

Breathing Room
Breathless
January 6, 2019

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

**Worship Songs – This Is Amazing Grace / Lord I
Need You / T & G**

Announcements – Shannon

Feature – Stressed Out (21 Pilots)

Good morning everyone ... and welcome to all of you who are watching via livestream or through the media section of our website and app.

And what a great song to kick off this new series, *Breathing Room* because it's such an accurate description of where so many of us are as 2019 begins: *we're stressed out and we need to make money*. We're stuffing so many activities and so many things into our life, hoping that more activities and more things will help us get the most out of

life.ⁱ

But in our attempt to get the most out of life, we're losing control of our life.

- We're so busy that we're not really *enjoying* any of the stuff we do.
- We shuffle our kids around to everything we think they need to be involved in but *they're* so busy that sometimes we feel like we don't even know them anymore. We're just carting them around to stuff *they* don't really enjoy.
- Financially, we're maxed out. Every single dollar (and then some) is accounted for. So, Lord help us if there's a financial bump in the road because there's margin; no room for error.

And I know it sometimes feels like we don't have any choice. We look around and everybody else's

life looks kind of like that, and our life looks kind of like that, so we think, “Well, this is just the way it is. This is how life works in our world.”

And maybe it is.

But the truth is ... for you and I to manage our schedules, our time, our relationships, our money and even our body in such a way that there’s just no more room to stick anything else in ... that’s just not sustainable.

In our attempt to get the most out of life, we’re losing control of our life. And a crash, at some point, is inevitable.

... which is why over the next four weeks we’re going to talk about how to avoid that by creating some breathing room.

A Definition

What is breathing room?

- Breathing room is not having to drive 80 mph everywhere you go because you get there early.
- Breathing room is having time to actually *talk* to the people in your family.
- Breathing room is having money leftover at the end of the month.
- Breathing room is not having to work three jobs to pay for all the toys you bought.
- Breathing room is actually *enjoying* all the things that you're doing because you're not doing all the things you could be doing and you're not doing all the things that everybody else is doing.
- Breathing room is being able to come to church or watch online instead of being a

slave to all the activities you jammed into your schedule.

I think – I hope – that it's clear: *life is better with breathing room.*

Breathing room ... and this is the definition we're going to use over the next few weeks ...

“Breathing room” is the space between our current pace and our limits.

Breathing room is the space – the distance – between our current pace schedule-wise, financially and physically (those are the three areas where we're going to apply this principle) ...

Breathing room is the space between our current pace (how hard we're charging, how much money we're spending, how well we're treating our body) and our limits.

And all of us DO have limits.

At the Limit

Now, that said ... you as an individual might have an extraordinary capacity compared to others. In fact, you might have *three times* the capacity that I have or the people in your family have.

But the truth remains: *you have limits*. There is a point at which you max out your life and you just can't add anything else in.

More importantly, if you continue to live your life right up to those limits – if there is no breathing room – several things happen, none of them good.

1. Stress levels go up.

You know that feeling of sitting in your car and you're late for work? Or you're late for a meeting or you're late for an appointment or you're late for something really, really important?

That feeling is stress.

It works the same in every area of life. When there's no breathing room relationally, when there's no breathing room financially, when there's no breathing room physically, that feeling you get is stress.

Another thing that happens when there's no breathing room is that ...

2. Our focus narrows.

When there's no breathing room, our tendency – and we can't help this, it just happens – we get so focused on the area where there's no margin, we get so focused on the area where there's no breathing room that in focusing on that one thing or those two things, we lose awareness of the other things around us.

For example, as long as my stool is a couple of inches in front of this music stand, I don't think about it. But if it gets too close, I get distracted.

My focus goes to how close am I to knocking that stand over and I can't concentrate on what is most important right now – what I'm saying to you.

When there's no margin, when there's no breathing room, our focus narrows, and often in an unhealthy way.

That said ... there *are* seasons of life (and even moments during the day) when we have to be extraordinarily task-focused. And that's OK.

For example, our staff here at NHCC just went through one of those seasons – the weeks leading up to Christmas.

But if our jobs are *always* like that or we live *our entire life* that way ...

3. The other thing that happens is that our relationships suffer.

Our kids start saying things like:

- “Mom, you’re always on the phone.”
- “Dad, you’re always on the computer.”
- “All you guys ever talk about – fight about – is money.”

And not only are we doing a lot of things and not enjoying the things we’re doing, we’re not *enjoying each other* anymore.

When you live at the limits, when you don’t have breathing room, the one thing that can bring joy to life no matter the circumstances – our relationships – suffers.

Three Fears

Now here’s what’s crazy about this.

No one would ever say:

- “I want more stress in my life.”
- “I want to be so focused that I ignore everything else.”
- “I want unhealthy relationships.”
- “I want my kids to cringe when the garage door goes up.”
- “I want my husband to sweat when he hears me walking in the door.”
- “I want my wife to run for cover when I get home.”

Nobody wants that. That’s not what you said “I do” for. That’s not why you had children. That’s not why you’re hoping to have a long-term relationship with somebody.

Nobody wants the consequences of a life lived right up to the limit.

So why do we do it?

- Well, sometimes, as we’ve seen, it’s because

we're in a temporary season.

- And sometimes – if we're really transparent – we'd have to say “part of the reason my schedule and my finances and my relationships (and even my body) are crammed so full is that I just lack discipline.”

And I think in some cases discipline is part of it.

But I think there's a more fundamental issue that is driving this for many of us. And I think if we're willing—Christian or not—I think if we're willing to focus on that fundamental driver, we'll make some progress.

A big part of what drives our schedule, drives our spending and the pace we live at is ...

Well, let me illustrate it like this.

If you and I could speak privately and I asked you,

“Why don’t you stop this craziness? Why don’t you slow down? Why don’t you cut back?”

... most of you would probably respond like this:

- “Well, Rick, if I did that, I’m afraid that ...”
- “Well, Rick, if I backed off, I’m afraid that ...”
- “I’m afraid if I told them I can’t come to the party <or whatever> ...”
- “I’m afraid that if I didn’t spend the dollars to have the new car or the big vacation ...”
- “I’m afraid that if I told my daughter she could do gymnastics *but not* swimming and softball and dance ...”

“I’m afraid that ... I’m afraid that ... I’m afraid that ...”

I think without knowing it, we allow *fear* to drive us.

Actually, there are three of them; three fears that are behind much of the hyperactivity and the overspending in our lives.

1. For some of us it's FOMO – the fear of missing out.

“If I don't go, if I don't say yes, if I don't sign up, if I don't, if I don't, if I don't, I'm going to miss out.”

And then, if we're parents, we apply that same logic to our kids: *they* will miss out if we don't have them in everything and doing everything.

2. I think another driver is the fear of falling behind.

We look around at what everybody is doing; what everybody else is accomplishing and we compare ourselves to how they live, what they drive, what they wear, where they vacation, how they spend

their time.

And that becomes the pattern to which we must conform or we'll be left behind socially or professionally or relationally.

3. Finally, I think there's a fear of not mattering.

I'll own this one personally because I want my life to count for something. I want to accomplish something.

I want to look back over the year and say, "I got something done," other than just taking up space and kissing my kids at night. I want to do something.

So, busyness and doing things and spending and buying and purchasing – somehow that gets all mixed up with "how much do I matter?"

What makes this one so deadly is that *our fear of not mattering much* has the potential to draw us

away from *what matters the most* – our relationships with others and with God.

The God of Breathing Room

Speaking of God ... here's a really interesting thing, especially if you're Jewish or if you're Christian.

If you're not either, and you're looking in from the outside, this is a great message to be here for because it will help you understand something fascinating about the character of God – who God really is.

Because a lot of people are under the impression that God is a slave driver. You have to do this and you have to do that and all of it will make you miserable. And if you don't do this or that, then God Himself will make you miserable in the life to come!

But, as we'll see, God is exactly the opposite of a

slave driver because when you open the pages of Scripture – and this is what’s interesting – when read the Bible you discover that God is very concerned about this problem of a maxed-out, overstuffed life, and He addresses it in a very unusual way.

Now, that said, you’re not going to find the phrase “breathing room” anywhere in the Bible.

But what you *will* find is an ongoing and practical conversation between God and his people in the Old Testament about margins in life. And then, in the New Testament, you’ll see Jesus constantly comparing and contrasting a life that’s driven by fear with a life that’s driven by faith.

The whole thing is quite fascinating so let’s get into it. And, to do that, we have to go back to the days when the nation of Israel was delivered from Egypt.

If you have even a limited familiarity with the

Bible, you're probably aware of the basic story:

- For many generations, the people of Israel had been slaves to the Pharaoh.
- Then God sent Moses to lead them out to the Promised Land.

Simple story but what that means is that every single person who left Egypt with Moses – every man, woman and child ... all they had ever known was *you work all day, every day*, and you do whatever you're told because if you don't, you die.

The only life they knew how to live was the slave life. The only rules they had ever lived under were slave rules.

So when God leads them into the Promised Land and establishes their nation – and this only makes sense – He has to give them *new rules* to live by. He has to give them *free rules* (so to speak).

And the most familiar of those rules are what we call “The Ten Commandments” but, as many of you know, the Old Testament has a lot more than ten rules. There are 613 to be exact, because that’s what it took to establish in His people a brand-new way of thinking, a brand-new way of living, and brand-new set of values.

Now, here’s what’s fascinating. In these 613 rules, God includes several very specific commandments concerning what we’re calling “breathing room.”

And we’re going to look at two of them but first I need to say that, because we are not Jewish (at least, most of us aren’t), they don’t apply to us in the same way they did to the People of Israel. (If you don’t understand why I say that, you should read Acts Chapter 15).

However, even though these commands don’t apply to us literally, *the principle behind them does* because in these commands, God is describing

how people live in freedom instead of slavery. And that's how we want to live. We don't want to be slaves to or driven by our fears.

So here's the first command – and it's probably already familiar to you because it actually made the top ten list at number three.

1. It's known as “the Sabbath.”

To this group of former slaves who only understand “work all day, every day” because that was the culture they lived in for centuries, God says “one of my top-ten rules for all of you is THOU SHALT TAKE A DAY OFF.”

Literally, He says ...

For six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the

*resident foreigner who is in your
gates. Exodus 20:9-10 (NET)*

I mean, how can you not love a God who, when He speaks, one of the first things that comes out of His mouth is, “Take a day off, kids!”

That’s amazing!

Now because our culture has been so positively influenced by Judeo-Christian values, this is no big deal to us. *Of course everyone should get a day off from work* – two, even – and if you don’t, they usually have to pay you overtime.

But to the People of Israel, the idea of taking an entire day and doing no work was completely foreign and even little scary. They’d never experienced it.

So, why God did give them this rule?

It’s because God created human beings and

understands how we are wired. And He knows that life is better when there is breathing room from work and activity. We're not meant to be slaves to a job or an overly crammed schedule. We're meant to be free.

But there's another reason God gave that rule; something that goes even deeper.

By instituting the Sabbath, God began to teach His people at the most elementary level that they had to trust Him. Here's why I say that.

Imagine you're hearing this law for the first time after many years of being a slave. It sounds very good at first but then it hits you:

- “So, God, what if it doesn't all get done by Friday evening?” (which is when the Sabbath was to begin)?

God's answer was “Trust Me in this.”

- “But God, what if we didn’t finish washing the clothes?”

God’s answer? “Again, Trust Me. This is the best plan for your life.”

- “But God, what if we haven’t brought all the crops in?”

Again, “Trust Me. I’ll take care of you.”

- “But God, what if, what if, what if?”

And God was saying, “Trust Me, trust Me, trust Me.”

The Sabbath – taking a day off – was an expression of faith for them.

And even though we’re not Jewish, the same thing is true for you and for me when we build in breathing room. It’s an expression of faith.

The second commandment I want to show you – and one you probably haven’t heard much about – is what might be called ...

2. The “Law of Gleaning.”

And it goes like this:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest.” Leviticus 19:9
(NIV)

Gleanings were the fruit (or whatever they were harvesting) that fell on the ground in the process of reaping. There was nothing wrong with it. It was still good to eat or it could be sold.

But God says “Here’s what I want you to do about that: if it falls on the ground during the harvest, just leave it there.”

“And, don’t go all the way to the edges, either. Leave the edges there.”

“Furthermore,” He adds ...

“And do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner.”

Leviticus 19:10 (NIV)

“You can go through once and pick the grapes,” God says. “But, if you miss some, you can’t go back and get the ones you missed.”

Now, remember, everybody in this new nation is, by our standards, extremely poor. Everybody *needs* everything they can possibly get.

And if you’re a farmer, the way you make your money is by planting and selling crops. And you don’t have giant fields like farmers do today. You have a relatively small plot of land you’re

working.

So when you hear the law of gleaning, what's your initial reaction?

I suspect it's something like "that's money left on the table; money I might need at some point. I mean, what if this happens or what if that happens?"

But God says, "no, you can't go through it twice, and you don't take it to the edges. You leave it for others who are in need."

And then He adds one more thing which, at first, sounds kind of odd.

He says ...

*"I am the Lord your God."
Leviticus 19:10 (NIV)*

What's the point of that? Is this God making a demand? "I'm God and you are not. Do what I say

or else!”

Is this a threat?

I don't think so.

I think God's saying to them “You belong to Me. You're my people ... which means ... *I'm* the one ultimately responsible for your well-being.

“And I want to show you that I can be trusted to do that which is why I am asking you not to take everything to the limit. I want there to be space, and in the space I want you to learn that I will take care of you.”

In the book of Deuteronomy, God gives a similar command.

He says ...

“When you're harvesting in your fields and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back and get it. Leave it for the

*foreigner, the fatherless, and the
widow.”* Deuteronomy
24:19 (NIV)

And then listen to what He adds:

*“So that the Lord your God may bless
you in all the work of your hands.”*
Deuteronomy 24:20
(NIV)

Now, again, if you're a farmer and hearing this, you're probably thinking, “Look, if it's about the work of our hands, then we need to go all the way to the corners. And we need to go over those fields three times to get everything that belongs to us. I would think that qualifies as good stewardship!”

But God says, “no, that's not how it works. I want you to leave some on the table. I want you to leave some extra. I want you to walk away and not take it all the way to the limit of what you could it teaches you to trust Me.”

“So, God, you're saying that if we *don't* do all we

can do, you're going to multiply the work we *did* do. Is that how this works? If we *don't* do all we *can* do, you're going to multiply or somehow fill in the gap of all the work we *did* do?"

God says, "that's exactly right. I want there to be space for your own good. But in the space, you'll have to trust me, trust me."

So, that's God in the Old Testament.

Now, fast forward hundreds of years later and Jesus of Nazareth walks into a culture that understands everything we've just talked about. They've all been taught the laws since birth.

- Take a day off – your life is not about work or an overcommitted schedule. You're not a human doing, you're a human being.
- And don't keep it all for yourself or spend it all on yourself. Just because it *comes* to you doesn't mean it *is* for you.

They all know the rules but Jesus understands that it's not just about knowing the rules; *it's also about knowing the heart of the God who gives the rules.*

So He goes at the issue from a different angle.

“Do not worry, saying ‘What shall we drink, what shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them.” Matthew
6:31-32 (NIV)

A pagan in Jesus day was a person who believed there were *gods* (such as Jupiter and Zeus) but those gods could care less about people. You could never get their attention. You never knew what they were going to do.

And if those are the kinds of gods you believe in and worship; if that's the kind of god or gods who exist, well, you *need* to run after things. Hard. Because they won't help you. They aren't

interested.

But Jesus says “your Heavenly Father is not like those man-made gods of the pagans. He’s very interested in you. He actually knows what you need.”

- He knows you want your kids to max out their potential and be the best they can be.
- He knows your kids need to go to college.
- He knows you need to eat and live in a decent home.
- He knows the pressures you have at work and the pressures you have in this culture.
- Your heavenly Father knows that you’re single and you want to get married and you’re thinking if you don’t drive this and do this and look this way, nobody is ever going

to go out with you.

- Your heavenly Father knows what's going on with you and what you need.

And because of that, Jesus said, you don't need to live like the pagans ...

- Who have no choice but to run after the things they think they need.
- Who have no choice but to worry whether or not the work of their hands will be enough.
- Who have no choice but to experience the high stress, myopic focus and damaged relationships that a maxed-out, overstuffed life always produces.

That doesn't have to be your life, Jesus was saying.

Question: What if Jesus was right about that? What if

your Heavenly Father really does know and care about you?

More importantly, what if you really believed that? What would happen to you? What would happen to your fear?

What would happen to your “I’ve got to measure up and I’ve got to make a difference?” Or “what if I miss out or what if I fall behind?”

What would happen if you woke up every single morning and you said, “God, I know what my limits are and I have to breathe, so there is a lot that won’t get done. I’m not going to get all the way to the edges of my field. There are going to be some grapes on the ground, there is going to be some wheat that just gets left out there, and I’m just going to trust You with that because *I know that You know what I need.*”

“And you know what my kids need, too, so I’m not going to push them all the way to the edges of

their field. There are going to be some opportunities they pass up, some things they aren't involved with and I'm just going to trust You with that. I'm going to trust that You care about them a whole lot more than I do."

Can you imagine living a life with that kind of faith?

Guess what? That's exactly the kind of life your heavenly Father is inviting you into.

And when you learn that and when you find that pace, there will be breathing room. And in your effort to get the most out of life, you will not lose control of your life.

Conclusion

Now here's what I know about all of us (and this is the conclusion).

We have limits. We have time limits and we have

money limits.

And something or someone is going to determine the limits that we live by.

You will either allow culture and/or fear to drive you to the limit of your limits, or you will learn to trust that your heavenly Father loves you and cares for you.

You're either going to live at the limit of your limit and you will not enjoy your life, you will not enjoy your relationships, and you won't enjoy the stuff that you spent all your money on. You won't enjoy the things you do because you're doing too much.

Or you will decide, I'm not going to live in fear. I'm not going to live in the world of "what if" the rest of my life, and I'm going to believe that God knows what I need. Then I'm going to take a step back from the limits.

- I'm going to trust Him with my children and my children's education and that they'll get into the schools they need to get into.
- I'm going to trust him with my finances.
- I'm going to trust him with what people think about me.
- I'm going to trust God with all of that, and I'm not going to allow my fear or the expectations of other people to drive me to an unhealthy limit.
- I'm going to allow God to help me to create breathing room. I am not going to trade peace for progress and peace for prosperity.

Now I know some of you are listening to me and you're thinking, "Rick, you're making too big of a deal out of this breathing room idea because this is just the world we live in these days. And we need to accept that and get on with it."

So let me just say this and I'll be done because *this is the world I live in.*

In 25 years of being a pastor, rarely has anyone called me to say, "Things are going great, just checking in." We don't get those kind of calls here. We don't spend our time in those kinds of conversations.

Instead, the kinds of calls we get are from men and women who didn't have time to invest in their marriage because they were so busy ... until the day their spouse decided to leave.

And suddenly, amazingly, they were spending hours and hours and hours trying to save their marriage and the irony was that they could have taken those same hours and hours and hours and invested them in their marriage ... if they had chosen to create some breathing room.

Through the years, we've had too many

conversations with busy moms and dads who love their kids; who are trying to provide for their kids; who want their kids to go to the best school ... but they have no real relationship with their kids.

Then one of their kids spins out of control, and they spend hours and hours and hours and lots and lots of money trying to rescue somebody they genuinely love.

And if they could tell you their story, they would say, “You know what, I wish I had taken those hours and hours and hours and invested them on the front-end instead of having to find them in crisis. I didn’t think I had the hours to give. But you know what, when things begin to fall apart, well, what do you know. I found the hours that I needed.”

Here’s what most people my age and older would tell you. They would tell you, “I would go back to being 30 and 40 and 50, and I would trade some prosperity, and I would trade some progress for

the sake of more peace in my life.”

“If I were you,” they would say, “I would go back to where you are. You are so fortunate because you haven’t eaten up your thirties, you haven’t eaten up your forties, you haven’t eaten up your fifties. Some of you haven’t even eaten up your twenties.

“If I could do it all again, I would go back and I would create breathing room because what I traded my breathing room for just wasn’t worth it.”

So, for the next few weeks ...

- We’re going to talk about finding some breathing room in our schedules.
- We’re going to talk about making some breathing room in our money.

And I promise, I'm not going to ask for any of it. This has nothing to do with giving. This has everything to do with margin.

- And we're going to talk about creating some breathing room *literally* in our bodies.

Your homework assignment between now and next week is simply to answer this question:

Where do you need some breathing room?

And what would it look like in that area if you were convinced that your heavenly Father knows what you need and can provide it without you driving yourself crazy?

Let's pray together.

Lord, in our effort to get the most out of life so many of us are losing control of our life. And we need some breathing room.

And we're so appreciative that you have made it clear that regardless of what the culture says or what our fears tell us, that breathing room is part of your design for us. Life is just better when we have it.

But getting from where we are today to where we could be isn't going to be easy. We need You to do something new in us. We need You to break through the old patterns of thinking and doing.

And so we say "yes" to what you're going to do because we know you love us and care for us.

Feature – New Wine

CLOSING COMMENTS

A couple of things before we go ...

1. Financial fitness class – Next Sunday 9:30-10:30 for 5 weeks

2. Offering @ door

3. Blessing

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)

Endnotes

ⁱ This message is based on a similar message from Andy Stanley called “Ex-Squeeze Yourself.”