

## BREATHE

Title: Part 1 – “Creating Space for God’s Voice”

Date: February 1, 2026

As you guys are grabbing a seat would you help me welcome everyone joining us online or on our app later in the week! We think you're part of our church family and we want you to know we are FOR you. If there's any way we can pray for you or walk alongside you, please let us know.

If you have a Bible or the Bible app on your phone, turn with me to **1 Samuel chapter 3**. 1 Samuel is in the Old Testament and is about half way between Genesis and Psalms if that helps. If you put your thumbs in the middle of your Bible that is usually somewhere in the Book of Psalms so just hang a left from there.

While you are looking for that let's do this. Everyone take a deep breath in with me... now slowly let it out. Do that again, deep breath in... and slowly let it out. Today we are diving into a little two-part collection of messages I'm calling **“Breathe.”** And if you're here thinking, “Great, another breathing exercise, I've tried a dozen of these from my YouTube feed...” Hang with me because this isn't about yoga or meditation or mindfulness trends. This is about something far more ancient and far more powerful than any fad.

Let me read 1 Samuel 3, starting at verse 9:

<sup>9</sup> So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup> The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is **LISTENING.**”

I love Samuel's story; I can't wait to dive into this. BUT be honest today, how many of you would like to hear God's voice better, raise your hands up. Now, be honest again, how many of you would say hearing God's voice is a challenge. Isn't that interesting. We all want to hear Him more but at the same time we all find it challenging.

Here's why I think we desperately need this conversation right now. Last show of hands I promise—how many of you feel like you're constantly out of breath? Not physically necessarily, but mentally, emotionally, relationally, spiritually? How many of you wake up already tired? How many of you go to bed at night and your mind is still racing through tomorrow's to-do list? Hands up if that's you.

We are a breathless generation!

I was doing some research for this and found that the average person takes about 20,000 breaths every single day. Did you know that? 20,000 breaths and we are actually aware of almost none of them, right? Breathing just happens. Your body does it automatically whether you think about it or not. But what if just three of those 20,000 breaths became prayer? What if you could attach deep spiritual meaning to something you're already doing all day, every day? AND what if that practice allowed you to hear the voice of God more clearly?

That's what we're going to explore through a three-minute daily practice that could transform your relationship with God. It's simple enough that you can do it in your car, in the shower, walking to your desk, lying in bed. But it's profound enough that Christians have been practicing variations of this for over 1,500 years.

AND in case you have to leave early or your phone dies while you are watching this the prayer is simply this:

**Breathe in: "Lord, I am listening."**

**Breathe out: "I trust You."**

That's it. That's the whole thing. We will practice this at the end, but at least say it with me, as you breathe in we say what? {Lord, I am listening} AND when we breathe out we say... {I trust You}.

Today we're going to focus on the first part—"Lord, I am listening." Next week we'll tackle "I trust You" AND by the end of these two weeks, my prayer is that this becomes as natural to you as breathing itself. TODAY I want to preach a message I'm calling:

### **Creating Space for God's Voice**

I'm calling it "creating space" because we live in a world that won't stop talking. Amen? Before we talk about listening to God, we need to be honest about why it's so hard. It's so hard because we live in a world that is designed to prevent us from ever being quiet long enough to hear anything.

Let me give you some numbers that should alarm you. If we're going to talk about learning to breathe, we need to acknowledge why we're all so breathless.

- Anxiety is epidemic. 43 percent of U.S. adults reported feeling more anxious in 2024 than the previous year. That was up from 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022. The trajectory isn't just bad—it's alarming. We're getting worse, not better.

- If current trends hold it means 1 – 3 of us will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in our lifetime.
- 70 percent of Americans feel anxious about current events. We're a deeply divided nation but we are also a nation on edge.
- Gen Z and Millennials are drowning. 61 percent of Gen Zers have been medically diagnosed with anxiety. 42 percent struggle with depression—nearly double the rate of adults over 25.
- Parents are also under pressure. And for those of you with kids in this room—this one's going to hit home. 57 – 60 percent of parents report experiencing parental burnout. 41 percent say most days they're so stressed they cannot function. 48 percent say their stress is completely overwhelming. The U.S. Surgeon General doesn't issue advisories often. But in 2024, he looked at American parents and said: "This is a crisis."
- Our attention span has also collapsed. Computer scientists and psychologists have been studying attention spans for about 20 years, over which time the average time that a person can focus on one thing has dropped from around 2 ½ minutes to around 45 seconds.
- And when you do get distracted—which happens constantly—it takes an average of 25 minutes to fully refocus. Meanwhile, the average American checks their phone 144 to 150 times per day.

You know what all that means? It means we are literally never fully present to anything. Ever! No wonder we are so breathless and no wonder we can't hear God. You can barely hear yourself think! And I don't think we've fully grasped what this is doing to our souls. Honestly, this is what prompted me to write my book "Reset" last year. We are losing something important in our breathlessness!

Eugene Peterson wrote this decades ago, but it's even more true today, he said:

**"Our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in 'muchness' and 'manyness,' he will rest satisfied."**

The enemy doesn't need to tempt you into some dramatic sin. He just needs to keep you too distracted to ever hear God's voice. He just needs to fill every moment with noise so that silence feels uncomfortable. He just needs to keep you so hurried that you never have time to be still.

And it's working, isn't it? When's the last time you sat in complete silence for even 60 seconds? When's the last time you drove somewhere without the radio, podcast, or phone call? When's the last time you ate a meal without scrolling through something?

We've trained ourselves to be allergic to quiet. And in the process, we've become deaf to the voice we most need to hear.

SO, as we begin to work our way through breath prayer—Lord I'm listening. God I trust you—and try to create some space for God's voice through this, I've got a few thoughts. If you are taking notes write these down or take a screen shot with your phone. Here's the first big thought:

### ▷ God is always speaking.

We have to begin from this foundation. The problem isn't that God isn't speaking. The problem is that we're not listening.

Let's look at Samuel's story again. Samuel is a young boy—probably around 12 years old—serving in the temple under the mentorship of Eli, the elderly priest. Samuel's mother, Hannah, had been unable to have children for years. She prayed desperately for a son, and when God finally gave her Samuel, she kept her promise and dedicated him to serve in the Lord's house. So, Samuel is living at the temple, learning from Eli, helping with the daily duties, and even sleeping there at night.

Eli, at this point in his life, is old and his eyesight is failing. He's been the priest for years, but his own sons have corrupted the priesthood—they're greedy, they're immoral, they've dishonored God. The text tells us that “in those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.” It was a spiritually dark time because no one was listening!

BUT one night, Samuel is sleeping in the temple near the ark of God, and he hears someone call his name. “Samuel! Samuel!” He assumes it's Eli needing something, so he runs to him. But Eli says, “I didn't call you. Go back to bed.” This happens three times. God calls out to Samuel three times before Samuel—or even Eli—finally realizes what's happening!

NOW think about that for a second. Samuel is sleeping in the temple! He's literally in the house of God, and he still can't tell the difference between God's voice and Eli's voice. This is a kid who's been raised in the priesthood, who spends every day serving in God's presence, and he doesn't recognize God's voice when He speaks.

But here's what I love about this story—God is patient. God keeps calling. God doesn't get offended that Samuel doesn't recognize Him the first time or the second time or even the third time. God just keeps speaking until Samuel learns to listen.

AND I want you to know that's the kind of God we serve. A God who doesn't give up on us just because we're slow learners. A God who keeps calling our name even when we're too distracted, too confused, too unfamiliar with His voice to hear it! A God who is always speaking if we will stop and learn to listen! Amen?

And that is what it took for Samuel to finally hear. Verse 8:

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup> So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is LISTENING.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

In other words, Samuel had to be taught how to listen. It didn't come naturally. He had to learn it. AND that's what we're doing today. We're learning to listen.

BUT I want you to see something that'll change how you pray this prayer. Because in Hebrew—the language Samuel was actually speaking—that word “listening” means something far more active than we realize. The actual Hebrew word here is SHEMA. If you know anything about Judaism, you know that the Shema is the most important prayer in the Jewish faith. It is from Deuteronomy 6:4 that says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

But here's what's fascinating: in Hebrew, there is no separate word for “obey.” The word shema contains both HEARING and DOING. Meaning to truly hear, in Biblical thinking, is automatically to obey. You cannot separate the listening from the responding.

SO, when Samuel prays, “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening,” he's not just saying, “I'm ready to hear what You have to say.” He's saying, “I'm ready to do whatever You tell me to do.” AND that changes the prayer, doesn't it? This isn't passive. This isn't just sitting around waiting for some mystical experience. This is actively positioning yourself to respond to whatever God reveals. That changes things doesn't it?

AND you might be a little nervous about that. It's like, “Wait, so every time I pray ‘Lord, I am listening,’ I'm committing to obey whatever God says? That sounds intense. What if He tells me to do something hard or painful?”

And that's a fair concern. But here's what I want you to see, number 2:

► God desires conversation, not just compliance.

Or you could say, God isn't looking for robots. He's looking for relationship. Take your pick.

How do we know this? Look at how God reveals Himself to the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19. Elijah is running for his life. He's exhausted, depressed, suicidal. He's hiding in a cave when God tells him to go stand at the mouth of the cave because He's about to pass by. AND then the show starts. First, there's a great and powerful wind that tears the mountains apart and shatters the rocks. But the Lord was not in the wind. Then there's an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then fire. But the Lord was not in the fire.

End of verse 12: And after the fire came a **GENTLE WHISPER**.<sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

The Hebrew phrase for "gentle whisper" literally means "the sound of sheer silence." And that's where God was. Not in the earthquake. Not in the wind. Not in the fire. God wasn't trying to power up on Elijah so he would just do what he was told. No, God shows up in the whisper and what does He do? He asks Elijah a question.

Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon on this passage, and he said something that's stuck with me. He said, "The still small voice had been doing for Israel what Elijah couldn't do with all his dramatic demonstrations. All the while that vile idolatry was spreading, God was quietly preserving seven thousand faithful souls who hadn't bowed to Baal. They weren't won by Elijah's impressive confrontation on Mount Carmel. They were won by the still small voice."

**Here's what I'm trying to get you to see:** God is not shouting. He's not trying to overpower all the noise in your life. He's whispering. And if you want to hear Him, you have to get quiet enough to listen.

This is what Jesus modeled constantly. In Mark 1:35 it says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." If Jesus—the Son of God—needed solitude to hear from the Father, how much more do we?

But here's the beautiful thing: God's not waiting in that quiet space to hand you a list of demands. He's waiting there to have a conversation! He wants to speak truth into your

anxiety. He wants to comfort your grief. He wants to guide your confusion. He wants to celebrate your joy. He wants conversation!

Think about Mary and Martha in Luke 10. Martha is stressed, hurried, overwhelmed with all the preparations. She's doing good things! She's serving Jesus! But she's so busy serving Him that she's missing Him. AND Mary? Mary just sits at His feet and listens. And when Martha complains that Mary isn't helping, Jesus says this:

<sup>41</sup> “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

The one thing needed. What was it? Sitting at Jesus' feet. Listening to His voice. Being present to His presence. Some of you have been serving Jesus your whole life but you've never just sat with Him. You've been doing things FOR Him, but you haven't spent time WITH Him.

Today He's saying the same thing to you and I as He said to Martha, as He said to Elijah, as He said to Samuel: “Come. Sit. Listen. That's what I want most.”

Alright, so we know God is speaking. We know He desires conversation. But how do we actually do this? How do we create space in our chaotic lives to hear His voice? Here's the hard truth, number 3:

### ▷ Listening requires intentional stillness.

Meaning it doesn't happen by accident. You will never stumble into a deep prayer life. You will never accidentally develop the ability to hear God's voice. It requires intentionality.

Psalm 46:10 famously says:

“Be **STILL**, and know that I am God.”

We read that or hear it quoted and we think, “Calm down” or “relax” or “slow down.” But the Hebrew word is way more intense than that. It means to surrender, to let go, to cease striving. Some translations say “Desist!” or “Stop your fighting!”

In context, Psalm 46 is about war and catastrophe—nations in uproar, kingdoms falling, creation in chaos. And right in the middle of all that, God says: Be still—stop fighting, surrender, let go, be still—and in that stillness, you will know Me. AND this isn't a gentle

suggestion. It's a command! It's God saying, "Stop trying to control everything. Stop striving to fix everything. Stop fighting to manage everything. And surrender to Me."

And in that surrender—that intentional stillness—is where intimacy with God happens.

Let me tell you how God has shown me this since having kids. And I fail at this all the time, but both of our girls are not very loud. Now you get them wound up at home and they can be loud. But in their everyday interactions they are somewhat soft-spoken. I've on the other hand spent way too much of my life around loud cars, loud equipment and loud speakers. I actually have a condition called tinnitus where my ears are constantly ringing. Put all that together and I really have to stop and be intentional if I want to have deep and intimate moments with my kids. Like I can't have my phone out, or background music playing, or be distracted by all the "important stuff" I have to do. I have to stop working and striving, pause, look them in the eyes, give them full and undivided attention, and then mediate for a moment on what they just told me.

AND what's crazy is there is a word in the Psalms for this. The word "Selah" {SAY-La} appears 71 times in the Book of Psalms. You've probably seen it and skipped right over it. But do you know what it means? It's actually a musical notation that means "pause" or "reflect." It's a built-in moment of silence in the middle of worship. 71 times, God interrupts the Psalms to say: "Stop. Be quiet. Think about what you just sang. Let it sink in."

But we don't do that, do we? We rush through our little prayer list. We pray while we're driving and texting and making breakfast and scrolling Instagram all at the same time. AND then we wonder why we can't hear God!

Dallas Willard said this: **"In solitude and silence you're learning to stop doing, stop producing, stop pleasing people, stop entertaining yourself, stop obsessing—stop doing anything except to simply be your naked self before God and be found by him."**

You want to know why you can't hear God's voice? It's not because He's not speaking. It's because we won't stop moving long enough to listen.

Hear me, church. Some of you have convinced yourselves that busyness equals faithfulness, but all you've done is drown out His voice with activity! You're exhausted because you're running on your own strength instead of resting in His presence! You're burned out because you're trying to do everything but spending time with the One who created you!

BUT you can't give what you don't have! You can't offer peace if you're not at peace! You can't lead others to rest if you're not resting yourself! And I'm telling you today—God is inviting you into something better! He's inviting you into this little three-minute daily practice that could change everything. Three minutes of intentional stillness. Three minutes of saying, "Lord, I am listening."

SO, let's get practical. Because I don't want you to leave here inspired but unchanged. I want to give you something you can actually do starting tomorrow morning. So, my final thought today:

### ▷ Practice breath prayer to learn to listen.

That's all this is, a simple breath prayer that followers of Jesus have been doing for over 1,500 years. And it's so simple you might be tempted to dismiss it. But don't. Because sometimes the simplest things are the most transformative. So, here is the basic rhythm:

- **Breathe in (4 to 6 seconds): "Lord, I am listening."**
- **Hold briefly (1 to 2 seconds)**
- **Breathe out (6 to 8 seconds): Just breathe...** [Next week we'll add the "I trust You" part, but then]
- **Hold briefly (1 to 2 seconds)** [AND repeat for about 3-minutes]

And that's it. That's the whole practice. We will actually practice this together in a moment, BUT let's break this down step by step:

#### **Step 1: Find a quiet place.**

It could be your car before you start the engine. It could be your bathroom. It could be walking outside. Anywhere you can have a moment without interruption.

#### **Step 2: Set a timer.**

Set a timer on your phone or clock so you aren't tempted to keep checking to see how long it has been. Also, put your phone on "do not disturb" for this practice if you are using it for your timer.

#### **Step 3: Get comfortable.**

Sit, stand, whatever works, and then close your eyes.

### Step 4: Relax.

Let your shoulders drop. Unclench your jaw. Release the tension you're carrying. Maybe even practice pausing and giving God everything and everyone.

### Step 5: Begin the prayer rhythm.

Inhale slowly through your nose: "Lord, I am listening." Exhale slowly through your mouth. Just breathe like this for 3-minutes. And don't freak out when this seems like an eternity at first. Finally:

### Step 6: End with gratitude.

Maybe you heard from God, maybe not. Either way express your gratitude for the breath in your lungs and His presence you have now become more aware of.

AND hear me. When your mind wanders—and it will wander—don't fight it. Don't get frustrated. Pay attention to where your thoughts are going, don't ignore them, note them, but then gently bring your attention back to the prayer. The distraction isn't failure. Coming back to God is the whole practice.

Now, here's the cool thing. Your body is already wired for this. Scientists have discovered that slow, deep breathing physically stimulates something called the vagus nerve. This is the longest nerve in your body—it runs from your brain down through your heart, your lungs, and your gut. And when you breathe slowly and deeply, especially with a longer exhale, you activate your parasympathetic nervous system. That's your "rest and digest" mode. Your heart rate slows. Your blood pressure drops. Cortisol—your stress hormone—decreases. Your mind becomes calmer and more receptive.

What does that mean? It means when Scripture commands us to "be still," it's not just spiritually good advice—it's physiologically smart. Your breath is literally a remote control for your nervous system. When you exhale slowly, you're telling your body: "You're safe. You can rest." How cool is that?

SO, before we practice this and wrap up for this week, let me address some of the obstacles you're already thinking about, I already touched on this but what about if:

**My mind wanders.** First of all, good. That means you're normal. The goal isn't to empty your mind (that's new age mindfulness). The goal is to keep returning your attention to God. Think of it like training a puppy. The puppy wanders off. You gently call it back. It

wanders again. You call it back again. Every time you return your attention to the prayer, you're building your spiritual attention muscle.

BUT what about if:

**Nothing happens.** I would push back a little and say define "happens." The goal isn't an emotional experience or some mystical vision. The goal is relational presence. You're showing up. You're saying, "God, I'm here. I'm available. Speak." Sometimes He does. Sometimes He doesn't. But either way, you're building trust. You're forming a habit of availability.

Maybe you are like, I still don't know...

**This sounds kinda weird or mystical.** But do you know what's fascinating when you study church history? For 1,500 years, Christians have been using breath prayers. The Desert Fathers in the 4th century. Monks in the Middle Ages. Dallas Willard re-popularized it in the 21st century. This isn't some fringe practice. This is mainstream Christian spirituality that we somehow lost along the way. And the reason it works is because it's rooted in Scripture—not in our feelings, not in mystical experience, but in God's Word.

BUT Pastor Brian, I don't know about you but:

**I don't have time.** I know someone is thinking this right now. But you already breathe 20,000 times a day on average, right? I'm just saying be intentional about 12 of them! If you practice this you will take about 4 complete breaths per minute, so we are talking about being intentional about 12 breaths a day. You're telling me you don't have time for 12 breaths?

BUT if this still seems to be daunting of a task then break it up if you have to. Do something like this:

- After I start my morning coffee, I will do 60 seconds of breath prayer while it brews.
- After I sit down at my desk, I will do breath prayer for 60 seconds before I open my email.
- After I lie down in bed at night, I will do breath prayer for 60 seconds before I go to sleep.

Come on, anyone can do that, right?

Here, let me read you something that Brother Lawrence wrote in the 1600s. He was a lay monk who worked in a monastery kitchen, and he wrote about what he called "practicing the presence of God." Listen to this:

"The most holy and necessary practice in our spiritual life is the presence of God. That means finding constant pleasure in His divine company, speaking humbly and lovingly with Him in all seasons, at every moment, without limiting the conversation in any way. He does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act of adoration, sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces He has bestowed on you. One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think."

God is nearer than you think. He's closer than your next breath. And He's been speaking to you all along. We just haven't been listening.

BUT today, that changes. Today you're going to learn a practice that people have been using for 1,500 years to cultivate intimacy with God. And it starts with three little words: "Lord, I am listening."

SO, let's practice this together. Right now.

### **[BASIC RHYTHM SLIDE]**

We're going to do 60 seconds of breath prayer as a church family. If you've never done this before, that's okay. I'll guide you through it. Close your eyes. Get comfortable. Relax your body. Now begin the rhythm with me:

Breathe in: "Lord, I am listening." {PAUSE} Breathe out... {PAUSE} Breathe in: "Lord, I am listening." {PAUSE} Breathe out... {PAUSE} NOW keep going at your own pace. If your mind wanders, gently come back. "Lord, I am listening."

### **[60 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**

You can open your eyes. You just did it. You just practiced being still before God. Some of you felt something. Some of you felt nothing. Both are okay. The point isn't the feeling. The point is the showing up.

SO, this week, I want to challenge you: practice this every morning. Before you check your phone. Before you get pulled in a hundred different directions. "Lord, I am listening."

Next week, we're going to add the second half of the prayer: "I trust You." But this week, just focus on listening. Show up. Be still. Let Him speak. Because He will if we make space for it.

### **[PRAYER TIME]**