

## Reflection Questions

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

1. What do you need to release in order to find balance in your life?
2. Think about the ways you have experienced the love of God. How can you extend that love to others?
3. What spiritual disciplines have you engaged in within the last year? How have you seen growth in yourself through these disciplines?
4. What commitments would you like to make to God within the GROW framework?



Department of Christian Formation 2008

The Evangelical Covenant Church

Website: [www.covchurch.org/formation](http://www.covchurch.org/formation)

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

# Breathe In, Breathe Out: Breathe Out—Extending God's Grace

A Devotional for Individuals and Small  
Groups

By Doreen Olson

Executive Minister

Department of Christian Formation

Evangelical Covenant Church



SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:6-10

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*



Try this. Take a deep breath. And hold it.

It’s impossible to take a breath in and not eventually release it.

Breathing in is meant to find its balance in breathing out. Breathe in. Breathe out. That’s the natural rhythm we’re made to experience. If we attempt one without the other, it simply doesn’t work.

We were created to extend to others the love and grace that we’ve received from God. Experience the love of God and extend love to others. Receive grace, extend grace. What God has been working in us needs to find outward expression.



In his classic book, *Celebration of Discipline: the path to spiritual growth*, Richard Foster sets forth three categories of spiritual practices. Inward Disciplines include such practices as meditation, prayer, fasting and study. Outward Disciplines involve simplicity, solitude, submission and service. Corporate Disciplines, in Foster’s construct, include confession, worship, guidance and celebration. Though this is not an exhaustive list, it certainly is a helpful guide to a healthy, balanced approach.

As I’ve engaged in the inward disciplines of meditation and prayer, I’m quite naturally prompted toward the outward disciplines. That’s the kind of holistic growth the Spirit produces.

Not too long ago, I brought a concern to my spiritual director. What if I get too completely engaged in the interior disciplines? Won’t I become rather selfish? “Impossible,” was his response. That’s just not the way the Spirit does his transforming work. And that has been my experience. The more I’ve engaged in meditation and prayer, the more sensitive I become to the needs of others. The inward disciplines lead naturally to the outward disciplines. Breathing in finds its necessary and balanced expression in breathing out. It’s a natural rhythm.

The opposite can also be true. Movement outward prompts interior growth. As we engage in the discipline of service, we find that the Spirit is producing humility. Foster puts it this way: “More than any other single way, the grace of humility is worked into our lives through the Discipline of service. Humility, as we all know, is one of those virtues that is never gained by seeking it.”

There are many avenues of experiencing the discipline of service. The key or central challenge is to determine how God has created you. What gifts have you been given? What passions? Fredrick Buechner puts it this way: You’ll find your vocational calling in the place where your greatest passion and the world’s greatest need intersect. What does that look like for you?

No matter what your passion or your calling looks like, you will definitely need to find ways to breathe in and breathe out. Because breathing in, without breathing out, causes a premature death. That’s not a pleasant thought. Whether we’re talking about physical death or spiritual death, that’s not where we want to be headed.

So take some time to consider, if you haven’t already done so, how you are designed to extend God’s grace to the world.

In order to achieve balance in your spiritual practices, use the following framework. Commitments to spiritual practices or disciplines within each of these four areas will help you lean intentionally into the transforming work of the Spirit. Breathe in. Breathe out. And in that rhythm find spiritual growth.

- **God’s Word:** In what ways are you attending to and making room for the power of Scripture to shape your actions and your life?
- **Relationships:** Are there people to whom you are looking for wisdom and spiritual companionship? Are you sharing what God is teaching you with others? With whom are you making yourself accountable for growth in Christ?
- **Obedient living:** Are you using your gifts in witness and in service to others? Each of us has been given gifts to use for the sake of the kingdom of God. Do you know what gifts you’ve been given to further the work of Christ’s kingdom?
- **Worship:** What practices or disciplines are you inclined toward? Is your life increasingly being offered or surrendered to God in worship?

This framework spells GROW, so it’s easy to remember. Use it to make commitments to God for the sake of growing spiritually. Remember that good health is promoted by breathing in and breathing out. Disciplines that allow you to receive God’s grace need to be balanced by practices that encourage the extending of God’s grace.

Take a deep breath...and let it out. It’s a life-giving, life-sustaining rhythm.



PRAYER: Holy Spirit, teach me the inward and outward rhythms of your love and grace so that I might more fully participate in your kingdom work in the world. Amen.