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Day 1

Life and Breath

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man
became a living being.

GENESIS 2:7

And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living
being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:45

I know you’ve only just started reading, but stop and breathe in deeply for a moment.

I know. I’ve read books that tell me to do things, like “Breathe” or “Write down any thoughts you have right now,” and I wouldn’t do it. I’d skip and skim through things like that because I was interested only in *information*, sincerely believing more information would produce transformation. Alas, it didn’t.

So, amuse me. Take a big, deep breath for four seconds, from your diaphragm. Hold it for four seconds. Breathe out for four

seconds. Do it again. Feel your body relax? It feels good.

We need oxygen—big, deep breaths of fresh air—to *thrive*. Breath keeps our bodies alive. We can go without food for weeks and without water for days—without breath, only a few minutes.

Just as we need breath to fuel our bodies, our humanity is meant to be powered by the Breath of God—the Holy Spirit, the *pneuma*.¹

The apostle John says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). John doesn’t say God *has* love and gives love to us as a *thing*, but that He *is* love. His very Being—the Holy Spirit—*is* love. The Holy Spirit is the breath of love in your heart, your soul, your spirit, your mind. When we’re getting low on love, we need to take a moment to fill up the tank. “Be filled with the Spirit,” says the apostle Paul (Eph. 5:18).

As believers, we need to learn to breathe in deeply this Holy Breath of the Person of God: God our Love, God our Life.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*,

The real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system.²

We don’t usually look for this because we’re so geared to the mindset of *doing*. We spring out of bed and *do, do, do*, stuffing

down feelings of anxiety, stress, insufficiency, or even worthlessness with coffee and an egg on toast. But without spending moments of time simply *being* with God, without receiving that infusion of the Holy Spirit, we wither and become increasingly subject to fear and anxiety; we listen to any and every voice but our Father's. If we want to live above this low level of life, we'd be wise to follow George MacDonald's advice:

But he who would be born again indeed,
Must wake his soul unnumbered times a day . . .
Submit and ready to the making will,
Athirst and empty, for God's breath to fill.³

If we begin to make a habit throughout the day of taking a moment for the Breath of God, to recognize His reality and presence, we'll see a deepening spiritual vitality.

In my years playing with Alison Krauss & Union Station, I've had times when I was down on my playing. Before a show I'd have a feeling of anxiety—worries about making mistakes. This anxious attitude often led to me making *more* mistakes, and it began to put tension into my arms and hands.

I began going into a dressing room before each show, closing my eyes, breathing in and out deeply, and recognizing the Lord as present with me and in me, thanking Him for the work He's done in me and through our music.

Over a few days of this, I became less and less anxious, and

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when showtime came, I began to step out on stage with more confidence, joy, and expectation of a great show—and I played better.

Anxiety and fear eat up our “processing power” and get us self-focused. Living life well requires presence, and we can’t have presence if we’re walking in self-conscious fear. Taking brief moments to breathe and rest in the awareness of God’s presence makes a big difference in our courage and ability to face the day.



Day 2

Jesus, the Son of God

If there be a God, he must hear you if you call to him. If there be a father, he will listen to his child. He will teach you everything. . . . Read the story of our Saviour as if you had never read it before. He at least was a man who seemed to have that secret of life after the knowledge of which your heart is longing.

GEORGE MACDONALD

That secret of life”: our hearts long to know it, not just our heads.

When I was in my late teens and early twenties, my pastor would say, “Most people don’t put flesh and blood on the Bible.” He meant that many of us read the Bible not really imagining what it was like to be there taking part as a human being. We don’t give much thought to what Moses, Caleb, Isaiah, Jesus, or others felt or thought as they lived out those stories.

The story of Jesus in the Gospels, when we read it as if for the first time, reveals His secret of life.

Jesus Himself is the way, the truth, and the life; the beginning and the end; the author and finisher of faith.¹ If we want to know what a stronger, deeper, better, more joyful Holy Spirit–filled life can be for us, Jesus is the center of it.

Jesus is the culmination of thousands of years of promises from God coming down to a single point in history when God Himself was born into a human body, *God with us* (Matt. 1:23). If we want to know how to walk in the ways of God, to live and speak the truth of God, and to live filled with the life of God, the best place to begin is with the God-Man, who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

The Gospels can help us put flesh and blood on Jesus, the disciples, and all the people interacting with them, rather than seeing the Bible as a collection of doctrinal concepts. We all have our perspectives, expectations, and experiences, and often read the Bible with something like a veil over our eyes. If it’s a passage or book we’ve already studied, we think we *know* it, and so we learn little.

The Bible is a many-layered document that continues to deepen as we grow. We don’t worship the Bible; its job is to point us to Jesus, to God, to the Holy Spirit, so that we worship God in spirit and in truth.

When we open our minds and hearts, praying for wisdom before reading, we’re asking to *learn*. It’s childlike and humble.

When we read the Gospels, setting aside what we *think* we know, we see a Jesus who is always loving but honest, kind though strong, compassionate but not letting people off the hook, wise yet continually asking questions. The God we see in

Jesus in the Gospels is not what many think of as a “religious person”—someone austere, stoic, and often disapproving. If you wanted to start an elitist religion, you sure wouldn’t start with Jesus, because He was often saying things to religious people that lit their hair on fire.

In the Gospels, we see Him associate with every level of society, rich and poor, religious leaders, thieves, prostitutes, fishermen, soldiers, and other races; He doesn’t seem to recognize social divisions between people. He goes into the temple and into synagogues. He attends parties, feasts, and weddings, is branded as a glutton and a drunkard, walks willingly among lepers, blind beggars, loose women, and demon-possessed people, and is accused continually of breaking religious laws.

Dorothy Sayers wrote, “What does the Church think of Christ? The Church’s answer is categorical and uncompromising, and it is this: that Jesus Bar-Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, was in fact and in truth, and in the most exact and literal sense of the words, the God ‘by whom all things were made.’”²

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

In the Gospels, through Jesus, we begin to see what God is truly like. Jesus said to Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9). Jesus is the declaration of God, the unfolding of God’s nature to us. If we want to know God’s thoughts, attitudes, and actions, we can read about Jesus in the Gospels with an open, childlike mind,

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ABIDING DEPENDENCE

ready to hear, ready to see. “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18).



Day 3

Jesus, the Son of Man

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 ESV

I grew up thinking of Jesus mostly as God in human form, believing when He lived as a man on earth, He lived and acted as the second person of the Trinity. Now, of course Jesus was and *is* God in human form. But when I was a boy and young man, the idea that Jesus in the Gospels lived His earthly life as an infinitely powerful, all-knowing being put a vast, unbridgeable gulf between His life and character and any love, compassion, kindness, or strength I could ever develop.

But Philippians tells us Jesus emptied Himself to become fully

human, to be just like you and me—that is, to be *a servant*. A servant’s job is to obey, to take care of the needs of another person. It isn’t that Jesus ceased to be the eternal Son of God, or lost His place in the Trinity, or emptied Himself of deity, but as we will see, He set aside the *use* of His *own* authority, power, and knowledge; the unlimited God limited Himself to fully identify with our humanness—to live as we are meant to live, listening and obeying the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ often called Himself “the Son of Man.”

Jesus emptied Himself to become fully human, to be just like you and me—that is, to be a servant.

If you were a rich, powerful Christian on a mission trip, you wouldn’t pull up to the village in a Lamborghini, step out in a Brioni suit, and throw around wads of cash. You’d leave your car, suit, and power behind, give money to the missions organization, and put yourself under their orders.

You’d wear ordinary clothes and be willing to get your hands dirty. You’d still be important in the eyes of your people back home, but you’d sacrifice appearances and the use of your power for love’s sake, humbling yourself to help others.

This is how Jesus can be 100 percent God yet 100 percent man. Even though Jesus was God and remained God, He set aside the use of His privileges as God. Otherwise, we couldn’t say Jesus was 100 percent human, because God is present everywhere, knows everything, and is all-powerful, while humans are not.

To understand the infinite God, to really *see* what He is like, we had to see Him in our human clothes. *God humbled Himself for us because He loves us that much.*

God came to us as a helpless baby, formed in the belly of an

unwed teenage girl. Doubtless, as God, He could have chosen to begin walking, talking, and doing miracles as a newborn. He didn't, because one of the reasons He came was to be kin with us, to be made one of us. To be human means to be *localized*, to *learn*, and be *limited*. This is how Jesus Christ, fully God, emptied Himself to be fully human.

Let's think on that for a few moments. God is omnipresent—that is, He's always present everywhere—but Jesus became *localized* in a single body. Among stable litter, sheep, and straw, amid rumors of scandal, He was born tiny and wet from Mary's body, in Bethlehem, with His father Joseph, to eventually grow up in the poor town of Nazareth.

God the Father is omniscient, but Jesus (in His humanity) had to *learn*: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). To learn is to grow and expand. As a toddler, He learned to talk and walk. As a boy, He learned all the jobs and tasks any ordinary boy had to learn growing up in the Middle East two thousand years ago. The apostle Luke writes, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). If you are omniscient, you already know everything, but Jesus grew in wisdom like He grew in height.

The difficulties of the situations Jesus went through in the Gospels increased with the narrative, and His reliance and obedience rose to each challenge, culminating in His obedience even to death on the cross.

In the Gospels we see Jesus learn, because He sometimes *marveled*. The Greek word *thaumazō* translated "marveled" means a thing happened that people didn't foresee,¹ prompting surprise

and wonder. To marvel is our human response to the unexpected. It's *astonishment*. There are various examples of people marveling in the Gospels, including Jesus.²

When Jesus was in Capernaum, a Roman centurion with a paralyzed, tormented servant walked up to Him and asked for healing. Jesus was about to go with him, but the centurion said, "Lord,

I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it" (Matt. 8:8–9).

Jesus marveled in response, not expecting the level of trust and understanding displayed by this Roman. The centurion saw Jesus was under His Father's authority, that He had been given authority and power, and that He could use His delegated authority and power to get things done quickly and efficiently.

Jesus was so surprised and amazed He turned around to the Israelite crowd following Him and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Matt. 8:10).

God is omnipotent—that is, He's all-powerful. The psalmist wrote of God, "Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). But Jesus put on *limitation*. In the Gospels, we see Him grow tired, needing sleep. Not only did He need sleep, but Jesus had to take time alone with His Father after long

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periods of teaching or ministry, needing to renew His spiritual, emotional, and physical strength. He became weak when He fasted. He thirsted and hungered just as we do.

Although He was God and remained God, Jesus became fully human and embraced limitation, becoming a servant, living as a man filled with and empowered by His Father. He brought the unlimited God into human form. Jesus Christ is the doorway for our finite minds to see, know, and comprehend who God is and what He is like so we can embrace God as our Father.