

Breathe

ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY 2011 Spring Reader



I am pleased to invite you and your community to join with us in reading a common text of Scripture as we enter into the 40 days of Lent and the 50 days of Easter. For the past several years the Asbury Reader piloted in a range of different faith communities. Consider this representative sample:

I serve a large and diverse congregation (12,000 people). The Reader has proven to be an effective resource to challenge the mature believer and equip the new believer. I have been using them personally and in my congregation for two years—I can hardly wait for the new one.

Vernon Rainwater, Pastor for Worship and Service.

Northland, A Church Distributed, Orlando, Florida

I have shared Asbury Seminary Readers with student leaders in my campus ministry for three different seasons and have been so excited about how it has shaped the spiritual conversation on our campus. The common text has been a backdrop for our lives together and been a source of inspiration, allowing each member of our leadership team to challenge one another to grow in his or her own discipleship.

Rev. Ashlee Alley, Campus Minister

Southwestern College, Winfield, Kansas

We used Asbury Seminary's Reader during Lent 2010 as a community devotional, a small group guide, and a key resource for Lenten sermons. The Reader combined profound scriptural insight with practical applications that enriched our Lenten journey. Our community (4500) loved the content and knowing they were in common dialogue with others.

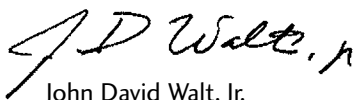
Mike Gammill, Executive Pastor of Discipleship

Foundry United Methodist Church, Houston, Texas

Our Spring Reader “Breathe” launches on Ash Wednesday, March 9, 2011. We would love you to join us. On the next page is a list of special features we are developing to serve our partner communities. We are pulling together the very best we have to offer. Rich in the tradition of transformational faith, you will not find a resource of this nature “off the shelf.”

For more information or to place an order email us at reader@asburyseminary.edu or call 859.858.2198.

We look forward to joining you in God's Word in the season to come.



John David Walt, Jr.

Senior Editor, Asbury Seminary Reader

Join us this spring for a 90-day journey of Reading Scripture together.

Special Features:

- Gospel of John featured in The Voice Translation for the 40 days of Lent
- Featured Lenten commentator: Hannah Whittall Smith's celebrated "Christian's Secret to a Happy Life."
- Featured Easter commentator: Teresa of Avila's Interior Castles.
- Introduces formational practices for reading Scripture.
- Instructional introduction to the core personal spiritual practice of breath prayer.
- Instructional introduction to the core corporate spiritual practice of formation and direction in common.
- Guide for engaging the *Breathe Reader* for small groups and classes.
- Online *Reader* with mobile device app integrating the *Breathe Reader* and special features.
- Weekly podcast devotional commentary on John's Gospel by Dr. Joe Dongell, Professor of New Testament Interpretation.
- "Deepening Life," a weekly podcast guiding listeners in spiritual exercises with Dr. Marilyn Elliott.

Special Features For Participating Communities*

- Live webcast and recorded podcast conversation with Dr. Ellsworth Kalas and Dr. Ben Witherington III, on preaching the Gospel according to John.
- Suggested sermon series outline and resources with web and print media resources.
- Preaching resources, including Witherington's *The Wisdom of John*, biblical commentary and Ellsworth Kalas' magnum opus on preaching, "Soul Preaching."
- Private social network for participating community leaders enabling creative message collaboration.
- The Gospel of John on DVD (2 disc set). "One of the most biblically accurate, historically rendered films enacting Scripture's story I have ever seen."
—Dr. Ben Witherington III.

Pricing

Individual Reader: **\$10 each**
Group Rate (50+): **\$8 each**
Group Rate (500+): **\$7 each**

**Complimentary package for communities who purchase 50 readers or more.*

To order, email reader@asburyseminary.edu

Orders must be placed by Friday, January 14, 2011.



ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
2011 SPRING READER

the story of this reader

In the summer of 2001, a group of 40 students, staff and faculty gathered every Wednesday from 4 to 5 p.m. in the small prayer room next to Estes Chapel on the Kentucky campus of Asbury Theological Seminary. They gathered to hear Scripture, to pray and to listen together for the guiding voice of the Holy Spirit. Each time they conferenced together about what the Spirit might be saying to the Church and in our case the Seminary. They recorded their findings. From these sessions emerged a clear and simple direction: Read Scripture Together. The sense of the Spirit was to find a way to gather ourselves around a common text such that it became a constitutional reality in our relationships. From these small gatherings came this Reader you hold in your hand (or see on the screen as the case may be).

(Re)Learning To Read

To read the Bible is not enough. Even our adversary reads Scripture. We must learn how to read the Bible together as the followers of Jesus. Here's some of what we think that means and doesn't mean:

1. We read in the power of the Holy Spirit who inspired the text (engaging but not trusting our own intellect).
2. We read to remember the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, risen Lord of Heaven and earth, all that led up to it and all that stems from it. We want the mind of Christ (not a collection of stories, principles, wise sayings and special knowledge).
3. We read with the singular hope of seeking our Father's Kingdom and righteousness on earth as it is in Heaven (not as a handbook for making our life work).
4. We read with the intent of becoming trained as actors in the Christian Story. We read in order to be immersed in the text as our memory, fed by the text as our food and inspired by the text as our imagination. Less can be more. Slower can be better. (Though an admirable practice, we are not trying to read the Bible in a year.)
5. We read not for mastery and expertise but for submission and obedience (not in order to extract something relevant for my 21st-century best-self-actualizing quest).
6. We read as a response to grace and a means of grace and to nourish a grace-filled community (not to create a behavior-monitoring, shame-oriented, legalistic group).
7. We read together with the living and the dead as an act of love, for as the church of the ages proves, "Those who read together lead together, and as necessary, bleed together" (not ignoring 21 centuries of wise interpretation and reflection).

the story of breath

ACT I

Scene 6

(Sometime following the creation of the earth and all its creatures. Ancient Near East somewhere in the Fertile Crescent)

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and **breathed** into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2

ACT II

Scene 435

(From the earliest days the human community ceased to breathe the Breath of Life, choosing instead to inhale the toxic oxygen of sin and death, dooming themselves to something akin to terminal lung cancer; an exilic breath-less-ness. Now in the tormenting hands of their Babylonian captors, they are as a desolate valley filled with dry, lifeless bones.)

Enter: The Prophet Ezekiel

EZEKIEL: The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me,

YAHWEH: “Son of man, can these bones live?”

EZEKIEL: I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

YAHWEH: “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put *breath* in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’ “

EZEKIEL: So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no *breath* in them.

YAHWEH: “Prophesy to the *breath*; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O *breath*, and *breathe* into these slain, that they may live.’ “

EZEKIEL: So I prophesied as he commanded me, and *breath* entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

YAHWEH: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **I will put my Spirit in you and you will live**, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’ “

Ezekiel 20

Continued on next page

Act III

Scene 15

Fishing village in Galilee. Resurrection day evening. The Disciples are hiding out behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

JESUS: "Peace be with you!"

After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

JESUS: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

And with that he **breathed** on them and said,

JESUS: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20

inhale... exhale... breathe...
inhale... exhale... breathe...
inhale... exhale... breathe...

HOW WE READ TOGETHER

We offer a simple structure for the daily common text:

INHALE

Get in touch with the simplicity of your breath... with the reality that the Word of God is literally “God-Breathed.” Consider what it would mean for reading to be engaged like breathing. Inhale the Words. Read slowly.

EXHALE

For 20 centuries, Christians have responded to Word and Spirit with words of their own. Guiding, encouraging, challenging, confronting, blessing, we learn much from those who went before us. We engage two holy women in the seasons ahead: Hannah Whitall Smith and Teresa of Avila (more on them to come). Though, their words do not bear the authority of Scripture, we consider them as inspired responses to Word and Spirit. The readings are not paired with scripture texts as direct comments on the text at hand, but as broader responses to the Word, will and ways of God. They give us human examples of what Divine breathing looks like.

BREATH-PRAYER

Our core spiritual practice this spring is an ancient way of praying known as breath prayer. It involves an often rhythmic breath-like repetition of several words in prayer. They can be words taken directly from Scripture or they can come from your own words of response. A breath prayer can be a short, repetitive affirmation of a few words of Scripture, (i.e. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us) or words of confession, (i.e. Have mercy on me a sinner), or a petition (i.e. Jesus, give me Living Water), or simple thanks (i.e. Thank you for making your home in me). The possibilities are limitless. The point is to craft a breath prayer from the day’s reading and carry it through the day, engaging it everywhere possible and at all times. It’s a faithful way to “pray without ceasing.”

Each day we will suggest an idea or two for the breath-prayer practice; however, we invite you to formulate your own.

Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

featured commentators

Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911) She was a Quaker born in Philadelphia. Her life expressed the joy that is found in complete surrender. The secret to a happy life, according to Whitall Smith, is to trust implicitly in the promises of the Bible. Her goal was not to impress the scholar, but to elevate the simple man or woman who longed for a more consecrated way of living. Deeply practical, her writings deal directly with the day-to-day struggles of ordinary people. Hannah Whitall Smith died in 1911. We are indebted to Catherine Jackson who engaged this 19th century text and paraphrased it into a more modern idiom.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) At 14 years of age, after her mother died, her father placed her with the Augustine Sisters for education. She entered the Carmelite convent where she first suffered a bout of sicknesses and interior struggles. Much later, she underwent a “second conversion,” after which she experienced mystic visions and decided to rule out anything from her life that would withdraw her from the Lord. She started a life of deep interior prayer. After establishing the first reformed Carmelite Convent of St. Joseph in Avila, she met St. John of the Cross and together they began reforming the monasteries. She was an excellent and tireless manager, waging a long and successful struggle with other branches of the clergy to have the Discalced Carmelites separated from the older order and eventually founding 17 convents. The reawakening of religious fervor that she brought about in Spain was astonishing. Soon after her death, the movement spread beyond Spain and across Christendom, having a profound effect on the Counter Reformation. E. ALLISON PEERS is the translator of many great works of Spanish verse and mysticism.

featured translation

We are using THE VOICE translation of the Gospel of John for the first portion of the Reader. Spearheaded by Chris Seay and the Ecclesia Bible Society, The Voice is a dynamic translation that brings the biblical narrative to life, representing collaboration among scholars, writers, musicians and other artists. The Voice attempts to capture the Scripture as Script, translated into the genre of screen-play and unfolding in a holistic, beautiful, sensitive and balanced work. In an effort to create a seamless reading experience, we will utilize The Voice translation for the entirety of John's Gospel, (Translation by Chris Seay). Our express gratitude goes to the publisher, Thomas Nelson, Inc., for the generous grant of permission to do so.

March 11, 2011

INHALE

John 1:22-34

They continued to press John, unsatisfied with the lack of information.

Religious Leaders: ²² Then tell us who you are and what you are about because everyone is asking us, especially the Pharisees, and we must prepare an answer.

²³ John replied with the words of Isaiah:

John the Immerser: Listen! I am a voice calling out in the wilderness. Straighten out the road for the Lord. He's on His way.

²⁴⁻²⁵ Then, some priests who were sent by the Pharisees started in on him again.

Religious Leaders: How can you travel the countryside cleansing people for their sins if you are not the Liberator or Elijah or the Prophet?

John the Immerser: ²⁶ Cleansing with water is what I do, but the One whom I speak of, whom we all await, is standing among you and you have no idea who He is. ²⁷ Though He comes after me, I am not even worthy to unlace His sandals.

²⁸ The mystery of Jesus' identity occupied us and will occupy generations of believers for centuries to come. As we journeyed with Him, it gradually became clearer who this man was, where He came from, and how His existence would profoundly affect the rest of human history. The question of "Who is this man?" was not answered overnight.

²⁹ The morning after this conversation as John is going about his business, he sees the Voice, Jesus, coming toward him. In eager astonishment he shouts out:

John the Immerser: Look! This man is more than He seems! He is the Lamb sent from God, the sacrifice to erase the sins of the world! ³⁰ He is the One I have been saying will come after me, who existed long before me and is much greater than I. ³¹ No one here recognized Him—myself included. I came ritually cleansing with water so that He might be revealed to Israel. ³²⁻³³ And, just as the One who sent me told me, I knew who He was the moment I saw the Spirit come down upon Him as a dove and seal itself to Him. Now, He will cleanse with the Holy Spirit. ³⁴ I give my oath that everything I have seen is true. If you don't believe now, keep listening. He is the Voice, the Son of God!

EXHALE

Sanctification—a theological term for the development of Christ-likeness, or Christ's likeness, in the believer's life and character—is *both an instant step of faith and a gradual process of works*. Our part is the step; God's part is the process. By a *step* of faith we enter into the life of Jesus; by a *process* we are made to "grow up into him in all things" (Ephesians 4:15). By a step of faith we put ourselves into the hands of the divine Potter; by a gradual process He makes us into vessels that are suitable for his use.

Hannah Whital Smith (Catherine Jackson, ed.), *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life for Today*, p. 23

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BREATH-PRAYER

Lamb of God—baptize me!

March 12, 2011

INHALE

John 1:35-51

³⁵⁻³⁶ The day after, John saw Him again as he was visiting with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, he announced again:

John the Immerser: Do you see Him? This man is the Lamb of God; He will be God's sacrifice to cleanse our sin.

³⁷ At that moment the two disciples began to follow Jesus, ³⁸⁻³⁹ who turned back to them, saying:

Jesus: What is it that you want?

Two Disciples: We'd like to know where You are staying. Teacher, may we remain at Your side today?

Jesus: Come and see. Follow Me, and we will camp together.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they met Jesus. They came and they saw where He was staying but they got more than they imagined. They remained with Him the rest of the day and followed Him for the rest of their lives. ⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ One of these new disciples, Andrew, rushed to find his brother Simon and tell him they had found the Christ, the Liberating King, the One who will heal the world.

⁴² As Andrew approached with Simon, Jesus looked into him.

Jesus: Your name is Simon, and your father is called John. But from this day forward you will be known as Peter, the rock.

⁴³⁻⁴⁴ The next day Jesus set out to Galilee; and when He came upon Philip, He invited him to join them,

Jesus: Follow Me.

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, came from a town called Bethsaida and he decided to make the journey with Him. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathaniel, a friend, and burst in with excitement:

Philip: We have found the One. Moses wrote about Him in the Law; all the prophets spoke of the day when He would come, and now He is here—His name is Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter, and He comes from Nazareth.

Nathaniel: ⁴⁶ How can anything good come from a place like Nazareth?

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Philip: Come with me. See and hear for yourself.

⁴⁷ As they approached, Jesus saw Nathaniel coming. **Jesus:** Look closely and you will see an Israelite who is a truth-teller.

Nathaniel: ⁴⁸ How would You know this about me? We have never met.

Jesus: I have been watching you before Philip invited you here. Earlier in the day you were enjoying the shade and fruit of the fig tree. I saw you then.

Nathaniel: ⁴⁹ Teacher, I am sorry—forgive me. You are the One—God’s own Son and Israel’s King.

Jesus: ⁵⁰ Nathaniel, if all it takes for you to believe is My telling you I saw you under the fig tree, then what you will see later shall astound you. The miracles you will witness are greater than your imagination can comprehend. ⁵¹ I tell you the truth: before our journey is complete, you will see the heavens standing open while heavenly messengers ascend and descend, swirling around the Son of Man.

EXHALE

The clay has nothing to do but lie passive in the potter’s hands; it did not have to make itself into a vase. The clay’s part and the potter’s part are necessarily *contrasting* but not in the least *contradictory*. The clay is not expected to do the potter’s work, but only to submit to his working.

Equally clear, it seems to me, is the perfect harmony between the two contrasting aspects of sanctification. The only thing to be said about man’s part in this great work is that he must continually surrender himself and continually trust. But when we come to God’s part, it is impossible to describe the many and varied ways in which He accomplishes the work entrusted to Him.

Hannah Whitall Smith (Catherine Jackson, ed.), *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life for Today*, p. 24



BREATH-PRAYER

Lamb of God—give me sight.

March 13, 2011

INHALE

John 2:1-11

¹⁻² Three days after the disciples encountered Jesus for the first time, they were all invited to celebrate a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee together with Mary, the mother of Jesus. ³ While they were celebrating, the wine ran out and Jesus’ mother hurried over to her son.

Continued on next page

Mary: The host stands on the brink of embarrassment; there are many guests and there is no more wine. Jesus: ⁴ Dear woman, is it our problem they miscalculated when buying wine and inviting guests? My time has not arrived.

⁵ But Mary sensed the time was near. So in a way that only a mother can, she turned to the servants.

Mary: Do whatever my son tells you.

⁶ In that area were six massive stone water pots that could each hold 20 to 30 gallons. They were typically used for Jewish purification rites. ⁷ Jesus' instructions were clear:

Jesus: Fill each water pot with water until it's ready to spill over the top, ⁸ then fill a cup and deliver it to the headwaiter.

They did exactly as they were instructed. ⁹ After tasting the water that had become wine, the headwaiter couldn't figure out where such wine came from (even though the servants knew) and he called over the bridegroom in amazement.

Headwaiter: ¹⁰ This wine is delectable. Why would you save the most exquisite fruit of the vine? A host would generally serve the good wine first and, when his inebriated guests don't notice or care, he would serve the inferior wine. You have held back the best for last.

¹¹ Jesus performed this miracle, the first of His signs, in Cana of Galilee. They did not know how this happened, but when the disciples and the servants witnessed this miracle, their faith blossomed.

EXHALE

I believe many a vessel has been damaged; many a potential ministry has been lost, through failure to understand God's part in the process of sanctification. A Christian doesn't reach maturity in a moment' but gradually, by the energizing and transforming power of God's Holy Spirit, he is made to "grow up into [Christ] in all things" (Ephesians 4:15). The only way we can hope to reach this maturity is by yielding ourselves willingly and without reservation to His mighty working. The *first step* in sanctification, however, doesn't consist in maturity of growth but in surrender; and this may be as complete in the newborn Christian as in the veteran believer.

Hannah Whitall Smith (Catherine Jackson, ed.), *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life for Today*, p. 25-26



BREATH-PRAYER

Son of Mary—my water into wine.

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