

The Breath of Life | 1 Peter 1:3-9
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INTRODUCTION

I have sat with people in some of the hardest rooms | you can imagine.

When the door is closed and the masks are off, the conversation often begins the same way: *"I probably shouldn't be feeling this way." "I don't want to be a burden."*

What they are really saying is: *I am not sure I am still someone worth showing up for.*

And every time I hear those words I think: I am not sure how the Christian life could be this hard. But every time I remember: God breathed life into this person. They are not a problem to manage. They are a God-breathed life, sustained by power that has not given up on them.

I think Peter felt exactly the same way when he wrote this letter.

He is writing to people in horrendous pain, scattered, persecuted, losing relationships, losing their footing. And he does not pretend it isn't hard. He says *you have been grieved by various trials*. He says the faith is being tested by fire. **He knows.**

And from that place, as a pastor who knows, he writes:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."

, 1 Peter 1:3–9

FORM IN CHAOS

I remember when I was in fifth grade, sitting in a classroom in Chicago during a time when violence was high and the future felt uncertain. One day a motivational speaker, an artist, came in. He scribbled chaotic lines across the board and asked, *"What do you see?"*

We laughed. One kid said, *"Yo mamma."* Another said, *"I see a shoe."* The speaker traced its outline in the mess, and suddenly we all saw it. Then his tone shifted. *"Statistically,"* he said, *"some of you may not make it to 18."* The room went quiet.

"Find the form in the chaos. And hold onto it."

Some of us spent our lives doing exactly that. And listen — that is not wrong. That is survival. That is resilience. But when life gets hard, resilience can

quietly turn into self-sufficiency. And we begin to carry something we were never meant to carry because **Our effort is always a response to life. It is never the source.**

THREE BREATHS

And Peter speaks directly to that.

In this passage Peter shows us three ways God is at work when the Christian life is harder than we thought it would be. And I want to organize it all around one idea: it is God's breath, not ours, that gives and sustains and restores life.

Here is where I get that word. When a baby is born, the first thing that happens is they take a breath. Peter says we have been *born again*. That means God gave us a first breath. And what I want to show you is that the same God who gave you that breath has been breathing into you ever since.

Three breaths. One direction: toward you.

POINT 1: THE FIRST BREATH, WE ARE BIRTHED BY GOD

SCRIPTURE, 1 PETER 1:3–5

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading... who by God's power are being guarded through faith..."

Look at that phrase, *He has caused us to be born again*. Stop there.

The life you now have in Christ did not start with you. It started with God. Just as Adam had no breath until God breathed into him, you have no life toward God until He breathes it into you. This new birth is not something you achieve, **it is something you receive.**

You are not self-generated. **You are God-breathed. Twice.**

Once in creation. Once in new birth. The same God, the same breath, the same you. Which means the most important question when life gets hard is not *what is going on in my life, or can I handle this*. It is **who is holding me.**

And Peter answers that before you can even ask.

TRUST THE FIRST BREATHE

We can trust this first breath, this new birth, because of one thing: Jesus' last breath. When He said *it is finished*, everything that needed to happen for you to be adopted as a son or daughter

of God had happened. That is what new birth means. Not just a fresh start. **A family. A Father.** That is your security.

THE SIDEWALK

After that speaker came to our classroom, me and my friends tried a lot harder. Me, David, Carlos, and Michael, pinky-swearing on the sidewalk in gangland Chicago. We were going to hold the line ourselves. No drugs. No gangs. We meant it.

And they did. Michael Russell and Carlos Chambers kept that promise. Church on Sunday. Changes made. Even moved away from that part of Chicago. They did everything right.

And still became statistics..

What I know now that I didn't know on that sidewalk is what Peter meant, we were asking the wrong question. Not *what* will hold. But ***who***.

There was nothing that could give us what we were reaching for, an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, unfading. Only God could hold what we were trying to carry. And He had been holding all along, holding Michael, holding Carlos, holding every name on that sidewalk, in ways we could not see and cannot yet fully understand.

When we let go of the idea that we are the ones keeping it together, we are finally in a position to receive what was never ours to generate.

You are not the breath. You are the one being breathed into.

TRANSITION

Peter is writing to people whose ground is shifting, scattered, persecuted, trying to find form in chaos that will not hold still. Sound familiar?

And what he wants them to know, what he wants *you* to know, is not just that God gave you a first breath. It is that Christ took a last breath, and you can trust it. Because grace is not specifically general. **It's generally specific.**

He did not breathe His last breath for sin in the abstract, our communion liturgy reminds us it was for the sins of the whole world. And the whole world includes the specific life you have been trying to hold together on your own.

POINT 2: THE SUSTAINING BREATH, GOD'S POWER UPHOLDS AND GUARDS

SCRIPTURE, 1 PETER 1:5–7

"...who by God's power are being guarded through faith... In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Peter does something interesting here. He looks backwards, *you have been born again*, and he looks forwards, *an inheritance that is imperishable*. And right in the middle, holding both of those things together, he says: *who by God's power are being guarded*.

Same God. Same breath. All the way through.

But here is the honest thing: you cannot always see it or explain it.

ILLUSTRATION, PAPER AIRPLANES

I grew up in Chicago. And I remember sitting by a window with my cousin Timmy. Just us, a couple sheets of paper, and an open window. We folded airplanes and threw them, seeing whose would fly farther.

Timmy's sailed. Mine dipped, then something caught it. The wind lifted it, carried it farther than I could have thrown on my best day. Timmy asked, *"How'd you do that?"* I smiled and said, *"Magic dust. Invisible. I keep it in my pocket."*

He shoved another plane into my hands. *"Put some on mine!"* I pretended to sprinkle nothing over it like holy oil. He threw it, and the wind caught his too. *"It works!"* he shouted.

I only said magic dust because I was a kid who couldn't explain the wind. But I am not a kid anymore. And what I know now is that the wind was never whimsical. It is the same force that holds a 900,000 pound aircraft in the air. You can feel it but you cannot fully explain it. And Jesus uses wind as his illustration for the Spirit, **because the Spirit is the breath of God.**

That word Peter uses, *dynamis* (die-NAH-mis), does not mean a power that started something and stepped back. It means **active, sustaining strength**.

Present tense. Right now. Fierce. Whether you can feel it or not.

And here is what that means practically: you will not always be able to see it working. You will not always know it is there until you look back one day and say, *I have no idea how I got through that.*

WHAT I HAVE SEEN

I have been here long enough now to say this to you: I have seen some of you walk through fire and God sustained you. I have watched things I could not explain, marriages that should have ended, faith that should have collapsed, grief that should have buried people, and God's wind

caught them. I cannot always tell you how. But Peter says it is His power. **And I have seen it with my own eyes.**

Notice what Peter does not say about the trials. Not *in this you endure*. Not *in this you survive*. He says, ***in this you rejoice***. That is not a command to fake happiness. It is an announcement of something grief cannot reach.

The trials come so that faith can be tested and proven genuine, like gold in fire. The fire does not destroy what is real. **It reveals it.** God is not watching you burn from a distance. He knows exactly what the fire will leave behind. **And He trusts it.**

THE HIDDEN PLACE

Grief has a way of producing a moment that happens in almost every life. Something in you says: *Don't let anyone see me like this.*

So we hide. We show up but not fully. And over time we believe the lie: *If people really knew... if God really saw... this would disqualify me.*

The resurrection answers back: the place you think disqualifies you is exactly where Jesus already went. He was not crucified in a cathedral. He was crucified at the garbage heap, outside the city walls, among criminals, in public shame. He breathed His last breath there so no one would ever have to say, *God has not been here.*

He has been there. He came not to condemn you. He came to raise what was dead back to life. The fire does not destroy what God has placed in you. It reveals it.

You are not disqualified by your wounds. You are met there.

God does not erase you. He restores you. As the source of life, He formed you with the first breath. He meets you when it feels like your last.

TRANSITION

That is the cross. Can we sit there for a moment? with the heaviest thing in history? (Hold Silence)

Because what comes next does not erase what we just said. It is born from it. There is one more thing Peter wants us to see, and it is the strangest thing in this entire letter.

These people are **in fire**. And Peter says they are rejoicing with joy that cannot even be put into words.

That is where we are going.

POINT 3: THE PARADOXICAL BREATH, LEARNING TO BREATHE UNDERWATER

SCRIPTURE, 1 PETER 1:8–9

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Read that carefully. *Though you have not seen him... you love him.*

That is strange. You love someone you cannot see. You rejoice with joy that is *inexpressible*, Peter literally uses a word for something that cannot be put into words. And they are being refined in fire at the same time.

This is not simple joy. This is not the joy of everything finally working out. This is the joy of learning to breathe underwater, and it does not come naturally. Every instinct says hold on, protect yourself, stay in control. But that is exactly what drowns you.

The new breath requires a completely different technique. You have to learn to exhale when everything in you says don't. **To receive when everything in you says generate.**

Peter does not apologize for the paradox. He names it plainly:

*You don't see him. And you love him.
You are in the fire. And you are rejoicing.*

Two things make that possible.

First, you need a love that has been built through His Word. That is His people, showing up even when you don't feel it. You fall in love with someone you cannot see by spending time with what He has left you. *You learn to breathe with his breath.* That love becomes the anchor.

Second, the ability to look at the most painful experiences of your life and see God doing something beautiful inside them. The fire is not random. It is refining. And when you can hold that, even imperfectly, something shifts.

That is the technique. That is how you breathe underwater.

OBTAINING EXPLAINED

And what are you receiving in this? Peter says it plainly: *the salvation of your souls.*

That word is *Sōtēria*. Not just rescue. Wholeness. Full restoration. Everything becoming what it was always supposed to be. Embodied. Right now. In the life you are actually living.

And I want to be clear about what that is *not*. There is a term for something a lot of us unconsciously believe, it is called **moral therapeutic deism**. It is a mouthful, I know. But essentially it is a contractual mentality: *if I am a good person, if I follow the rules and try my best, God owes me a comfortable, easy life*. Treating God like a vending machine for a stress-free existence.

***Sōtēria* shatters that contract entirely.**

Because God is not promising to drain the ocean so you can breathe normal air again. He is not fixing the environment. He is giving you a **completely different set of lungs**, lungs that were never yours to begin with, so that you can survive, and even find that strange, inexpressible joy, in an environment that by every calculation should drown you.

That is what Peter is describing. Not comfort. **Transformation**. Not the removal of the fire. The refinement happening inside it.

You are not becoming someone else. You are becoming who you were always meant to be.

PETER'S BEACH

You know who wrote this letter? A man who knew exactly what this paradox costs.

Peter denied Jesus three times. The same night Jesus needed him most. Before the rooster finished crowing, he had said *I don't know him* three times. And then Jesus died. And Peter went back to the only thing he knew, he went fishing. Trying to find the form in the chaos. Coming up empty.

Then someone called from the shore: *throw your net on the other side*. The catch was so full they couldn't haul it in. And John said, *It is the Lord*.

And Peter, carrying three denials and a week of shame, jumped out of the boat and swam to shore. **He couldn't wait.**

Jesus didn't meet him with a list of failures. He met him with breakfast. With a fire on the beach. And then three questions, once for every denial:

Peter, do you love me?

Not *did you earn this*. Not *explain yourself*. Just, *do you love me?*

And when Peter said yes the third time, when it finally broke open, Jesus commissioned him. *Feed my sheep*. And then He said something that should have sounded terrifying:

Someday they will take you where you do not want to go.

Your life is not going to look the way you planned. The form you were trying to hold together, that is not what this is. And yet, Peter writes a letter to people in fire and he says: *in this you rejoice with joy inexpressible*.

That is a man who learned to breathe underwater.

He is not pretending it isn't hard. He is saying: I have been to the place of total exposure. Jesus met me there. And the life He sent me into, nothing I would have chosen, nothing I could have written, **was better than anything I ever planned.**

That is sōtēria. Not just rescue. Wholeness. Everything becoming what it was always supposed to be. Right now. In the life you are actually living.

TRANSITION

You do not become yourself by striving harder or white-knuckling it. You become yourself by receiving what God gives.

Some of you walked in here today not sure how the Christian life could be this hard. And I want you to know, **Peter knows. Jesus knows.** And the same voice that found Peter on that beach is the one speaking into this room right now.

Do you love me?

That is where the new breath begins. Not when you finally get it together.

When you finally stop pretending that you can.

If you had said any of this to me as a kid on that sidewalk in Chicago, I would have said exactly what maybe some of you are saying right now, sitting in the middle of your own fire:

Really?

Does He redeem this? This body. This story. This pain. This chaos.

Does God redeem this?

CONCLUSION

Yes.

Not eventually. Not once you get it together. Not once the pain makes sense.

Yes.

Because Jesus rose, and His wounds were still there. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a ghost story. This is not a polished, cleaned-up return.

Salvation is embodied, in a real life, a real story, a real body, a real person.

He came back as Himself, same hands, same side, and said, *"Touch it. It is still here. And it is redeemed."*

This is a preaching draft.

Nothing in your story is wasted. Not the pinky swear on the sidewalk. Not

the friends you lost before you could explain it. Not the years of striving. Not the denials. Not the empty nets. Not the knees in the sand.

All of it is material in the hands of a God who does not erase. He fulfills.

Into the resurrection, He is restoring you. Not into someone else.

Into who you were always meant to be.

That is the joy that is inexpressible. Not because your life is perfect. But because you are finally receiving what God has been holding for you **the whole time you were gone.**

So let us pray.

God, we come to you as Peter did. Not with answers. Not with performance. Not with everything figured out.

For everyone in this room still trying to hold the form together, still folding the planes just right, still searching for magic dust, still carrying what they haven't let anyone see, and for those who have lost someone before they could explain it, Michael, Carlos, and every name this room holds, would you meet them right here? Not eventually, but *now*, the way you met Peter in the sand, reminding us that you are holding what we cannot.

God, would you do what only you can do.

Help us put it down. Help us stop trying to be the source.

Not because we finally got it right. Not because the chaos finally cleared. But because you are the source of our first breath, our last breath, and our new breath. **You have never stopped breathing.**

So fill us with your breath, Father, we pray.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

THE BREATH OF LIFE, Small Group Discussion Questions 1 Peter 1:3--9

OPENING

1. The sermon opened with the image of finding form in chaos. Where in your life right now are you most trying to *hold something together* on your own? What does that feel like?
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THE FIRST BREATH, We Are Birthed by God

1. The sermon drew a distinction between effort as a *response* to life versus effort as the *source* of life. How does that distinction land for you personally? Where have you been living as though effort is the source?
 2. Peter says we are being *guarded* by God's power, *dynamis*, active, sustaining strength, present tense. Where in your story, looking back, can you see that wind at work even when you couldn't feel it at the time?
 3. The sermon asked: *the most important question when life gets hard is not what is going on, but who is holding me*. How does grounding your endurance in a *who* rather than a *what* change the way you approach a current struggle?
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THE SUSTAINING BREATH, God's Power Upholds and Guards

1. Peter says *in this you rejoice*, not endure, not survive, but rejoice. What is the difference between those three words in your experience? Have you ever felt that strange, grief-and-hope-at-the-same-time quality Peter is describing?
 2. The sermon described grief producing a *hidden place*, a part of your life you believe would disqualify you if anyone really saw it. Without going somewhere you are not ready to go, is there a hidden place you have been carrying? What would it mean to believe you are *met* there rather than disqualified?
 3. Jesus breathed His last breath at the garbage heap, outside the city walls, among criminals, in public shame, *on purpose*. What does it mean to you that God did not avoid the worst place, but entered it?
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THE PARADOXICAL BREATH, Learning to Breathe Underwater

1. The sermon introduced the term *moral therapeutic deism*, the unconscious belief that if I am good enough, God owes me a comfortable life. Where do you see that belief operating in your own expectations of God? How has suffering challenged or reshaped that contract?
2. Peter describes people who *love someone they cannot see* and *rejoice in the middle of fire*, what the sermon called an inexplicable, paradoxical joy. Have you ever experienced something like that? What made it possible?

3. The sermon said learning to breathe with God's breath requires *technique*, showing up in His Word, His people, even when you don't feel it. What practices or habits have helped you breathe in seasons when everything in you said *don't*?
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PETER'S BEACH

1. Jesus asked Peter the same question three times, *do you love me?*, once for every denial. Is there a place in your story where you feel like you need to hear that question asked of you? What would it mean to answer it honestly right now?
 2. Jesus told Peter *someday they will take you where you do not want to go*, and that became his commissioning. Where is God asking you to go that you do not want to go? What would it look like to receive that as calling rather than punishment?
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CLOSING

1. The sermon ended with the question: *Does He redeem this?*, this body, this story, this pain, this chaos. What is the *this* you walked in carrying today? And what does it mean to you that the answer is *yes*, not eventually, but now?
2. *Sōtēria*, salvation, means not just rescue but wholeness. Full restoration. Everything becoming what it was always supposed to be. What would wholeness look like in your life right now? What would you need to receive rather than generate to get there?