

# Are You Out of Breath?

by Vance Havner

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being spiritually alive and open to God, and warns against spiritual stagnation and the need for revival.*

**Duration:** 34:49

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 28:19, John 4:14, John 17:18, John 20:19, John 20:21-22

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of young people distancing themselves from negative influences such as evil thoughts, television, books, and bad company. The speaker shares a personal experience of being in the mountains of Virginia and realizing the need to get out of a difficult situation. The sermon highlights the significance of one's relationship with God, using the example of John F. Kennedy's life and death. The speaker also mentions the need to unlearn certain things and emphasizes the importance of having a genuine love for Christ and His Church.

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## Transcript

I want to read from John 20, beginning with verse 19, a familiar passage. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, and where the disciples were assembled for care of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side.

Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you. As my Father sent me, even so send I you.

And when he had said this, he breathed it down on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. Reader's Digest had an article some months past on deep breathing.

Went on to say that we breathe with only a part of our lungs. There's plenty of air around us and more lung space within us than most of us ever use. And we ought to make the most of our resources.

After all, breathing is pretty important. Everything depends on it. When you quit breathing, you quit, period.

We are never more than a few breaths, beloved, from death and eternity. Just a few breaths. We read in Genesis 2,7 that God made man out of the dust and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became

a living soul.

Man is a God-inspired being in that sense. We're not mere matter, we're living souls. And what makes the difference is the breath of God.

Then we read in 2 Timothy 3,16 that God breathed again in the Scriptures. All Scripture is Godly. Now, there is ordinary human inspiration in great literature and music, but this book's more than a book, it's breath.

The breath of God. I'm not interested in theories of inspiration, this is God's word. Not just in spots or wherever it happens to speak to me, but in its entirety.

Anytime and all the time, all Scripture is God-breathed. I believe every bit of it. I think of that businessman who was called upon to preside at a religious meeting, and he was a little out of his element.

And after the Scriptures had been read, he got a little mixed up with the procedure of the business meeting, and said, if there are no corrections or additions, the Scriptures will stand as read. Well, I'm in favor of that. We just read here now that our Lord breathed on the disciples, and I think this was prophetic, of Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit.

Every Christian is God-breathed, for when he's born again, God breathes into him eternal life, and he's indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But here is a breathing of the Holy Spirit for power. For service, the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

The Church is God-breathed, a true Church, a heavenly fellowship, imbued with life from above, but not all churches are empowered by the Holy Spirit for service and for testimony. I've stood before many a Sunday morning congregation, and felt like that the only text for that morning ought to be, Can these dry bones live? The greatest need of the Church today is breath. Dr. Phillips, in the foreword to one of his translations, says the Church today is so prosperous that she's fat and out of breath, and so organized it's brussel-bound.

I like that statement, fat and out of breath. That's a pretty good description of the professing Church today. Puffing and blowing and reddening the face, exhaling without inhaling, breathing out without taking in, and if we quit breathing in, we soon quit breathing out.

There's a lot going on today. There has been more going on in the Church. But somehow, so much of it doesn't amount to a great deal.

I heard of a cook down in the South who decided to go up north and cook for a very wealthy family, sort of a tonguey group. She didn't stay long, came back and said, Didn't you like it up there? No, she said there was too much shuffling of the dishes for the fewness of the widows. You ever been in a church where there was too much shuffling of the dishes? I have.

We've got a lot of that today. Once at Northfield, at Mr. Moody's table, Wilbur Chapman asked F.B. Meyer, Why is my experience so intermittent, up and down, in and out? And F.B. Meyer asked him, Have you ever tried breathing out three times before you breathed in once? And that's all he said. And Wilbur Chapman began to think that one over.

And he learned a great lesson. Then we have artificial respiration. They mouth to mouth and somebody drowns.

And the Church is using a lot of it. Men are trying to blow inspiration into the Church by pit talks and programs and promotion. And sometimes they revive the organism temporarily and resuscitate the corpse momentarily.

But there's no real revival for just blowing human breath into a corpus. We've got a lot of artificial respiration experts today in the religious field. Making a living blowing ordinary human inspiration into churches that have long since been out of breath.

And my subject tonight and my question is this. Are you out of breath? Now, you sing here in the Spirit, I think, but have you ever watched a song leader trying to get a crowd to sing when they didn't have a song in their hearts? What frustrating business. What an exercise in futility.

And we're spending a lot of time in the Church today trying to pull out what never has been put in. You know what's down in the well will come up in the bucket. And if there's no song in them and if there's no love for Christ in them and no love for His Church and no love for the Lord, you can't get them to exhale what's never been inhaled.

Now, there are two verbs here in this passage I read. He breathed on them and said, Receive, give. We must breathe into us what He breathes upon us.

There is the giving and there's the receiving. There's a word among the many words that are going around these days in the religious circles, you know. We've had quite a lot of them.

Relevance and dialogue and involvement and what have you. I'm getting a little tired of some of them. Now, one of them is open-endedness.

That's a new term that's going around. Open toward God for strength and open toward man for service. Now, the stream that has no inlet will soon be exhausted and the stream without outlet will soon be stagnant.

The church at Jerusalem was a stagnant church until persecution came and scattered it out in all directions. Dr. Phillips says of the early church, they were open on the Godward side. I like that.

Dear friend tonight, are you open on the Godward side? Your life cannot be open on the manward side. There won't be any blessing if you're not open on the Godward side. How we miss A.W. Tozer.

Tozer was a prophet. We've never been oversupplied with prophets. Since he's gone, I can't think of one.

And Tozer had a way of saying things that would shock you at first. He said the notion that the first business of the church is to spread the gospel is false. He said the first business of the church is to be worthy to spread it.

He said our Lord said go ye, but he said carry ye first. I think today we're trying to promote evangelism, trying to send the crowd out to evangelize, they're not ready to evangelize. Trying to send folks out to be missionaries in their communities, they're not ready.

I'm leaving. Going out? Certainly I do. Many of our people are not ready to go.

You can have a pep meeting and excite some laymen and others to rush around over the community when they don't know what to say when they get where they want. I've heard sermons to young people from Isaiah's call, trying to get young folks to say here am I. Send me. The trouble with a lot of folks today is they're not ready to say here am I because they've never first said woe is me.

Until you've said woe is me and have seen the Lord and have said I am undone, man of unclean lips, dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips, you're not ready to go. I think a Christian needs to look in the mirror before he looks out the window. I've been looking out the window at the lost world and all its need, but don't look out the window until you've looked in the mirror and this is the mirror.

First see yourself in the sight of God and when you get straightened out with Him, then look out the window. Use a salt of the earth, yes, but salt never did any good in a salt shaker. I can't imagine any way that salt would ever be beneficial in a salt cellar.

It has to be shaken out. Now we're building million-dollar salt cellars all over the country, calling them churches, but there's nothing much good unless you can shake that cloud out of there. We are not depositories, beloved, we are dispensers.

I heard of a fellow showing a friend of his over a brand-new church building some time ago, and he said, You know, this place is so insulated you can't hear a sound from the outside. I've been in some churches like that. They never heard the call of a lost world.

They never heard anything from the outside. You should congratulate society. Now in the book of Acts, wonderful things happen, beloved, but have you ever stopped to reflect that all these marvelous things that happen in the book of Acts were just the outflow and the overflow of the inflow of the Spirit of God? Just that.

Now look. I have used in other connections the illustration of the old water wheel. My father used to take me when I was a boy to an old mill out in the country that was operated by a water wheel.

And the stream poured on the big wheel and it turned and all the smaller wheels turned and the mill was in operation. Now suppose the miller would come down some morning and the wheel wouldn't turn because there wasn't enough water. How foolish he would be to strive and strain to try to make the wheel go round.

How foolish to call in the neighbors and strive and strain to make the wheel go round. But I can tell you where he could use some energy. He could go up the creek, clear it out, get the channel clean, remove the debris, the dead logs, the leaves, and then the water would flow.

The wheel would turn and the mill would operate and he'd be in business again. I don't know of anything that Christians need to do today quite so much in all our churches as to take a trip up the creek in our personal living and in our church life. Everywhere I go I see educational directors and music leaders and pastors and Sunday school superintendents sweating and coughing and blowing red in the face trying to make the wheels go round.

They won't go round that way. And we won't have anything to show for all our neighbors. I'm having the hardest time in this world trying to get church members to agree to go up the creek and clear the channel.

They'll do everything else in this world but do that. They'll put on all kinds of drives and campaigns but to go up the creek, no. To get right with God and right with people, no.

We want a revival without that. You never have a revival without that. And it's just as simple as getting right with God as Dr. Torrey used to have in his placards for his great evangelistic campaigns.

Just those words, get right with God. Anybody can understand that. And the corollary to that is to get right with people.

What is there up the creek that needs to be cleared out in your own life? Is it the sin of omission, something you ought to do but you won't do? Is it the sin of omission, something you ought not to do that you are doing? Is it the sin of the disposition? Is it a doubtful thing in your life? What is it that clogs the channel? You know what the song says, we cannot be channels of blessing if our lives are not free from known sins. Beloved, we need to go up the creek. Now if I may change horses in the middle of the stream here, and change the figure from air to water.

Our Lord said in John 7, 37, 39, He spoke of the spirit, Any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. This spoke he of the spirit, which they that believe on him should receive. For the spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Now you have the giving and the receiving again. Openness toward God, let him drink. Openness toward men, from within him shall flow rivers of water.

There it is again. That's the Christian life in its fullest experience. Have you read The New Life of Mr. Moody by Pollock, the man who wrote the biography of Billy Graham? I've read many biographies of Moody, but I got more out of this one than any of the others.

And as you know, when Mr. Moody was a young Christian, he was a dynamo of energy. If he was built like an ox, he could wire out a dozen men. Sometimes they'd pray that the Lord would either tie Moody down or give him an extra dose of strength, because nobody could keep up with him.

There were two old ladies in the congregation who kept praying that he'd be filled with the spirit, and one day he came into that blessed experience, and then he said this. And I'd never read this before. He said, Up until then I was carrying buckets of water.

Now I have a river that carries me. Oh, isn't that just about what's the matter with most of us today, aren't we? Running around with buckets of water always, refilling, refilling, running out, refilling. Beloved, we need to get out on the river that carries us.

I believe the Church must get out into the world. I didn't have to read Bonhoeffer to find that out. I've known that ever since our Lord said, As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent you into the world.

Well, I read in John 17 where I belong with regard to this world. I don't see why folks have such a time trying to figure that out. Jesus said in John 17 that we've been saved out of this world.

We're still in the world, that is, physically. We have to live here. But we're not of the world, but we've been saved out of the world to go right back into the world and win other people out of the world, and that's the only business we have in this world.

Now that's ridiculous. But we're trying to send folks out before they're ready to go, and that comes back to our deep breathing exercises again. We're trying to get churches and Christians to breathe out before they

breathe in.

Now, never mind all the books on how. Dr. Tozer said he started taking deep breathing exercises one time. He said, I'd have had a chest like a bell, but I made the mistake of buying a book on how to do it.

So he got some mixed up on the book and quit. Never did develop himself. Don't buy too many books on how to do all these things.

We wear ourselves out figuring out how many steps to take. Some have four, five, six, seven steps. Lay the books all aside.

Come to Jesus like a little child, in simplicity. I think of the fable about the mother bear who was trying to teach her cubs how to walk, and one of them said, Which foot shall I put forward first? The old mother bear said, Shut up and walk. So, don't read too many books.

Just as physically we draw such short breaths. I think readers digest this right. I'm sure there's something to that.

I know I'm guilty. We get along with just gasps, most of us. We sort of gasp our way along.

I never use most of our lungs, only a portion. And just so do we Christians draw little gasps of divine power instead of the deep, regular inhaling of the breath of God. A lot of diseases in the church today.

One brother this afternoon mentioned sleep and sickness. Well, we are considerably afflicted with that in the church today. Then there's pernicious anemia.

A lot of souls are suffering from that. Then we've got infantile paralysis. Babies, you know, like the ones at Corinth that wouldn't grow up.

A hundred and fifty and two hundred pound babies. Keep the preacher busy running around with a milk bottle. And they should have been on leave.

And then when they have a new preacher, change pastors, a new man comes, they say, I don't like him, he changed my formula. Babies. Babies.

But beloved, with what we are considering tonight, let me remind you of another disease in the church. Spiritual emphysema and asthma. I've been in more asthmatic churches, wheezing their way along.

And that's because we're living but gasps. I go from church to church and I see these dear people, red in the face, puffing and blowing out of breath. No regular, orderly, devotional life.

No moment by moment appropriation of the living Christ for every need of body and mind and spirit. No constant looking unto Jesus for everything. I encounter them everywhere.

And it's so simple, if only we could get into the secret of it. Some years ago I spelled out faith, f-a-i-t-h, into a little acrostic. I read of it in the forum.

For all I take him. And I find myself saying again and again, for all he is, I take him. For all my need, I trust him.

And for all his blessings, I thank him. And that spells out f-a-i-t-h, you know, every time. It helps me along.

These little things sometimes come in helpful. We've made it complicated, beloved. This secret's been hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto them.

It did me a lot of good to learn some years ago that there'll always be enough of everything that I need to do all that God wants me to do, as long as God wants me to do it. Now, are you worrying about things? Isn't that true? If I'm in God's will to do what God wants me to do, then I'm not supposed to be doing anything else as long as God wants me to do it. When are we going to come to the simplicity of this thing? I read of a dear old lady who was told, now the doctors have done all they can for you, and you're just going to have to trust the Lord.

And she said, has it come to that? Well, it always comes to that, and since it always comes to that, why don't we start out with that? You're going to get around to it, isn't you? It always comes to how things stand between us and God. John Fitzgerald Kennedy rode down a street in Dallas, and it looked like to this world that he had it made wealth, education, attractive wife and children, president of the United States, power, and what looked like a promising future. And then a rifle cracked, and all that mattered was how things stood between John Fitzgerald Kennedy and God.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, and all that might or will there give, a waiter like the inevitable hour, the paths of glory lead me to the good. All that mattered then was how things stood between him and God. And it's all that will matter with any of us.

When are we going to learn this precious, simple truth? And sometimes it's the humblest people who learn it. You know, beloved, there isn't so much to learn as there is to unlearn. We know too much.

Sometimes we've read too many books and heard too many preachers. Mrs. Woodrow Wilson said that on her wedding day, the second wife of the president, she said, On the wedding day, my old negro cook said, Goodbye, take Jesus for your doctor and your friend. And Mrs. Wilson said, I have thought that if I could take him with as simple and childlike faith as that fine old negro woman did, the new life with its broader opportunities could have been more enriched for myself and more useful to others.

Now, here was a wife of a president of the United States who somehow couldn't get into the simple lesson that an old negro cook had learned a long time ago. And after all, the Bible says that there are four categories of people from which there just won't be a lot of people saved. It said not many rich people.

That doesn't mean God's got anything against rich folks, but rich folks have a lot of trouble getting saved because it's pretty hard for them to become poor in spirit and realize they're nothing. The rich young ruler was a fine chap, but away he went on his crutches. And then Paul said, Not many wives.

How many of the super-intellectuals do you know that are deep, devoted servants of the Lord? There are a few, thank the Lord. It doesn't say not any. Lady Huntington said she got to heaven on an M. It didn't say not any, not many.

She said that letter M was what led her through. Not many mighty. How many men in power and position? I don't know how many senators.

I don't know how many presidents of the United States have been deep, devoted Christians. I can't get much information along that line on most of them. Not many noble, the blue bloods, the aristocrats.

How many of them make it? God hasn't got anything against these people, but it's awfully hard to come in that little wicked gate of Matthew 18.3, except you be converted and become as little children. Those two C's, conversion and childlikeness. It's pretty hard to get in that door somehow.

It's too simple for us. It's difficult, it seems, to be converted and becomes a little child, and then after we enter in, it's pretty hard to enter into the deeper secrets of just trusting Jesus for everything. I wonder what would happen if somebody would just start out and really trust Jesus for everything.

Quit talking about it and do it. I'm getting to the place where my favorite song is Trusting Jesus, that is all. Now, that's one of the simplest things.

Anybody could have written it, I think, and yet, no. Because it's a more profound song than you imagine. I find myself trying to sing it in my cracked voice again and again because that's the whole thing.

Trusting Jesus. But somehow a Mrs. Wilson may miss it while the old cook finds it. A millionaire may miss it while the gardener finds it.

A college PhD may miss it while the janitor finds it. A United States president may miss it while some country justice of the peace finds it. A socialite Mrs. Van Snoodle with blue blood in her veins may miss it while the maid finds it.

The Lord hasn't got anything against those people, but you've got to humble yourself and come as a little child. The folks who got the blessing from Jesus, most of them just ordinary folks. Rich young Rudolph was quite a classic character, but he missed it that there was old Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus and that poor sick woman who'd spent all her money and was worse and somehow got through the crowd and touched him.

They got the blessing. I'm afraid we know too much. Our Lord has made it simple enough.

I remember when I went to Charleston back in the 30s, I was exercised about the need in my own life of the filling of the Spirit. I'd read a lot of books, which, like I said, confused more than they clarified. And there was a godly old saint there who gave me a book, The Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians.

It did me more good than any book of its kind I've ever read. Took it to my room. Couldn't go to sleep till I had read the book, and then I couldn't go to sleep because I had read the book.

And I found myself sitting down at that old church with the light turned on and folded over myself sometimes, saying, Lord, what's this all about? I said, whatever I need in whatever is true to the book, I want. I thought I was safe on that. But I didn't have any vision, didn't hear any voices.

I guess I'm not made up that way, and I'm glad that I'm not, because if I'd had some great, blazing experience on top of a mountain, I'd be running around telling everybody they had to climb a mountain and have a blazing experience. If they didn't have it, then they'd be worse off than ever before. The Lord has never been pleased to send me a special delivery letter about these things.

But I have thanked God I got through to the place where, just as I took Jesus as my Savior by simple faith, so I received the Holy Spirit for a gracious infilling. And that's what he wants us to do, believe me. But Reader's Digest goes on to say that if you're going to practice the deep breathing exercise, first get all the old foul air out of your lungs.

It goes on to say you'll be surprised how long you can keep on exhaling. And that's true. You think that you are through exhaling, but you still keep on.

That must be done before you inhale properly. A lot of Christians have never really gotten rid of the sin in their lives and put away even the not ready to receive the Holy Spirit. It's one thing to ask God to take away our sins.

It's another thing to be willing to put them away. And then you want to get out of the places where there's foul air. Some people hang around in these spots and wonder why they don't know anything about the deep breathing exercises of the children of God.

I heard of a young couple that had been dancing in a nightclub in the foul, faded air. And they came up on the street long in the early hours of the morning into the morning breeze. One of them said, What's that I smell? And the other said, That's fresh air.

I think a lot of young people need to get out of the basement of evil thoughts. And the things they look at on television, and the books they read, and the company they keep, get out to where the air is better. And then breathe, and then receive, and drink deeply.

I was in the mountains of Virginia last year in summertime, lovely mountains like these. When I arrived at the motel, I looked around and could see no way to walk. Of course, motels are made for motorists, not for pedestrians.

But I finally discovered a little obscure path that led up the side of the hill, and I took up that path and I found a patch of woods, and I went across and climbed a hill and came out on a view that practically took my breath. I got up every morning at 5.30 for the rest of the week to climb that hill and have a little session with the Lord. I found myself saying morning after morning, Lord, as I breathe in this wonderful air, by simple faith, I would draw in the breath of the Spirit for the needs of this day.

F.B. Meyer did it in 1887 at the first Keswick conference he ever attended. He didn't bother about this, and some of the people at the conference were greatly concerned. Some of them had been praying long hours and hadn't gotten through.

He said, I climbed a little hill one evening, and I said, Lord, I'm too tired to think or to feel or to pray intensely. I'm too worn out to agonize. He said, A voice seemed to say, As you took me for forgiveness, so take the Holy Spirit.

According to your faith, be it unto you. And F.B. Meyer said, Lord, as I breathe this whiff of air, so I breathe thy Holy Spirit by faith. He came back down from that hill.

He hadn't had to procure you thinking. He hadn't seen his vision. He hadn't heard the voice, but he had settled with God, and the rest of his life proved it.

I covet this for every person in this place tonight. I'm not talking about a set of mental gymnastics. I'm not talking about auto-suggestion.

I'm not talking about any trick of the subconscious or any subjective, worked-up experience God provides. But the same Savior who saved you, if you're a child of God tonight, then in simple faith he took you, is willing and is breathing upon you if you will receive what he brings by simple appropriating faith, the

appropriation of the living Christ for every need, the appropriation of the Holy Spirit for testimony and for service. There's nothing fanciful about it.

It's as simple as that if you mean business. There's a song that carries out and continues the thought, Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love and do what thou wouldst do. Now, let's look at that, beloved.

You're asking God to breathe upon you and fill you with new life. What for? So I can run around and brag about it? No. That I may love what you love and do what you do.

You see, there's a practical purpose to this thing. And have you noticed the unkills and the kills in the next two verses? Breathe on me breath of God until my heart is pure, until with thee I will one will to do what you need to do. Breathe on me breath of God till I am wholly thine, till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

There's a practical purpose here. We don't want subjective experiences to make us feel superior. There are various things going around today that disturb the church and divide the church a great deal, because some people have some of these experiences and then they become a select group.

And if you haven't had that, you're not one of the ends, and you've maybe never even been saved, and it's causing untold confusion. Well, there's no confusion caused by this sort of thing when you understand it, because it's that Jesus Christ might be glorified. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus.

He never calls attention to himself in this book. He magnifies the Lord Jesus Christ. And a true spiritual Christian brags on Jesus, not on himself, but glorifies the Lord.

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