



Links Players

Breath

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath[a] enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:4-6, ESV)

Matthew Jordan stood with his eyes closed, slowly moving inhaled and exhaled past his mouth. Intentionally using his breath to settle his nerves and anxious feelings for his Sunday round at The Open on his home course Royal Liverpool.

From a neuroscience perspective, this slower breathing brings more oxygen to the body, allowing the heart and lungs to do the work they are designed to do. For Jordan, focusing on his breathing helped him focus on his tee shot.

We rarely think about our breathing because our bodies automatically breathe for us. Without breath, we don't exist. It is the start of the human story. "Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Genesis 2:7).

The Hebrew word for breath in our Ezekiel passage today is ruach. Ruach as spirit appeared when the LORD hovered over the waters as God began creating. Ruach can be a blast of wind of God's destruction (Job 4:9). Ruach (breath) is also the source of life that originates with God.

Babies come into the world breathing seamlessly using the diaphragm. As we grow and life happens, our coping strategies hijack this process leaving us stuck in shallow breathing. Silent chaos begins to ensue within our nervous systems.

Modern neuroscience confirms that re-learning to breathe from the diaphragm positively impacts our nervous systems and therefore strengthens other systems in our bodies at the same time. For elite athletes, slowing the breathing allows the brain to slow down, which helps the athlete be more focused, calm, and ready to perform at their full capability.

Self-awareness of the rhythm of our breath is spiritual too. Author K.J. Ramsey says, "Any moment that stress starts to sink you down the autonomic ladder (fright, flight, freeze), you can remember that the Breath who formed this world breathes within you." Sometimes all we might be able to do is say Lord on an inhale and help on an exhale. Attuning to our most basic function of breathing can remind us of our need for God.

The physiological benefits of slower, diaphragmatic breathing are managing stress and anxiety, increasing oxygen to the heart and brain, and better sleep. The spiritual benefits unite us with God – the creator and giver of life.

How are you breathing today?

Prayer: Lord, help me connect to you through my breathing today.

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Tracy Hanson

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