

B R E A T H E

A Reflective Space
Friends of ICM

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Breathing Spaces

Letting God Breathe New Life



While I was working on a research project during the early phase of Covid-19, I hit a writer's block and began questioning the value and relevance of my fifty-thousand-word project in this season of crisis. I was stuck. Not knowing what to do, I reached out to a trusted mentor-educator-friend for advice. Her reply was not what I expected: *"Perhaps you may want to let it go (but not give it up) and let God breathe into it."*

Somehow these words became a breath of fresh air, spoken as if by God to illumine the abyss of my soul. Over the following weeks, these same words, embodying God's light and life, permeated my inner life and outward deeds as I navigated the terrains of work, ministry and family life. I began to notice three inner movements operating seamlessly in my interior space - letting go, letting God breathe new life and becoming open.

Letting Go

When the pandemic crisis wiped out all our plans and the road maps of our lives, we confront the reality of how little control we possess. Crisis has a way of pushing our self-preservation button and setting off our freeze reaction mode into high-speed. A natural defense mechanism, this built-in fortitude helps keep us in-tact in the face of crisis. It is not a bad thing. At least not in the beginning.

None of us want a life lived in constant hyper-vigilance, fear and anxiety. A closed-in mind and a fenced-up heart is far from the life Jesus talks about when He promised us an abundant life. Hence, the first movement in navigating any transition and crisis is to learn to let go of control. But for most of us, this first movement is easier said than done!

Letting go is a journey. During this C-19 crisis, we discover that some things seem easier to let go than others. While it feels challenging in the beginning, we slowly let go one thing at a time. One meeting at a time. One travel schedule at a time. (What choice do we have!) The tighter our grip, the more precious it is to us, the harder to let go. We discover what truly matters to us - rightly or wrongly. Jesus says where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. Letting go is a journey of prying our fingers open - one at a time. It takes practice to let go of what we

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3 Spiritual Practices to cultivate in times of crisis

1. The Practice of Stillness
2. The Practice of Lament
3. The Practice of Surrender

Where are your breathing spaces that help you connect with God on a daily basis?

fear to lose. Like it or not, Covid-19 forces us to confront our mortality, the ultimate letting go of control - of our own lives. James Bryan Smith wrote, "In the end, it is not about what you have to give up to follow God. It is what you will never get to experience if you don't choose to follow Him." This open palm journey awakens our hearts to the One who is the Creator of life.

Letting God Breathe New Life

Letting go takes on a different trajectory when we realized we are not alone on this spiritual journey and certainly not alone in this crisis. The Emmanuel God is with us. When we learn to embrace Him more fully, not just in our thoughts but also in our emotions and our actions, He can breathe new life into us.



When the Risen Christ entered the Upper Room, He gave the fearful disciples two transforming gifts they probably did not expect - first, His abiding peace, and then, the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23). This is an account of God not abandoning His people, keeping His promise to return and breathing new life into their hearts. How does God, the indwelling Spirit breathe peace into our concerns and lead us in our current realities?

Consider cultivating these practices in our daily rhythms: *The practice of stillness* helps us to slow down, breathe a little more deeply and quieten our hearts to hear His still small voice. Some days we may need to *practice lamenting* for it teaches us, like the Psalmist, to pour our hearts in all honesty to a God who is faithful and can be trusted with our fears, frustrations, anger or grief. The *practice of surrender* teaches us to loosen our grip and slowly open our palms to the One who breathes new life into us.

Find a space where God can connect with us on a daily basis. It could be our garden - where nature teaches us something about God and the rhythm of life and death. It may be a chair in our room that helps still our anxious heart and opens us up to His Word and to Him in prayer. It could even be sitting with our furry friend and being reminded that God, the Emmanuel is our faithful companion. Where do we go to find our breathing space so that we can connect to God and receive new life from Him daily?

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Prayerful Reflection

1. What might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to let go of?
2. Where are places in your life that you need God to breathe new life?
3. Where and when do you notice courage, compassion or curiosity emerging?

Becoming Open

The scene of the Risen Christ with the disciples in the Upper Room was a poignant pivotal point in Christianity. It sets in motion God's continuous mission of redemption through His disciples, His Church. It redirected every disciple's life and mission that faithful evening of the first Easter. In the same way, as God breathes new life into our situations and concerns, it can feel like a way opening up within us. Becoming open is a third movement. There are at least 3 voices we must pay attention to in this third movement - the voice of courage, the voice of compassion and the voice of curiosity. Courage comes from a hope in God even in the midst of chaos. We begin to understand that '*His grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in our weakness*'. (2 Cor 12:9). Compassion comes from a humility that considers others more highly than ourselves, leading us to look outward with deeds of love and kindness. Curiosity comes from a willingness to learn and to try new things. Crisis can potentially be turning points that propel us to love and live differently. Courage, compassion and curiosity - three voices that will bring about an increased faith, hope and love!

In contrast, be wary of the voices of fear, judgment and cynicism. These opposing indicators lead to a decreased of faith, hope and love. However, if we see them as God's invitation to return to Him and allow Him to breathe new life into us, then there is healing for our souls.

Letting go and letting God breathe new life is an on-going journey. Paying attention to what is emerging will teach us to discern and follow God's leading. When we grow deeper into these movements, we experience a glimpse of what Eugene Peterson describes as *practicing the resurrection life*. It is a life that is deeply rooted in Christ. A life that allows us to experience the power of His resurrection, a life out of death. A life that opens us up to His mystery so that we may be surprised by His graces and gifts. His offer of a peace that surpasses all understanding. His mercies that are new every morning. His assurance to us that even darkness is as light to Him.

We are called to live by faith, not sight. May God's abiding presence and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit inspire us to live and love with new courage, new compassion and new curiosity in the coming days. We are not alone. God is with us.

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