, his words ring true for all of God's people. As Ezekiel described the future redemption and restoration God would bring about, the prophet relayed God's promise to *breathe life into* his people. Ezekiel reported, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life,'" (Ezekiel 37:5–6a).

The connection between God's breath and human life originates in the opening chapters of Scripture when God breathes into Adam (Genesis 2:7). As God breathes into humanity, he doesn't simply impart biological life, but spiritual existence. Thus, when the Father promised to breathe into Judah and make them live again, he offered physical restoration *and* spiritual redemption.

This knowledge, then, equips us to understand Jesus' interaction with his disciples following his own resurrection.

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20:19–22

In this passage, I see Jesus giving new spiritual life to his disciples and resurrecting their hope.

Certainly, the disciples' faith was in dire straits. Notice that in John 20:19, they were hiding behind locked doors in fear, and from Mark 14:50, we learn that they had fled in terror when Jesus was arrested. From Mark 26, we learn that Peter had denied the Savior three times and "wept bitterly" over his spiritual failure (Mark 26:65). Yet, when Jesus returned, he didn't chastise the disciples for failing to understand his teaching or criticize their lack of faith. The Lord simply breathed into their despondent hearts, washing away their fear and restoring their faith. In doing so, he resurrected their ministry and reinvigorated their passion to spread God's love. The scene is so beautiful that I don't want to rush past it. Let's therefore pause here to reflect on the life-giving love of our Savior.

Jesus, thank you for breathing new life into me. Thank you for giving health to my body and my spirit. Forgive me for the times I've hidden my faith out of fear or failed to speak up on behalf of your goodness. Thank you for refusing to hold my sins against me and for accepting me just as I am. Just as you transformed the fear and sorrow of the disciples into peace and joy, I ask you to resurrect the lifeless parts of my heart. I ask you to reinvigorate my desire to share your love and spread the Gospel. In your name, Amen.

Personal Reflection

Take a few moments to think about the emotional rollercoaster the disciples experienced. I can't imagine how dejected they must have felt when Jesus was arrested and crucified; how betrayed that their Messiah had failed them; how terrified that they would follow in his crucified footsteps; how ashamed of their own failure to stand firm. In the span of 24 hours, the entire framework of their faith and the very purpose of their lives crumbled around them. Then, he reappeared—their living breathing Savior! With only a few words and one breath, Jesus gave new life and purpose to those who felt dead inside. As you meditate on the restoration of the disciples, think about any times in your own life during which you doubted your faith. Thank God for restoring your purpose, peace and joy. If you are currently in a devastating season of life, pour out your heart to God and allow the experience of the disciples to remind you that your own restoration is right around the corner.

.. ✨ .. INSPIRATION—PART 2 .. ✨ ..

Yesterday we talked about the breath of God—a gift that both animates our physical bodies and our spiritual lives. The Father bestowed it upon humanity at creation, and Jesus bestows it upon his followers in preparation for the new creation. Today we'll continue talking about breath and its significance in our lives

As biological entities, breathing is essential for life. The process of respiration is so vital that our bodies manage it automatically. Receptors in our heart and blood vessels send signals to our brain with information about how much oxygen we need. For example, when we exercise, our receptors notify the brain that we need more oxygen, and the respiratory center of the brain accommodates by increasing the respiration rate. When physical exertion ceases, receptors let the brain know that the oxygen demand has decreased and respiration returns to normal.

Respiration is unique, however, among other automatic bodily functions. Unlike processes such as digestion and blood circulation, breathing can be controlled automatically *and* voluntarily. Athletes and musicians learn to breathe in such a way as to maximize performance. You and I can learn to breathe deeply in order to calm ourselves in stressful situations.

I believe that these two aspects of respiration—voluntary and automatic—serve as a helpful analogy for our spiritual lives. As physical creatures, we don't have to make any effort to stay alive. Our hearts, lungs, kidneys, brains, and other organs function without conscious control. Our spiritual life operates much the same way. Once we accept the free gift of new life from Christ, we are redeemed through no effort on our part. However, if we want to maintain a healthy body or a healthy spiritual life, we must take proactive steps. Just as deep breathing calms the nervous system, reduces stress hormones, and promotes healthy blood pressure, “breathing” God's spirit through prayer and Bible study brings life to our spirit.

In fact, both physical and spiritual respiration are described by the same word: inspiration. In biological terms, inspiration describes the intake of air. Spiritually speaking, inspiration refers to divine influence—the process of being filled with God's spirit such that we are stimulated to think, do, or say something. Over time, the term has shifted toward the more broad nuance of “motivation” or “infusion of imagination,” but its origin has always been theologically rooted.¹

¹ “The Inspirational History of *Inspiration*,” Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inspiration#note-1>.

Both spiritual and physical inspiration require focus, intention, and action. The behavioral control of breathing requires a mental decision which is then followed by a specific action—the intake of air. Similarly, being filled with a greater degree God’s Spirit requires a mental decision followed by action. Growing more spiritually alive will never happen by accident. If we want to be inspired, we must seek inspiration! Job drew upon the inspiration of God to speak words of truth and righteousness (Job 27:1–6). The prophets “sought and inquired carefully” about salvation, and were inspired to share the Gospel message (1 Peter 1:10; 2 Peter 1:16–21). The words of Scripture are inspired by God, and searching them empowers us to draw nearer to Christ and be equipped for his service (1 Timothy 3:16–17; John 5:39).

Gathering together, just as the disciples did before and after Jesus’ crucifixion, also invites the breath of God to inspire us. Despite the disciples’ fearful state, Jesus appeared to them behind locked doors and breathed on them (John 20:19–22). When the disciples gathered for Pentecost, God’s breath blew as a mighty wind and filled them with power (Acts 2:1–4). In Matthew 18:20, although he doesn’t specifically mention breath, Jesus teaches that when two or more gather in his name, his presence is among us.

So, as we close, let’s take a deep breath and set an intention to be inspired today!

Jesus, thank you for breathing life into my imperfect soul. Help me be intentional about seeking the inspiration you provide. Empower me to turn from every pattern of behavior or speech that breeds death and destruction. Give me a greater desire for your Spirit and your inspiration. Guide me toward habits that will foster my faith and deepen my understanding of your love. Reinvigorate the parts of my heart that are weary and give me fresh motivation to serve you with joy. In your name, Amen.

Personal Reflection

Today’s reflection is two-fold.

- First, prayerfully meditate on how you can be more inspired in your spiritual life. Write down a few ideas below then choose one to try today.
- Second, recall that gathering with fellow believers is a powerful avenue for experiencing God’s inspiration. Since we’ve recently discussed communion, consider inviting a family member, friend, or Bible study group to join you in partaking of communion and thanking Jesus for the new life he has given you.

