

Barely Breathing

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You may not be fully aware, but there has been a lot of attention being paid to the act of breathing lately, or at least our growing inability to do so comfortably. Now I am referring to the latest viral mess that the world is currently subjected to, whether it is the common cold, some strange cocktail of viral bugs, including the latest iterations of COVID, the world is experiencing a significant increase in respiratory illnesses above and beyond the standard seasonal increases that are causing a lot of nasal and chest congestion, coughing, sneezing, and wheezing, and making it harder for many persons to breathe without great difficulty.

The WHO (the World Health Organization), the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institute of Health, and many varied healthcare organizations are reporting increases in respiratory illnesses across the board demographically throughout the world and especially since late 2022, but peaking in the last 12 to 15 months. Now the most likely and most common culprits are the latest COVID variants which today are of the Omicron variety, though the latest Delta variant is still out there causing trouble. The respiratory syncytial virus also known as the as RSV, along with several flavors of influenza, varied rhinoviruses, adenoviruses, and even non-COVID coronaviruses are all on the upswing and are responsible for making much of mankind unusually uncomfortable as it struggles to breathe.

And one of the most common symptoms of the latest COVID variant that according to physicians really stands out today is an infection that causes what is often referred to as never-ending sinus or chest congestion. In many persons, it fails to respond normally to the standard medical treatments or over the counter remedies, filling the sinus passage passages and or the lungs with an unusually stubborn glue-like mucus that refuses to clear up or even move. Now this results in what doctors refer to as unproductive nose blowing or unproductive sneezing or unproductive coughing with symptoms often lasting for up two, three, or even more months.

Now I can personally attest to this. I just got over such a challenge with my symptoms lasting almost exactly 4 months. That was my experience, that with the use of decongestant pills and sprays, rinses and some cough syrup thrown in along with the dreadful neti pot and a Breathe Right nasal strip, I could open up my sinuses and soothe my lungs well enough to go to sleep. However, night after night I would be jolted out of slumber at about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning by a sudden acute inability to breathe through my nostrils or to take deep breaths into my lungs. And so often when I would be forced then to breathe exclusively through my mouth to get back to sleep, in short order I was reawakened by coughing or a parched mouth desperate for water. Even eating was a challenge because you cannot easily breathe through your mouth when you are trying to chew and swallow your food.

Now I searched online seeking answers and while it did me little good I did find that I was not alone. Doctors in urgent care facilities, clinics, and hospitals around the world reported being swamped with patients unable to breathe normally and frustrated about the length of time associated with their uncomfortable and unhealthy sinus and chest conditions. One well-respected medical website blamed it all on global meat trade, climate change, and a global decrease in vaccination rates. I did not stick around there too long. After several weeks of discomfort, I remember one evening praying, asking God for understanding and relief, and it was at this time that I began to consider that perhaps He had a bigger role in all of this trouble than had perhaps previously considered.

So I turned my online attention to the study of breathing, the act or the acts of inspiration and respiration, the lungs, the heart, and the roles that they played in all of this. I thought back to COVID-19 and the mess we all dealt with back in 2020 and 2021, remembering those ventilators and how big a deal they became around the world and well, of course, a ventilator is nothing more than a simple mechanical breathing machine. And though we are several years beyond the initial pandemic of 2021, it has also become quite apparent that we will never be rid of the troubling impacts of COVID-19 and the never-ending variants that continue to morph into bizarre, distressing, and unpredictable bugs.

There is also a growing belief among many doctors that the initial onset of the disease with its nasty spike protein, along with the so-called vaccinations that also implanted that same nasty spike protein, have served only to weaken man's overall immunity, which is likely contributing to the growth of all the respiratory illnesses today.

So why do we breathe? How do the lungs work? Breathing involves inhaling, or the inspiration of oxygen rich air into the lungs, and exhaling, or the respiration of carbon dioxide, a waste product that is actually toxic to the body in strong enough concentrations. This process is called gas exchange, and it takes place in tiny air sacs in our lungs called alveoli. Now keep in mind that every cell in the body requires oxygen to function, to live. And we are all typically aware of the four basic necessities of life: food, water, shelter, and oxygen.

Now you may have heard of the rule of threes with regard to survival priorities. This is sort of a loose formula at best, but you know, with some exceptions, but it goes: one can survive three weeks without food, three days without water, three hours without shelter in a harsh, too hot or too cold environment, but only three minutes without breathable air. And we are all aware of the five senses and their roles in allowing us to function efficiently and safely in our world: sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, but they are all worthless without the ability to breathe. And on a typical day, how often do any of us stop and think about breathing?

You know, until I struggled to breathe recently, I probably took it for granted more than any other bodily function. Now, according to Theophilus, the CGG AI assistant, there are over 100 Bible verses that reference breathing, highlighting its significance in both physical and spiritual contexts. Theophilus stated that these verses illustrate the concept of breath as a divine gift and a symbol of life throughout the Scriptures. Let us turn to a few. Let us start with Genesis chapter 2 and verse 7, something that we are all very familiar with.

Genesis 2:7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Now, of course, God could have merely spoken Adam into being. Instead He formed him from the dust of the ground, at which point He still could have just spoken to Adam or touched him in order to bring him to life, but instead He breathed into his nostrils in order to animate him. Therefore, we can say that God "inspired" Adam to life. And in Genesis 2:7, the word for breathed is *Strong's* #5301, *naphach*, which implies puffing, blowing, inflating, or even to kindle. It has 12 uses in the Old Testament.

The word for breath is *Strong's* #5397, *nishmah*, which implies a puff, wind, vital breath, breath of God, or divine inspiration, intellect, or spirit. Twenty-four uses in the Old Testament.

Now let us turn to Psalm 33, verse 6.

Psalm 33:6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

In this case, breath comes from *Strong's* #7307, *ruach*, implying wind, breath, mind, energy of life, spirit, courage, temper, anger, among many others with both positive and negative connotations. And most significantly for today, it also refers to the Holy Spirit. It has 378 uses in the Old Testament.

Now in the New Testament we will look at John 20, verse 22 where the freshly resurrected Christ appears to His disciples and by breathing on them gave them a preview of what was soon to come on Pentecost, their receipt of the Holy Spirit.

John 20:21-22 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." [in 22], and when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them. Receive the Holy Spirit.

In this scripture the Greek word for breathe is *emphusao*. It is *Strong's* #1720, meaning to puff or breathe on. And the word used here for spirit is *pneuma*, *Strong's* #4151, which means a current of air, a breeze, a blast of breath, and by implication, God's Holy Spirit. Now in II Timothy 3:16, where we learned that all Scripture is inspired by God, the word for inspired

is *theopneustos*, Strong's #2315, which according to Albert Barnes communicates the idea of God breathing into the soul.

So I think we have firmly established the great importance that God confers on breathing and breath itself. So where is all this going? Well, just as God breathed life into the first man, Adam, He also breathes eternal life into us through His Holy Spirit, both at our baptism and whenever we have need during our trial-filled journey to the Kingdom. And just as physical man needs to keep breathing in order to live, we need to keep spiritually breathing in order to continue our journey. So just as Adam is considered a type of Christ, I believe he can also be considered a type of us, the elect, that is, as he was the first physical child of God and we are the firstfruits, the first spiritual children of God.

And just as Adam sinned and was separated from God and no longer able to walk and breathe in His divine presence, we are also vulnerable too and made weak by the effects of our sin which, like a respiratory illness, prevents us from comfortably breathing. You know when physically ill our lungs and nasal passages are filled with mucus, hampering and restricting our ability to breathe, just as sin spiritually hampers and restricts our ability to be inspired to walk with God and properly function. And just as increased physical activity requires more oxygen, more breathing, so too does increased spiritual activity require more of God's Holy Spirit, His divine breath. Consider also how contagious all these respiratory illnesses are. Even when our coughing and sneezing seems unproductive, it is still their very nature to spread and to infect others, just as it is sin's very nature to make us unproductive children while infecting those all around us.

The number of metaphors and parallels are really remarkable. Is it possible that the convergence of all these respiratory illnesses today, does it foreshadow troubling times ahead? Is God trying to get our attention? Are we too close to the world such that we are sharing in their disease and risking the loss of the remarkable gift of His divine inspiration? You know, we already know from Genesis 6:17 when God tells Noah that He would use the floodwaters to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, and He did.

We also know that from Job 34:14-15 that if God were to take back His Spirit and His breath from us, that all life would cease. And one day in the

future we also know that He will remove His breath from most all of sinful humanity. And consider this. The air we breathe is also required for sound to travel, for us to speak, for us to hear.

Amos 8:11 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

And just at the time when mankind needs God's voice, His inspiration more than ever before, we know He must take it away from most of mankind in His divine judgment. Therefore, as we are instructed in Romans 11:22, I think it behooves all of us to carefully consider the goodness and severity of our great God, the goodness of His breath of life, and the severity of losing it. And consider this. In this season of the Passover where we are admonished to examine ourselves honestly and thoroughly, how can we do so without the divine inspiration of our loving and powerful God who knows all and sees all within our hearts far more clearly than we do ourselves. His very breath is the source of everything good in our lives. Without Him, without His breath, we can do nothing. And any effort to rid ourselves of the sin that besets us will be unproductive.

As I move toward a conclusion, I wanted to read a synopsis on the journey that our blood travels endlessly through our respiratory system as we breathe. I found it on HealthCentral.com and it is a little technical, but do not get bogged down with that. I just wanted to give you an idea of the complexity of our design so that we can enjoy and truly appreciate the breath of life from moment to moment, each and every day.

So here goes:

While it sounds simple, the lungs give your blood oxygen. Your heart pumps that oxygenated blood around your body. The process is actually quite involved, and here is how it happens. 1) after delivering oxygen to your body's organs and tissues, oxygen depleted blood returns to your heart and enters your heart's upper right chamber called the right atrium. 2) your blood flows through your tricuspid valve down to your right ventricle, your heart's lower right chamber.

3) your right ventricle pumps that blood out through your pulmonary valve, which separates your heart from the pulmonary artery and the blood vessel that supplies your lungs. Once in the lungs, 4) your blood gets enriched with the oxygen that you breathe in. Oxygen enters your blood through tiny air sacs in your lung called alveoli. As you breathe out, the carbon dioxide exits your blood with the help of those same alveoli. This swapping of carbon dioxide for oxygen is called gas exchange.

5) now enriched with oxygen, this blood leaves the lungs and heads back to the heart via your pulmonary veins. It flows into your heart's upper left chamber called your left atrium. 6) now your mitral valve opens up, allowing blood to flow down to your left ventricle. This is your heart's main pumping chamber. 7) your left ventricle contracts or squeezes, pumping blood through your aortic valve in and into your aorta, your body's largest artery.

8) From there, your blood travels through a network of increasingly small arteries until it is delivered its supply of oxygen throughout your body. 9) your blood then returns to your heart via your veins entering your right atrium and beginning the cycle all over again.

Think about it. All this and more just to keep us breathing. Consider, therefore, if God designed us physically in such an amazingly complex fashion just to keep us upright today, imagine what is going on inside us spiritually as God prepares us to breathe for all eternity.

And finally, I would like to read, as I often do, from the following five scriptures.

Job 32:8 "But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding."

Job 33:4 . . . and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Job 12:10 In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?

Psalm 139:14 I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalm 150:6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

So take a deep breath, everyone, be inspired.