

Reflection Questions

Reflect on each of these questions. Spend time discussing them with your group or journaling them on your own.

1. How do you see Jesus inviting you to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? What is your usual response?
2. In what ways are you being open and receptive to the Holy Spirit in this season of your life?
3. How have you used *lectio divina* or other methods of reading Scripture to become aware of God's presence in your life? What have you heard from God? How have you responded?



Department of Christian Formation 2008

The Evangelical Covenant Church

Website: www.covchurch.org/formation

For information: Covenant Resource Center (800)338-IDEA

Breathe In, Breathe Out: Breathe In—Receiving God's Grace

A Devotional for Individuals and Small
Groups

By Doreen Olson

Executive Minister

Department of Christian Formation

Evangelical Covenant Church



SCRIPTURE: John 20:21-22

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."



Have you ever blown a puff of air onto a baby's face? The response seems fairly automatic. A quick puff of air causes an immediate intake response. Usually the baby is pleasantly surprised by the puff of air. Sometimes a joyful laugh is the response. It certainly gets the baby's attention.

I wonder what it was like for the disciples to experience Jesus breathing on them. Was it a quick puff of air from Jesus or a slower more prolonged breath? Was it something Jesus did regularly so they were not surprised at all by it? Or was this a more unusual action Jesus took to get their attention?

Whether it was short or long, a surprise or not, it was intended as gift. The gift being given was the Holy Spirit.* Jesus accompanied his own breath with an invitation to receive the gift of the Spirit. In what ways might Jesus be inviting us today to receive that same gift? And what is our usual response? Do we position ourselves, metaphorically speaking, to receive such a gift from Jesus? What would that look like for us?



The spiritual disciplines of prayer and reading Scripture and fasting are meant to allow space in our lives to receive what God has for us. They are a 'means of grace' that God uses to remind us of his unconditional love and his purposes and hopes for us and for this world.

During different seasons of my life the expression of my desire to be intentionally open and receptive to the Holy Spirit has taken varying forms. As a young parent prolonged times of silence and meditation were simply not practical. But parenting, when approached with attentiveness and care, can offer its own forms of spiritual discipline. The practice of being truly present to a child surely has a transforming effect. The exuberant joy and quick forgiveness that children often offer can be received with gratitude as means of grace and true gift from God.

During this current season of my life, I am drawn toward longer periods of meditation and silence and a slow reading of Scripture offering space to carefully listen. The practice of *lectio divina*, or holy reading, nourishes my soul these days. It provides opportunity to receive God's grace as if being offered the very air I need to breathe.

This prayerful reading of Scripture is fairly simple. It has a natural progression.

Centering/relaxation exercise: sit comfortably, breathe deeply, relax body, acknowledge and release distractions, invite God's presence.

Read the passage (1 or 2 times). Stop when a word or phrase stops you, becomes vibrant or attracts you. *Is there a word or image that impresses you?* Bring your senses to the text. Allow for 1-2 minutes of silence.

Read the passage again. Listen to discover how this passage touches your life today. *What does it mean? What is God trying to say?* Do not try to force a meaning. Stay open. This is a time of reflection, involving thinking, feeling, and/or intuition. Allow for 1-2 minutes of silence.

Read the passage once more. Listen to discover the invitation. *What is God calling me to do or be today or this week?* Be aware of resistance. Open your heart and will to the action that may be called for. Allow for 2-3 minutes of silence and response to God.

Share and pray. Take time to express what you have heard from God. If alone, journal impressions, or words, or a prayer that expresses your response to God. In a group, share aloud the word, image, or invitation received. Pray for God to help you respond to the invitation or word received.

It has been especially meaningful to focus on the Scripture passage or passages for an upcoming Sunday worship. Fruitful, too, has been the experience of *lectio divina* in a small group. Being present as the Spirit breathes words of invitation to others is both encouraging and inspiring.

Throughout the successive seasons of life, no matter what disciplines or practices I commit to, my hope has been that I would respond with increasing openness to the gift of the Spirit. Like the wind, God's Spirit blows where it wills. I can't control its direction or force. But I do want to be ready to receive it as gift.

As a baby, I hope that my natural response is to take it in. To receive God's love and grace with joy and gratitude, surrendering fully to the transforming work of the Spirit.



PRAYER: Breathe on me, breath of God. Fill me with life and joy and hope anew. Grant me the grace to completely surrender to your transforming work. Amen

*The word for 'breath' in the Bible is the same as the word for 'spirit.' In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, that word is 'ruah' and in the Greek language of the New Testament the word is 'pneuma.'