

BREATHE

Title: Part 2 – “When Control Becomes a Cage”

Date: February 8, 2026

If you would remain standing, we're going to read God's Word together in just a moment.

Today we are wrapping up a message we began last Sunday called “Breathe.” If you missed last week, don't worry—I'll catch you up. But we are basically learning a prayer for overwhelmed people. Anyone willing to admit they are a little overwhelmed?

Before we read this text I also want to welcome everyone joining us on our app or online later in the week. You are family, and we're so glad you're here. If there are ways we can serve you or pray for you this week, don't hesitate to let us know.

SO, in Proverbs 3 we find one of the most famous passages in all the Bible. This is our main text for today, let's read this out loud together. Proverbs 3, starting at verse 5:

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

This is God's Word to us today. Let's pray before we dig in.

[PRAYER TIME]

Hey, high five three people and you can have a seat. Thank you, worship team.

So, last week we started a message on a simple but profound prayer that Christians have been practicing in various forms for over 1,500 years. If you were not here, we missed you, I encourage you to go back and watch or listen because we're building on what we started. The prayer was simply this, we:

Breathe in: “Lord, I am listening.”

Breathe out: “I trust You.”

Christians have used “breath prayers” like this throughout the centuries to make conscious what is already true—our physical breathing echoes our spiritual dependence. St. John {KLIM-a-Kus} Climacus (a 7th century monk) wrote: “Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of stillness.”

Which is huge for us today because we live in the most breathless, noisiest, distracted generation in human history. SO, we dove into the first part of the prayer, “Lord, I am

listening.” We looked in the Old Testament at Samuel learning to recognize God's voice, Elijah hearing the still small voice, and then in the New Testament, Mary choosing presence over productivity. And I challenged everyone to spend just 60 seconds every morning this week breathing in that first part of the prayer: “Lord, I am listening.”

So, before we go any further, I want to hear from you. How many of you actually did it? How many of you practiced the breath prayer at least a 4 times this week? Good! I see some hands. Now how many of you—be honest—forgot about it by Tuesday? Yeah, I see those hands too. And that's okay. We're learning. This is a practice, not a performance. There's no grade. There's no shame if you forgot. You're here now, and that's what matters.

BUT here's what I want to know—for those of you who did practice, what was your experience? Did any of you sense God speaking? Did any of you just feel... quieter inside? Did any of you hear absolutely nothing but kept doing it anyway?

All of those experiences are valid. All of them are part of learning to listen. BUT here's where we are going today. Listening is just the first step. **The natural response to hearing God's voice is trusting God's character.** Let me say that again. The natural response to hearing God's voice is trusting God's character.

Because here's the thing—you can learn to recognize God's voice, but if you don't trust what He says, what's the point? Right? You can create space to hear Him, but if you refuse to release control based on what you hear, nothing changes.

Listening leads to trusting. And trusting leads to transformation. Today I want to preach a message I'm calling:

When Control Becomes a Cage

So, let me set up what we're talking about today. Trust is the bridge between hearing and doing. BUT trust is not the same thing as belief. Belief is intellectual agreement. Trust is weight-bearing reliance.

Let me illustrate it this way. I could show you this stool and say, “I BELIEVE this stool will hold you.” You might look at it and say, “Yeah, I believe that stool would hold me. I believe it can support my weight.” But belief doesn't mean anything until you actually sit down! Trust on the other hand is putting your full weight on it.

That's what the prayer out “I trust You” means. It's not just intellectual agreement that God is trustworthy. It's actually transferring your weight from yourself to Him. It's

releasing control. It's letting go of the outcomes you're trying to manage that have become like a cage for your soul.

BUT that's terrifying for most of us, isn't it?

But here's what I want you to see today: trust is the natural outcome of listening. When you consistently hear God's voice, when you regularly experience His presence, when you repeatedly see His faithfulness, trust develops naturally. It's not something you force. It's something that forms.

Think about it—how do you learn to trust someone? Through relationship over time. Through seeing them show up when they say they will. Through experiencing their consistency. Through seeing their character. That's exactly how trust in God develops. It starts with listening. It grows through experience. And it deepens through testing.

BUT what does it actually look like to trust God? Because I think a lot of us have the wrong idea about this. Write this down if you are taking notes:

▷ **Trust is not passive, it's active surrender.**

Sometimes we think trust means we sit back passively and let God do everything. We think it means we don't act or make decisions. We think it means we just wait around for God to drop opportunities in our lap. BUT that's not biblical trust. That's fatalism. That's not faith—it's passivity disguised as spirituality.

Look at our passage in Proverbs 3 again, let's break down phrase by phrase:

5 TRUST in the Lord with ALL YOUR HEART, and do not LEAN on your own understanding.

The Hebrew word for “trust” means to rely on, to have confidence in, to put your security in. It is the word for glue in Modern Hebrew. It originally came from an ancient art of welding which dates back to the bronze age. Proverbs is literally saying bond yourself to God.

BUT here's what makes it even more powerful—it carries the idea of feeling safe, being careless in a good way, being bold because you're secure. It's the same word used in Psalm 4 where David says: “Put your TRUST in the Lord...” and you will have “peace when you lie down and sleep, He makes me dwell in safety.” Same word. It's the confidence that lets you close your eyes at night. It's the security that lets you stop

controlling everything. It's the boldness that comes from knowing someone has your back.

But this word is also a verb. Meaning it's something you do. Trust is active, not passive. It's choosing, moment by moment, to place your confidence in God instead of in yourself, your bank account, your abilities, or your backup plan.

AND it is with “all your heart.” Which I want to be clear, all your heart doesn't mean with perfect trust—like you never have doubts or fears or questions. No, it means with sincere trust. With authentic trust. With undivided trust.

It means you're not hedging your bets. You're not keeping one foot in God's camp and one foot in your backup plan. You're not saying, “I'll trust God, but just in case, let me also...” No! All your heart. Your whole self. Even the parts that are still learning. Even the parts that are scared. Even the parts that don't understand yet.

Which I will be honest, God has been growing me in for the past 6-weeks or so. I have had to actively place my full confidence in Him and what He is doing as life has just not been working out the way I saw it in 2026. Can anyone relate? I am having to trust in Him AND NOT on the second half of Proverbs 3:5, *and do not LEAN on your own understanding*. The verse is saying remove the supporting weight from your own understanding. WHY?

Because your understanding is limited. Your perspective is finite. Your knowledge has gaps. Your wisdom is incomplete. And if you try to lean on it—if you try to support yourself with your own reasoning—you're going to fall. Because it can't hold you. It's like trying to lean on a stick that's already cracked. It might hold for a little while, but eventually, it's going to snap.

SO, remove the supporting weight from your own understanding. Stop trying to figure everything out by yourself. Stop relying on your limited perspective. Stop putting all your weight on your ability to reason through every situation.

Then verse 6 says:

⁶ In all your ways **ACKNOWLEDGE** him, and he will make straight your paths.

The Hebrew word for “acknowledge”, or in some translations “submit” is yada. Everyone say, “yada.” Not to be confused with Yoda the Jedi Master. Yada means to know intimately, experientially, deeply. BUT are you ready for this? It's the same word used for sexual intimacy between a husband and wife in Genesis 4:1, “Adam knew (yada) his wife Eve.” It's not head knowledge. It's not theoretical understanding. It's intimate, personal, experiential knowing.

So, what does it mean to “acknowledge him in all your ways”? It means in every decision, in every path, in every direction your life goes, you bring God into it intimately. You consult Him. You invite Him. You experience Him. You involve Him. NOT just the big decisions. All your ways. The career choice and the grocery list. The marriage decision and the Tuesday afternoon. The crisis and the mundane.

AND if we do that, when you trust Him actively, with your whole heart, when you stop leaning on your own limited understanding, when you acknowledge Him intimately in everything—then He makes your paths straight. Not easy. Not comfortable. Not always free from obstacles. But straight. Directed. Getting where you need to be.

SO, what does all this have to do with our breath prayer and breathing out “I trust You”? Everything!

When you inhale “Lord, I am listening,” you’re engaging yada—intimate, experiential knowing of God’s voice. You’re acknowledging Him. When you exhale “I trust You,” you’re actively placing your security in Him. You’re removing your weight from your own understanding and transferring it to Him. You’re doing it with your whole heart, even the parts that don’t fully understand yet.

This breath prayer is Proverbs 3:5-6 in motion. Inhale: I’m acknowledging You intimately in this moment. Exhale: I’m transferring my weight from me to You.

How cool is that? Something so simple and yet so powerful!

And here’s where the physiology becomes spiritual practice again. Remember last week we talked about how slow breathing activates your parasympathetic nervous system? Well, the exhale is particularly powerful. When you breathe out slowly, you’re sending a signal to your brain that says, “It’s safe to relax. I can let go of control.”

The exhale is surrender. The exhale is release. The exhale is trust made physical.

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Last week we talked about how “be still” means to cease striving, to let go, to surrender. And if we do that then we can know that He is God.

The surrender leads to knowing. The letting go creates space for intimacy. The trust opens the door to experience. You want to know God more deeply this year than last? You want to experience His presence more tangibly? Then you have to learn to exhale. You have to learn to release control. You have to learn to trust.

AND I hinted at this, but number 2:

▷ Trust is formed in the ordinary not in the crisis.

Someone might be thinking, “Okay, I get it. Trust is important. But how do I actually develop it? How do I learn to trust God when life is falling apart?” AND here's the answer you don't want to hear: You can't learn to trust in the crisis if you haven't practiced trust in the ordinary. Trust is formed in the daily mundane, so it's available in the desperate moments.

Think about it like muscle memory. If you're a musician (which I am not but somehow managed to raise one) but you don't learn a difficult piece right before the concert. You practice it over and over in rehearsal until your fingers know what to do without thinking. Then when you're on stage under pressure, your training kicks in automatically.

That's how trust works. When you practice the breath prayer—“Lord, I am listening... I trust You”—in the ordinary moments, you're building muscle memory. You're training your soul to release control. You're forming a habit of surrender so that when the crisis comes, trust becomes reflexive. It becomes your first response instead of your last resort.

Look at what Jesus did on the cross. Yes He was fully God, but He was also fully man, just like you and I. Luke 23:46 says:

⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.

Jesus' final breath was a prayer of trust. But this wasn't the first time Jesus prayed a prayer of surrender. This was the culmination of a lifetime of practicing trust. Every time Jesus withdrew to pray alone. Every time He said, “Not my will, but yours.” Every time He chose obedience over comfort. He was practicing trust so that when the ultimate crisis came—when He was dying on a Roman cross, bearing the sins of the world—trust was His automatic response. “Father, I trust You” was the exhale.

And that same pattern is available to you. When you practice trust in the ordinary—in the morning commute, in the difficult conversation, in the financial pressure, in the health concern—you're preparing for the crisis you can't see coming.

C.S. Lewis said it this way:

“Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done.”

Every day you wake up and choose: “Today, I’m going to trust God with this.” And then tomorrow you wake up and choose it again. And the next day. And the next. AND one day—maybe years from now—you’ll face something that would have destroyed you. Something that would have shattered your faith. Something that would have left you hopeless. BUT instead, you’ll find yourself breathing out, almost without thinking: “I trust You” because you’ve been practicing.

That’s why I am teaching you this breath prayer because it is an easy, accessible practice you can do waiting for your coffee to brew, before you get out of the car at work, on your lunch break, before you close your eyes at night. It is an easy way to form the muscle memory you will need when a crisis comes.

Trust is formed in the ordinary not in the crisis, BUT let me push this a little further.
Number 3:

▷ Real trust says, “Even if.”

Because there's a level of trust that goes beyond “God will come through for me.” There's a level that says, “Even if He doesn't, I still trust Him.”

Do you know the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? It is found in Daniel chapter 3, but a King named Nebuchadnezzar has built a giant golden statue and commanded everyone to bow down and worship it. If you didn't bow, you got thrown into a blazing furnace.

These three Jewish boys—there in exile—refused to bow, they only worship the One True God. So, the king confronted them and gave them one more chance. “If you don't bow, I'm throwing you in the fire. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” Listen to their response in Daniel 3:17-18. This is one of the most powerful statements of trust in all of Scripture:

¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. ¹⁸ But **EVEN IF** he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Did you catch that? But EVEN IF He doesn't... That's the trust I'm talking about. That's the exhale that says, “I trust You” even when I don't understand. Even when it doesn't make sense. Even when it looks like You're not showing up.

Can I get pastoral for a moment? Some of you are in that place right now. You've been praying for something for years. You've been asking God to move. You've been believing for a breakthrough. And it hasn't happened yet. AND you're starting to wonder: Does God even hear me? Does He even care? Can I really trust Him with this?

I want you to know that while I can't promise you that God is going to give you what you're asking for. I can't guarantee that He's going to answer your prayer the way you want Him to. BUT what I can tell you is this: God is **TRUSTWORTHY** even when we don't understand His timeline. God is **FAITHFUL** even when we can't see His plan. God is **GOOD** even when life is hard.

Tim Keller said it this way:

“Trust is accepting what God sends into your life whether you understand it or not.”

That's the “even if” trust. That's the trust that doesn't require explanation. That's the trust that releases control of the outcome.

And some of you need to hear this today: Your trust in God is not contingent on Him doing what you want Him to do! Your faith is not dependent on Him following your timeline! Your confidence in His goodness is not based on whether He gives you what you've been asking for!

Because here's what you need to understand—God's faithfulness isn't proven by how many prayers He answers the way you want. His faithfulness is proven by the cross! His love isn't demonstrated by how comfortable your life is. His love is demonstrated by the fact that He gave His own Son to die for you!

You want proof that God is trustworthy? Look at Jesus! You want evidence that God is faithful? Look at the empty tomb! You want assurance that God is good? Look at the sacrifice He made so you could be reconciled to Him!

- Your circumstances don't determine God's character!
- Your feelings don't define His faithfulness!
- Your understanding doesn't limit His sovereignty!

So today, right now, you can exhale and say, “I trust You.” Not because life is going well. Not because you have all the answers. Not because it all makes sense... BUT because He is who He says He is. And He's proven it at the cross.

Everyone breathe in... now slowly breathe out "I trust You." Number 4:

▷ Trust transforms anxiety into peace.

So, let's get really practical about what trust actually does in your daily life. Look at Philippians 4:6-7 with me:

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This is one of the most quoted passages on anxiety in the entire Bible. But I want you to notice the progression here.

First: "Do not be anxious about anything." This literally means to be divided, to be pulled in different directions, to be distracted. Sound familiar? Anxiety divides you. It fragments you. It pulls you in a hundred directions at once.

Second: "But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." In other words, instead of letting anxiety divide you, bring everything to God in prayer. Don't just bring the big things. Everything. Every situation. Every concern. Every fear. Then...

Third: The promise, "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." It doesn't say God will answer all your prayers the way you want. It doesn't say He'll fix all your problems. It says He'll give you peace. Peace that doesn't make sense given your circumstances. Peace that transcends understanding.

That's what trust produces. Not the absence of problems. Peace in the middle of them.

AND here's where the breath prayer becomes so practical. When you're feeling anxious, when your mind is racing, when you're overwhelmed—that's the moment to **breathe**. Breathe in: "Lord, I am listening." Breathe out: "I trust You."

In doing that you are literally praying the prescription for anxiety. You're recentering. You're reunifying your divided heart. You're transferring the weight from your shoulders to His.

I looked forever trying to find the exact quote, I swear it was Dallas Willard, but the quote I have in my journal is this:

“You don't have to do anything. Everything is going to come out all right. But you must learn to be still and not seize, so that you may attend to what God is doing.” - Unknown

That's the peace that comes from trust. It's not the peace of having everything figured out. It's the peace of knowing Someone else has it figured out, and He's got you.

As the worship team comes and helps me close this out, I've got one more point:

▷ Trust says yes before knowing where.

Trust often requires obedience before understanding. It means saying yes before you know where it's going to lead. Look at Abraham in Genesis 12:1. God says:

“Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.”

Did you catch that? “...to the land I will show you.” God didn't give Abraham a map. He didn't give him directions. He didn't even tell him the destination. He just said, “Start walking, and I'll show you where you're going as you go.”

That's trust. That's what it looks like to exhale “I trust You” in real life. You take the first step without knowing the tenth step. You obey what God's calling you to today without demanding to see the whole plan.

And for those of you who are analytical, who are planners, who like to have everything figured out before you move—this is hard. I get it. I'm a planner too. I want to see the roadmap. I want to know the outcome before I commit.

BUT that's not how trust works. Trust means taking the next right step even when you can't see the whole staircase.

Richard Foster (a theologian and author) once said, and I am sure of this one, this is one that will stick with you forever:

“Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to Him. He grieves that we have forgotten Him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He longs for our presence.”

God doesn't want to play hide and seek with you. He's not trying to keep you in the dark. But He does want you to walk with Him step by step instead of demanding the whole plan up front.

Because here's the thing—if you could see the whole journey, you wouldn't need faith. If you knew every outcome, you wouldn't need trust. If you understood every detail, you wouldn't need God.

But you do need Him. You need Him every day. You need Him every step. You need Him every breath.

And that's why the prayer is “Lord, I am listening... I trust You.” Not “Lord, show me everything and then I'll trust You.” Not “Lord, let me understand it all and then I'll follow You.” Just: “I trust You.” Today. This step. This breath. I trust You.

SO, let's put this all together and make some space to practice it. Last week you practiced breathing in “Lord, I am listening.” This week we're adding the exhale: “I trust You.” Let me walk you through the complete practice now:

Step 1: Find a quiet place.

Same place you've been going this week if you've been practicing. 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.

Step 3: Get comfortable.

Sit, stand, whatever works, let your body settle and then close your eyes.

Step 4: Relax.

Let your shoulders drop. Unclench your jaw. Release the tension you're carrying.

Step 5: Begin the prayer rhythm.

Breathe in slowly (4-6 seconds) through your nose: "Lord, I am listening." Hold briefly (1-2 seconds). Breathe out slowly through your mouth (6-8 seconds): "I trust You." Repeat for however long you have. One minute. Three minutes...

BUT here's what I want to emphasize: the exhale. Make it longer than the inhale if you can. Because the exhale is where the release happens. The exhale is where the surrender occurs. The exhale is where you physically let go.

When anxiety creeps in, breathe it out with "I trust You." When fear rises up, exhale it with "I trust You." When you start trying to control the outcome, release it with "I trust You."

Then:

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...

21-Day Challenge

Here's what I want to challenge you to do. Starting today, commit to 21 days of practicing this breath prayer. Why 21 days? Because research shows it takes about three weeks to form a new habit.

Week 1: Practice once daily for 60 seconds, anchored to your morning routine.

Week 2: Add a second anchor point (midday or evening).

Week 3: Extend to 2-3 minutes at multiple points throughout your day when you need to recenter.

We're going to give you commitment cards as you leave. On the card, you can write your anchor points—the specific times and places you're committing to practice. Put it somewhere you'll see it every day. AND if you miss a day? That's okay. Just start again the next day. No shame. No condemnation. Don't spiral into shame. Just exhale: "I trust You. Help me try again."

Come on, how simple is that? Breathe in: "Lord, I am listening." Breathe out: "I trust You." This isn't just a breathing exercise. This is a conversation with the God of the universe who knows your name and loves you more than you can comprehend.

This is you saying, "God, I'm here. I'm available. Speak to me." AND then: "Whatever You say, wherever You lead, however You provide, I'm Yours. I trust You."

Some of you came in here today carrying so much weight. Anxiety about finances. Fear about health. Worry about your kids. Stress about work. And you're trying so hard to control outcomes you can't control. You're trying to manage situations that are out of your hands. You're trying to fix people you can't fix.

And God is saying to you today: "Exhale. Let it go. Transfer the weight. I've got this. I've got YOU."

Before we end our time, I want to make some space to practice this together. We're going to do two full minutes of the breath prayer as a church family. For some of you, two minutes of silence is going to feel like an eternity. And that's OK. For others, two minutes won't feel like enough. That's OK too.

Just breathe. Just be with God.

SO, close your eyes. Get comfortable. Take a deep breath. Let it out. Now begin:

Breathe in: "Lord, I am listening."

Breathe out: "I trust You."

When your mind wanders, come back... Release the anxiety... Let go of control...

[2-minutes]

Amen. You can open your eyes.

Church, you just spent two minutes in the presence of God! Some of you felt peace. Some of you felt nothing. Some of you felt resistance. All of that is OK. The practice isn't about the feeling. It's about the faithfulness. It's about showing up. It's about saying yes to the invitation to be with God.

As you leave today, the ushers will hand you a prayer card. On the front is the prayer and on the back is a place to write down the specifics for your 21-day commitment. What time? What place? What anchor point?

And then tomorrow morning, before you check your phone, before you start the coffee, before you do anything else. Breathe! And see what God can do with what you give Him.

[PRAYER TIME]