

“Put Your Oxygen Mask On First”

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Series: Believe Week 4. The Bible

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Southwest Airlines is known for being a bit quirky. Watch how they spice up the dull and often ignored safety instructions given at the beginning of every flight. I'd like to pretend to have your attention for just a few moments. If you get mad and wanna take your toys and go home there's 8 ways to get there. Two forward exit doors, 2 wing exits, 2 rear exits, signs overhead and disco lights on the floor.

Everybody gets a door prize in the seatback pocket in front of you along with dirty diapers, chewing gum wrappers, banana peels and all other gifts you leave for us. Right on top is a safety information card. Take it out, you'll notice in the highly unlikely event that the captain lands us near a hot tub everybody gets their very own teeny weeny yellow Southwest bikini. One size fits all.

My attendants are coming by hoping you'll tell them how good looking they are. They're gonna make sure your seat back and tray tables are in their full upright and absolutely most uncomfortable position possible. And your carry-on items are crammed and shoved completely under the seat in front of you leaving absolutely no room for your knees or feet.

As you know it's a no-smoking, no whining, no complaining flight. It's a "please" and "thank-you" and "you are such a good looking flight-attendant" flight.

Smoking is never allowed onboard at Southwest. If we do make you that nervous, you're more than welcome to step outside. We have a special smoking section just for you. We'll even show you a movie tonight: *Gone With the Wind*.

And although we never anticipate a loss in cabin pressure – if we did we certainly wouldn't be at work tonight – but if needed 4 oxygen masks come out of the compartment overhead. Stop screaming, let go of your neighbor, pull until that plastic tubing is fully extended, place the mask over your nose and mouth and breathe normally. To activate the flow of oxygen simply insert \$.75 for the first minute and \$.50 for each additional minute. And if you're traveling with small children...we're sorry. If you're traveling with more than one child, pick out the one who you think might have the most earning potential down the road. And if you're traveling with somebody needing special assistance put on your mask first.

That's it for the do's and don'ts of show & tell. So, sit back and relax or you can sit up and be tense, either way. That's what we call very cheap entertainment. Nobody has to pay extra but you certainly don't get a refund. Thank you for choosing Southwest. Welcome aboard.

Buried within those hilarious instructions is a critical message: we all need to breathe. That's why those oxygen masks drop from the ceiling. To live is to breathe. We've all been doing it since birth. In CPR the technical term for breathing air into a patient is "inspiration." It literally means to put breath into someone. You watch for the lungs to fill, the ribs to expand, the chest to rise. If the patient dies it's called "expiration" – literally, the breath has gone out of them for good. A friend once told me of a frightening full asthmatic attack. When his airway closed up he could not, at first, even take in the medicine from his inhaler. We all need air. God designed us to work this way.

The Lord also built into each one of us the need to breathe in His Spirit. In both Hebrew and Greek, the words translated as Spirit and Holy Spirit also mean 'wind' and 'breath.' When God created the first human, He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). So you and I literally take God's breath away. Yet life is more than just having air in your lungs. You can do CPR all you want on someone who's expired and it will not change a thing. God puts breath in your lungs and spirit in your life. That's what makes you alive.

Have you ever seen a child rebel against a parent by holding his or her breath? That must be the dumbest threat in history. Your body eventually rebels against you and forces you to breathe. The same is true in our spirits. We cannot avoid breathing spiritually. The question is: What do we take in when we spiritually inhale? Your spirit, like your lungs, is a vacuum. It must take in something. The great tragedy of our age is we often don't breathe in God's Spirit.

That's why Week 4 of Believe is about the Bible – the oxygen mask for God's Spirit. In Week 1 we discovered God is above us, beside us and in us as Father, Son and Spirit. Week 2 told us that God offers each of us a personal relationship and a plan. Week 3 taught us Jesus sacrificed His life to make that saving relationship possible. In Week 4 God gives us a unique way to know His will and to live His life: the Bible. God's Word and God's Spirit are the oxygen mask for your spirit. Put it on so you can breathe freely.

If we don't breathe from God's Word, we will unconsciously breathe in the second-hand smoke of consumerism and materialism. These tell us to be self-indulgent, self-centeredness and selfish. When you breathe in pollution you get sick. The same is true when your spirit breathes in pollution. Every day I hear another story of spiritual sickness. We are told if we have things or if things go our way we will be fulfilled. And worst of all we make our kids breathe this in from birth. William Falk says:

I've seen firsthand the emptiness that haunts so many middle-class kids. From an early age, they are taught that life is a pitiless pursuit of individual gratification and success, requiring above-average brains and above-average looks. There is no sense of context, or community, or higher purpose. It's hardly surprising that so many of them are taking antidepressants, meds, or other pills. Many more hide their sadness in eating disorders, drugs, or meaningless hookups. In our rush to

give our children everything, I'm afraid, we have forgotten to help them answer a question that won't be ignored: *What is this all for?*¹

Long ago the Apostle Paul predicted it would be this way:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:2-5).

It doesn't have to be this way. God wants to breathe His Spirit into you, your children, your grandchildren.

To begin, follow the advice they give you on the plane – **Put Your Mask on First**. You will be no help to anyone if your relationship with God is not right. Timothy's mother and grandmother were Jews who followed Jesus. His father was a Gentile who did not. Timothy could go either way. Paul writes,

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

'The oxygen mask is right in front of you Timothy,' Paul says. 'You've known it since you were a kid. The Scriptures lead to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. You can't help anyone until you put on the mask and breathe in God's Spirit through the Bible.'

To every couple who wants their child baptized I say, "The best way to help your child grow in his/her relationship with God is if you grow in your relationship with God." You will not be any spiritual help to your family and friends, classmates and coworkers until you read and apply God's Word. Putting on the oxygen mask of Scripture gives you faith, hope, love, joy and peace to share with them. Set aside time each day to read a portion of the BELIEVE book. Fill your spirit with the breath of God.

Next you need to do what they taught us in Lamaze class, **Take a Deep Cleansing Breath**. Paul writes in Ephesians, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). The verb, "be filled" describes continuous action: keep on being filled. You cannot stay free from one bad influence without adding a good one. God wants to keep on filling you with His Holy Spirit. Prayer and Scripture are the best place to breath in God's Spirit. Paul continues,

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

¹ William Falk, "The Week," The Week (3-2-07), p. 5.

How does God inspire the Bible? He breathes through it. Many people make the mistake in thinking that God inspired the Bible long ago and He's done. Of course we believe He inspired the writers who spoke and recorded His Word. But He continues to breathe through the Bible to you. The Bible is not an oxygen tank. It is a continuous lifeline. And God does not only inspire the Bible. He also inspires you through the Holy Spirit. So God works in two directions – through the Scriptures and through your spirit. That's why the Scriptures, despite being written thousands of years ago, still speak directly to you.

Yet some say you cannot trust the Bible. Here are the three common objections.

A. People introduced errors into the Bible. There are thousands of Bible manuscripts, far more than other ancient books. And yes, every one of them has some errors. You would think thousands of copies make us doubt the Bible but the opposite is true. The more copies you have the better able you are to find, and remove the errors. What's more, the oldest manuscripts of the Bible were found in the 20th century. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, are a thousand years older than the oldest manuscript we had of the Old Testament. The same is true for the New. So you can be confident your Bible is more accurate and closer to the original than any Bible in history.

B. Science proves the Bible wrong. Some scientists may say this but science cannot prove the Bible wrong. The Scriptures reveal Truth that science itself says it cannot study – the supernatural. It can study the natural world but not the supernatural world. It can tell us *How* God created but not *Who* God is or *Why* God created. That's why science and the Bible need not be in a debate or even a duel. Instead, they can be a duet. Together, working in harmony, they reveal a richer understanding of God's Truth.

C. The Bible has lots of discrepancies. Let's face it: the Bible was written by humans. God did not override their humanity. They were fallible human beings with their own limited understanding of the world. So are we. Years from now people will laugh at what we say is true. The authors of the Bible were as human as we are. In fact, I would go so far as to say the Bible is fully human and fully divine like Jesus. When Jesus walked the earth He was limited by a physical body. He needed food, water and sleep. He willingly limited himself to a first century world view in order to communicate with us. He was fully human and, at the same time, fully divine. It's a mystery we can't completely explain but we deeply believe. The same is true of the Bible. It is fully human and, at the same time, fully divine. In spite of whatever discrepancies and limitations we see in Scripture, this fully human story is also fully God's Word to us.

Take a deep cleansing breath. Let the Word of God work its way down into every corner and cranny of your soul. Let it touch and cleanse the disease and sickness of your spirit. Let it teach and correct, train and equip you to live God's way.

Finally, **Get a Breathing Buddy.** Paul writes to Timothy,

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. (2 Timothy 1:5)

Timothy had his grandmother Lois, mother Eunice, Paul and believers in the churches to support him. It's popular today to say, "I want to have my own private relationship with God. I don't need organized religion or the institutional church. I don't need anyone." Well those people are partly right. We don't need organizations or institutions. But we do need each other. Why do we treat faith differently than everything else? We don't say, "I'm going to get my food all by myself," or "I'm going to earn my money by myself." Even farmers and self-employed workers must rely on others.

God breathes through His Word and through His people the Church. Not through an institution or organization but through the people. You will never fully breathe in God's Spirit unless you join with other believers. You must become part of God's family. Take a step and put down roots in a congregation and a growth group. Why go through life without breathing buddies to cheer you on? Liana Ennis is a high school student who found a Breathing Buddy.

I felt there was a vacancy in my life. I wanted something more. One day I was sitting at lunch with Kerry Philips and a few friends. Kerry, being the awesome Christian she is, would talk about Jesus and how much she loved Woodside. I realized God had just opened a door for me. Kerry invited me to join her one Thursday night and I agreed! Youth group helps me grow in my relationship with Jesus. I am surrounded by other people who also strive to grow in their faith. Our small groups are filled with meaningful, relevant, and eye-opening discussions which also solidify my love for God. We really take apart the Bible when discussing each chapter. The time for small group flies by too fast! Finally, our service projects give me a chance to put my faith into practice, to recognize Jesus in our surroundings and to be light in dark situations. Once I learned that, I knew my love for God and Jesus was solidified.

Kerry was a Breathing Buddy for Liana. So were the other youth group teens and all the youth group advisors and so are you when you give to God's work at Woodside. You make it possible for us to share God's Word with children, youth and adults, with people near and far. I hope you will do what Liana did and get into a Growth Group so you can be surrounded by Breathing Buddies.

Finally, I must warn you if you read and apply the Bible it will be challenging and convicting. It will, at times, be in conflict with what you want, how you feel, and what our culture preaches. Please don't take it personally. The Bible has always challenged every culture through the ages. Scripture itself says:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

If you read and apply God's Word it will get under your skin. Like a surgeon's scalpel it will go to the heart of your problems. It will challenge your lifestyle, your opinions on all the hot button issues, your attitudes and desires. If you take it seriously it will, at times,

be hard to swallow and even hurt. It's strong medicine. Yet it's the very medicine we need if we want to be well, if we want to be free, if we want to live as God designed us.

Many of you know my grandson Ben. You probably don't know he occasionally has breathing problems. He puts on a child's breathing mask to unblock his airways. He may have asthma. It's a little too early to tell. Last summer, the night before our family vacation, he landed in the hospital with breathing problems. He recovered enough to join us on the vacation. Unfortunately, we needed to give him an awful-tasting medicine three times a day. He hated it. He refused to take it. We reasoned, cajoled, promised treats, mixed it in yogurt, even warned him that he would likely go back to the hospital if he didn't take it. This was a reality. Still he firmly refused to open his mouth.

After two hours of unsuccessful reasoning, we had to make him take it. This took four adults holding a four year old's arms and legs still and mouth open. He hated it. We hated it. I hated myself for doing it. Yet I knew there was no other choice. If we didn't do it, Ben would not be able to breathe. Once it was done we all relaxed until we realized we'd have to do it all again in a few hours. Despite all the pain, that nasty medicine made it possible for Ben to breathe.

The Bible is strong medicine. To you, at times, it may seem nasty, harsh, or painful. Your Heavenly Father does not hold you down and does not want to hurt you. Nor does He want to stand by and watch the world give you blocked airways and a collapsed spirit. Let the double-edged scalpel of God's Word cut away whatever is not His will in your life.

Put on your mask breathe.