



Study Guide for *Breathe: Creating Space for God in a Hectic Life*

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Welcome to what I hope will be a life-changing experience for your group: Reading *Breathe* together.

Jesus modeled life in a small group for us, because he knew that we were made for community, for relationship. Not just a vertical relationship with Him, but horizontal relationships with other people. He speaks to us through all our circumstances and experiences, especially the experience of community.

The best way to study *Breathe* together is to take your time. Don't hurry your group through this book on slowing down. If a chapter takes you more than one meeting to get through, that's okay. Let God meet you in the reading.

I highly recommend that each person keep a journal or notebook during this study. As you each read the book on your own, stop and do the breathing exercises scattered through the chapter. Jot some notes about each one in your journal. Then, when you come together to discuss the chapter, talk about your experiences in the breathing exercises. Some of the study questions are taken directly from the breathing exercises, or ask you to share what you learned by trying those exercises. There are also questions called "Breathing Deeper" that will take you a step deeper together as a group through reflection or study of Scripture. Hopefully, having done the exercises on your own will enrich your discussion time.

You have freedom to structure this study however you'd like. You may want to pick just a couple of questions, or one breathing exercise. You may want to discuss a whole chapter in a meeting, or break it into a few meetings. Again, take your time and see what God is showing you as a group through your experiences.

I'd suggest that you start each meeting with a few minutes of silent prayer. One person can lead this by simply saying, *"Let's take a few moments to get quiet and settle ourselves, breathe. God, we know you are as close as the air we breathe. You are with us, whether we know it or not. Make us aware of your quiet presence."*

Then, just sit and be quiet, allowing everyone to take a few deep breaths and let go of the distractions that we inevitably bring with us to any meeting. Use the time to focus on God, to focus on being present. After a few minutes, the leader can simply say *"Amen."* Then you can begin the discussion.

Respect the confidentiality and safety of the group. All that's shared stays within the group, and everyone is entitled to have an opinion and to share it without shame or ridicule.

Be sure to end your time by praying for each other, and continue to pray for each other during the time between your meetings.

The Invitation

Come to me, all you who are weary
and burdened and I will give you rest.

Chapter 1

Hurried and Worried

Each week, after you have your time of quiet prayer, you may want to start with this question: *Since we last met, where did you notice God?*

(Knowing that question is coming up will help us to look for God's work in our lives and in the world. We may see the Spirit in a hug from our children, in a conflict at work being resolved, an answered prayer, or just an awareness of God's presence in a difficult situation. The idea is to practice noticing.)

Then, talk about the woman whose story opens the chapter. In chapter one, we meet Jane — a busy mom of five young kids. In what ways could you relate to Jane? In what ways are you like her? In what ways are you different? _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. Do you exhibit any of the symptoms of Hurried Woman Syndrome (fatigue, weight gain, or decreased libido)? Are these symptoms related to the pace of your life? Are your days hurried? _____

2. Did you notice God anywhere in your day? _____

3. Do you ever find yourself hurrying even when you are doing things that don't need to be done fast, like praying or spending time with your spouse or children? _____

4. Read 1 John 3:1 again. According to this, how does God feel about you? How does that make you feel? _____

5. How much margin is there in your life? Do you feel overloaded? How do you feel about this? What would you have to do to increase the margin in your life? _____

Breathing Deeper

Take some time to be still. Most of us are at least a little hurried. What drives that for you? Write in your journal, and ask God to show you the things that motivate you as you write. What is one step you'd like to take toward living a less hurried life, toward embracing Sabbath Simplicity?

Ask God to help you begin to take that one step. _____

Chapter 2

Out of Breath

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then ask the question, *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

Then talk about Christine. What is your response to her story? Did you see any aspect of yourself in her struggles? _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. How many hours do your kids have to just "hang out" and play in an unstructured way? _____

2. How might time to daydream and read affect your child's spiritual life? How might allowing this kind of thing affect your ability to trust, to not have to control? _____

3. Do you feel pressure to hurry your kids? Were you hurried as a child? What was that like? _____

4. What was your experience as you tried the final exercise in this chapter? What challenges did you encounter? If it felt uncomfortable, what might help you to feel more comfortable with this type of prayer? _____

Breathing Deeper

Do you ever feel that others are making your choices for you, that you don't have a lot of control over your schedule? When you hear people say, "you have to do...or you'll never get to..." question that. Ask yourself if it is really true or just a myth of our culture? _____

Read Mark 1:35-39. Jesus has taken some time to be alone, to pray. What happens when the disciples realize he's gone? _____

Do you ever feel that it's hard to find time to be alone? Is it helpful to know that Jesus also had a hard time with it? But he does not give up on taking that time — throughout the gospels we read that Jesus took time to go to "lonely places" in order to pray. What would happen if you followed his example? _____

What happens to Jesus as a result of his time alone? _____

The Challenge

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

Chapter 3 Scattered

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then ask the question, *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

Then talk about Laura. "Like many of us, Laura was a giver . . . Also like many of us, Laura had trouble saying no." In what ways are you like Laura? In what ways are you different? Laura and her family experienced a crisis which became a catalyst for growth in their lives. What role have difficulties played in your spiritual journey? _____

Often, our hurry keeps us on the surface of our lives, able to avoid any negative thoughts or feelings. We bury ourselves in busyness. Sometimes we are afraid if we slow down we'll be less important. Again, this is a lie. And we don't really avoid the sadness or fear—it's still there under the surface. Slowing down allows us to look at it and heal it.

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. How much are you, as Laura says she was, "shaped by who I thought people wanted me to be?" What would happen if you were shaped instead by God's love for you and his calling on your life? _____

2. Do you ever give yourself the time to notice or attend to the stirrings in your soul? _____

3. What would happen if you said no to some things in order to say yes to focusing on your relationship with God? _____

4. What worries, concerns, goals vie for your heart? What do you believe about your heart? _____

5. What anxieties, worries, responsibilities cause you to forget that you are child of God, deeply loved? What are you afraid of? Even if your fear is irrational, name it. _____

Breathing Deeper

Laura admits that sometimes she would “self-medicate by buying things,” and that she “overscheduled the kids and me to avoid pain.” Can you relate? Have you noticed any similar patterns in your own behavior? _____

Sometimes we think that in order to please God, we have to please others. But since other people can expect or demand any number of conflicting things from us, it is not possible to please everyone. To love someone and to please them are two different things. If this is an issue for you, ask yourself — what motivates me to try and make other people happy? What am I afraid of? Then read 1 John 4:18: *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.”* What is God saying to you about this issue? _____

Chapter 4

Simplified

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then ask: *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

What thoughts or questions came up for you as you read Jean's story? Jean walked through the tension of balancing her parenting and her work outside the home. Have you and your family wrestled with these kind of issues? What has that been like for you? _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. What life challenges have you faced that have made your life more complicated? Could these same challenges be God's way of calling you to the simplicity that comes from focusing on him? _____

2. What do you think of when you hear the term "simplicity"? Have you ever thought of how it might relate to your spiritual life? _____

3. How connected are the financial and spiritual areas of your life? What keeps them separated? _____

4. Even if we think we don't have much money, we likely have food and shelter. How do these privileges affect your dependence on God? How do they affect your level of gratitude? _____

4. Does your stuff enhance relationships, or detract from them? _____

Breathing Deeper

Read Philippians 4:11-13. Paul, who wrote the verses you just read, had a difficult life. He endured prison, beatings, being shipwrecked, and more. Yet he said he was content. What do you think made Paul, despite his sufferings, able to feel content? What steps could you take toward being content no matter what your circumstances are? _____

The Reason

For I am gentle and humble in heart.

Chapter 5

Mindful

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then discuss the question, *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

What issues or questions surfaced as you read the story about Donna, who is "ruthlessly unhurried"? How are you like her? How are you different?

What changes, if any, do you want to make to be more mindful? _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. What stands in the way of your being focused on Christ? _____

2. How can you actually take advantage of opportunities when you see them? How can you improve your ability to see those opportunities?

3. Have you tried some of the slowing steps suggested in the exercises? How did that go? _____

4. What were meals like at your home growing up? Do you have fond memories, or do you recall more strife and tension? What would you have to say no to in order to say yes to family meals? _____

Breathing Deeper

Read Deuteronomy 6:5-9. This passage talks to parents about passing on the legacy of faith to their children. It's implied that parents will be with their kids enough to talk to them about God. It says we should talk about God's way of life, his commandments, *"when you sit at home and when you walk along the road."*

But the question is, do you ever sit at home? Or are you just running through? Maybe you don't walk along the road, but you drive along it in the carpool. What would it take to create a family mealtime where you could talk about God? Do you ever use the time in the car to talk about matters of faith? How could you apply this passage to your real life? _____

Chapter 6

Humble

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then ask: *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

Elise made practical financial decisions to live simply. These decisions allowed her to follow her heart. We may think of rational decisions about things like a budget are disconnected from our emotional life. How were these two areas of life connected for Elise? What is your response to her story? _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. How does where you live affect your ability to practice simplicity? _____

2. Think about a time when you were recently interrupted. How did you feel? How did you react? _____

3. Do you have a personal mission statement, or a clear idea of what God is calling you to do? What steps could you take toward working on this? _____

Breathing Deeper

Read Mark 5:21-43. Look back at the comments on this passage on pages 150-153. Who do you relate to in this Bible story? Explain. Imagine yourself in the place of the different people in the story. What do you think each is thinking or feeling? What do you notice about Jesus? _____

How are our ability to practice simplicity and our response to interruptions related? _____

The Promise

And you will find rest for your souls.

Chapter 7

Rested

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

Patti and her family longed for rest, so they began keeping Sabbath. What is your response to this story? What did you notice about Patti? What do you notice about yourself as you read it? _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. Do you have a day in your week where you can simply rest? How much do you want that? What steps would you have to take to begin to move toward having that day of rest? _____

2. What specific things could you and your family or friends do on Sundays to let your "love take form as time shared?" _____

3. What were Sundays like for you as a child? What objections or uncertainty arises as you consider the possibility of Sabbath-keeping?

4. Read Luke 23:50-24:12. Meditate on the story—imagine yourself in it. What feelings came up for you as you tried this on your own?

5. What is a step toward Sabbath Simplicity that you have taken or want to take? _____

Breathing Deeper

One of the more common objections I hear to Sabbath keeping has to do with children's sports. Soccer games and other events are often held on Sundays. Has your family dealt with this issue? _____

My daughter has soccer games on Sundays during certain seasons, and for a long time, I wrestled with how to make Sundays restful. I decided that a soccer game can be fun recreation or it can be a stressful, pressured experience. The determining factor is how I behave on the sidelines. We've found that if I can keep my comments and yelling to a minimum, then soccer is a joyful experience for all of us. How can you make sporting events more fun and recreational for your kids? _____

Chapter 8

Sheltered

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then ask, *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

What is your response to Naomi's story? Do you ever find yourself, as she did, longing for sanctuary? Tell about that experience. _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. How do you think slowing your pace for just one day would affect the rest of your week? _____

2. What refreshes or rejuvenates you? What brings you joy? _____

3. Have you begun trying to take a Sabbath? How's that going for you? _____

4. If you were to eliminate certain chores or activities (such as laundry or shopping) on Sundays, what changes would you have to make to the rest of your schedule? How feasible is that? _____

Breathing Deeper

"Sabbath is not about rule-keeping; it's about creating space." This book is supposed to be about *"creating space for God in a hectic life."* How's that going? What do you have to do to create space? What steps have you taken toward that, toward a life of Sabbath Simplicity? Do you believe it is truly possible to create space and slow down? _____

The Reassurance

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Chapter 9

Slow

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then ask, *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

What struck you about Grace's story? What could you relate to? Have you ever tried to slow down your life, as Grace did? What happened?

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. What pruning do you feel God is calling you to do? Where have you already pruned your schedule or commitments? _____

2. How are you feeling right now? Have you tried noticing when you feel rushed or overwhelmed? What feelings tend to accompany your hurried moments? _____

3. What is a routine task, something you have to do each day? (Answers will vary depending on the age of your kids and your lifestyle.) Have you tried pausing around those tasks? What has happened as a result? _____

4. What is God saying to you about your priorities and about pruning things from your life lately? _____

5. What keeps you from being fully present in each moment of your life? _____

Breathing Deeper

Grace took time for solitude: regularly for an afternoon, and sometimes for a weekend retreat. Do you think such a practice might be possible in your life? What appeals to you about it? What other feelings — perhaps fear, apprehension, uncertainty — come up when you consider making solitude a regular practice? _____

Chapter 10

Focused

Again, begin your meeting with the prayer and time of silence. Then ask, *Where did you notice God this week?* _____

What is your response to Anne's story? What did you think about her four goals for simplifying her life? How do you think her challenges shaped her? _____

From the Breathing Exercises:

1. Do you live in a culture of going fast? How have you responded to that culture? _____

2. What are some things in your life that "choke off the fullness of life that God intended for you?" What steps are you taking to eliminate those things? _____

3. Do you have interests or hobbies outside of what you do with your kids? Why or why not? How does that affect you emotionally and spiritually? _____

4. Have you found a family activity that you can enjoy together? What is it? Are you making time to actually do it? _____

Breathing Deeper

Anne said that her fourth step toward living a simpler life was to "live in reality," that is, to face her emotional issues and deal with healing the pain of her past. How much work have you done in this area? What might God be calling you to take a look at, perhaps even with the help of a counselor? _____

