

KIRSTEN WATSON

with Ami McConnell

Sis, Take a Breath

Encouragement for the Woman
Who's Trying to Live and Love Well
(but Secretly Just Wants to Take a Nap)



PRAISE FOR

Sis, Take a Breath

If you're yearning for a real, honest conversation about how to handle the relentless stresses and demands of life, this book is for you. You'll immediately feel seen and understood, and as you walk through the pages of this book with Kirsten, you'll be changed. This highly practical book is what every woman needs to find the truest version of herself and live her most intentional life for Jesus!

KATY MCCOWN

Wife to retired NFL quarterback Luke McCown; mom of six; president of She Laughs Ministries; and author of *She Smiles without Fear: Proverbs 31 for Every Woman*

Sis, Take a Breath reads like a fun road trip with a friend—one you come out of as close as sisters with Kirsten, who has the gift of being straightforward and loving, honest and wise, vulnerable and strong. You will giggle, laugh, relate, learn, and come to love the journey even more after reading it yourself!

ELISABETH HASSELBECK

Emmy Award-winning cohost of *The View*; *New York Times* bestselling author

Like the older sister we've always wanted, Kirsten helps us feel understood and not alone with her conversational approach. She's intentional with her words and wisdom. This book will make you feel like you're sitting next to a best friend.

ESTHER FLEECE ALLEN

Bestselling author of *No More Faking Fine* and *Your New Name*

I absolutely love Kirsten Watson's energy and sweet spirit. It was a mystery to me how she kept both with seven kids at home and an abundant, busy life. Her amazing candor, humility, and wisdom shine in *Sis, Take a Breath*. A must-read!

REBEKAH LYONS

Bestselling author of *Rhythms of Renewal* and *You Are Free*

I'm in awe of Kirsten—she's not only a super mom, she's a superhero. In *Sis, Take a Breath*, Kirsten invites us into the grind, freeing us from the guilt. If you're isolated and overwhelmed, Kirsten finds strength in the struggle and shows us how you can too.

PAULA FARIS

Founder of CARRY Media; author; podcaster

Favorite roles: wife and mom

After spending time with Kirsten, I always leave feeling encouraged and challenged. *Sis, Take a Breath* is a fantastic extension of her heart as she teaches you how to walk with God and others in a genuine way.

COURTNEY DEFEO

Author of *In This House, We Will Giggle*

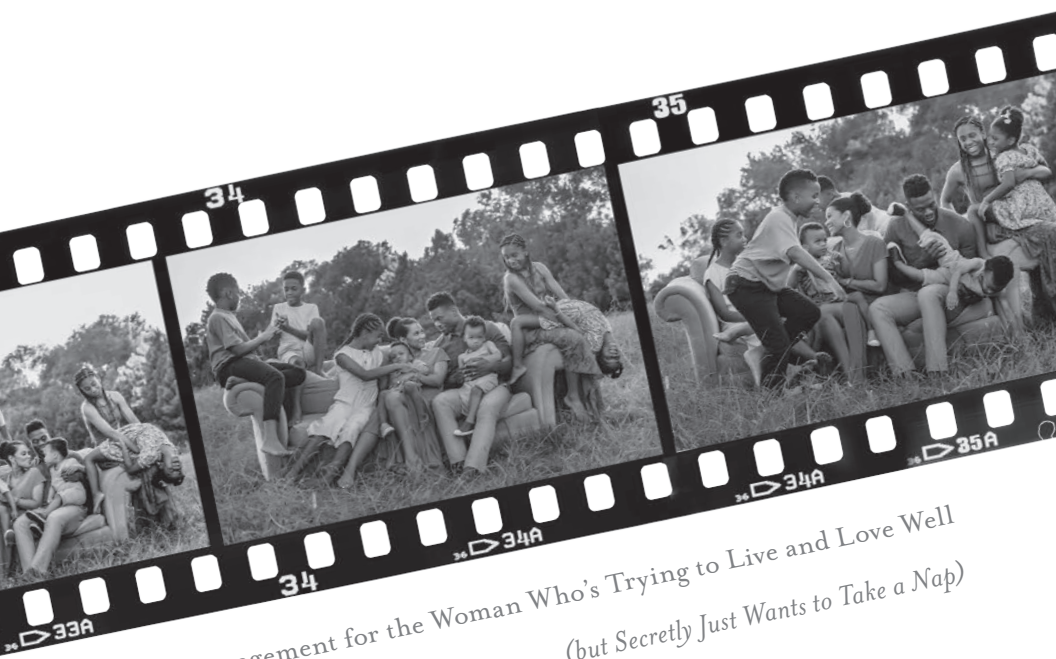
On these pages, Kirsten Watson has effectively married scriptural, spiritual truths with practical, honest applications. Her vulnerability and raw honesty invite the reader to know her, not as the pedestaled, beautiful NFL wife who has it all together and for whom life is perfect, but as a truly surrendered woman of God who is seeking to grow in Christlikeness in the midst of struggles common to all. As the road of life forks, we follow either the socially acceptable path of appearance management, settling for a life of *If it looks like everything is good, it must be and that's all that matters*, or the path of sanctification—the transforming process of becoming like Jesus, which requires honesty, vulnerability, humility, and community. Kirsten personally settles for nothing less than the road less traveled—the one that leads to growth in Christlikeness—and her heart desires that for each of us.

DR. VIRGINIA FRIESEN

Codirector of Home Improvement Ministries (HIMweb.org);
coauthor of *The Marriage App*; author of *Raising a Trailblazer:
Rite-of-Passage Trail Markers for Your Set-Apart Teens*

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Sis, Take a Breath: Encouragement for the Woman Who's Trying to Live and Love Well (but Secretly Just Wants to Take a Nap)

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*To my mom, who always taught me to take a breath
for myself and find what brings me peace.*

*To my people: Grace, Naomi, Isaiah, Judah, Eden, Asher,
and Levi. Thank you for giving me grace to do this book and
for all the “breathing practice” you’ve allowed me to have.*

*To my husband, Benjamin. You fought for my voice
to be heard even when I didn’t think I had anything
to say. You are my biggest cheerleader. I love you,
and I’m so grateful God brought us together.*

*“Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord!”*

(PSALM 150:6)

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FOREWORD

Sis, take a breath. Breathing . . . that's effortless, right? Although the title of this book is a simple statement, it strikes a nerve with most women, giving us a unified call—and permission—to exhale!

We don't usually put much thought into how we breathe—that is, until we're instructed to do so. Breathing has been second nature for us ever since we entered the world as infants. As we continue living, a doctor might ask us to take a deep breath in order to listen to our lungs. We might

also practice concentrated breathing during childbirth to help keep calm during the delivery process. During overwhelming experiences, we are encouraged to slow the pace of our breathing so panic doesn't overtake us.

My own journey of stopping to take a breath was often arduous. My twenty-six-year marriage to the guy some would say helped change the genre of gospel music (Kirk Franklin) began with a blended family when I was twenty-five years old. Our union thrust me into the spotlight and was accompanied by overwhelming expectations from others as well as from myself. My physical and emotional well-being were challenged as I made appearances on red carpets at the Grammys, Stellar Awards, and Dove Awards and as I juggled the demands of caring for my family and marriage. I distinctly remember the guilt I felt when my mind and body would signal that they needed rest, because, after all, I was supposed to have it all together—a false expectation I fed myself.

God has gifted women with so many talents, one of them being multitasking. But we often utilize this particular gift to our own detriment, feeding the unspoken pressure to be perfect. Unfortunately, social media has added to this dysfunctional thinking, perpetuating the need for women to present themselves as busy and

put together at all times. It amplifies the phrase “She’s a boss” when she just might be overwhelmed, falling apart, and internally dying. Although I’ve lived enough life to implement some healthier boundaries for myself, I, too, succumb to this tireless way of thinking at times.

This is why I’m so excited that Kirsten was obedient to God’s call to share her heart of encouragement. We are all sisters in the quest to manage our commitments and prioritize our marriages, our children, and our careers. Most important, my sister, is the need to make sure we are placing ourselves as a priority on our own to-do lists. The Lord’s command to rest is a great gift of love that we must surrender to.

Kirsten’s unique authenticity and transparency will speak to young moms navigating the complexities of home, as well as to more seasoned women who need to be reminded it’s never too late to begin. As you delve into the pages of Kirsten’s heart through this book, I’m confident you will be encouraged to listen to your body, push past the guilt or pressure, and do what should come naturally: breathe.

Tammy Franklin

“HOW DOES SHE DO IT?”

“Seven kids and a pro-athlete husband. How do you do it?”

I get this question a lot. I still haven't gotten used to it. As the wife of Benjamin Watson, a sixteen-year veteran of the NFL, I'm comfortable walking down red carpets on my hot husband's arm as camera lights flash. I've given media interviews about what it's like for millions of football fans to learn I'm pregnant. But that's just a tiny sliver of my life. Maybe 2 percent.

What you don't see is the other 98 percent. The early

mornings when I'm up with bawling twin infants, surrounded by unpacked boxes from yet another cross-country move. Or the times when I've finally found a moment to myself and I hear a voice calling from the bathroom, "Mommy, can you come wipe me?" Or when I'm driving our twelve-passenger van across town for yet another flag football game. For the majority of my time, I'm serving my family behind the scenes, doing rather ordinary and unglamorous tasks.

So it's nice to be called out, to have someone imply that maybe I'm getting something right.

But when the question comes, it's also a little hard to answer. What kind of response could begin to make sense of my life? What sound bite could possibly cover that 98 percent? But perhaps the question is more important than the answer. What I know for sure is that this question comes from a place of deep hunger.

A hunger for insight.

A hunger for encouragement.

A hunger for understanding.

A hunger for truth.

I know because I'm asking it too. When I see someone navigating the challenges and joys of womanhood and motherhood, I wonder, *How does she do it? What makes her tick? What keeps her going?*

I've always wanted a sister. Don't get me wrong—I love my brother, but there's a special bond that comes with sisterhood. Sisters are friends for better or for worse. When one grows, the others don't hold it against her. As things change, they don't judge. Sisters allow you to just be yourself and at the same time cheer you on to go further than you dreamed possible.

Whether you have a sister or not, I hope I can be that for you on these pages. I'm going to be vulnerable, open, and real—and encourage you to do the same.

I believe we're built for community. We're hardwired to learn from each other.

In an increasingly disconnected world, we long to learn from each other's real-life stories. And while an Instagram story may look appealing on the outside, each of us secretly desires genuine connection, the knowledge that we're not alone.

So I've begun to honestly seek the answer to that question: How *do* I do it? As I share my story, I hope you will be able to find yourself on these pages too. Together we can walk this journey to loving and living well.

IN AN
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THE TRUTH ABOUT FAME

Let's start with one essential point: being married to an NFL athlete was never my plan. If anything, I was aiming for business success, not fame. Being famous for my relationship to Benjamin, or any man, never crossed my mind.

I met Benjamin when we were students at the University of Georgia. Like Benjamin, I was a college athlete. I was a softball player, and my teammates thought I should meet the new guy who'd transferred to UGA from Duke. Like me, he was a Christian. But I wasn't interested in dating a football player. Sure, I'd dated athletes when I was in high school, but I'd found that D1 college athletes were mostly next-level egos. I wasn't interested in any of that. Between classes and practice, I didn't have time for foolishness. I was ambitious and driven, and I knew my worth. My goal was to graduate with honors and have a corporate job waiting for me on the other side of that diploma.

BEING
MARRIED
TO AN NFL
ATHLETE WAS
NEVER MY
PLAN.

One activity I made time for was Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) meetings. At one meeting the talk focused on godly dating relationships. I'll never forget when Benjamin raised his hand during the

discussion. “My dad always told me that your relationship is like a triangle,” he said. “You’re on one corner and she’s on the other, with God at the top. The only way to get close is to individually seek God.” I remember thinking, *What’s his name again?*

We got married after Benjamin’s rookie year in the NFL. The average length of an NFL career is three to four years, so I figured Benjamin would play for five years, or maybe ten at most—because, after all, he’s not average! If you’d told me that fifteen years later, we would have moved six times and had seven kids (including twins!) and I’d be a homeschooling, full-time mom, I would have laughed and assured you in no uncertain terms that you had the wrong girl.

Before Benjamin and I got married, we went through premarital counseling with our pastor. He asked how we imagined life once we had kids. Benjamin went first and calmly said he saw me staying home with our kids. My head turned so fast! I was working for Home Depot in California at the time. I had the clothes, the look, the expense account. I was like, “Wait! What? I have a career! I’m going to own my own company!”

Our pastor spoke directly to me, telling me I couldn’t marry the “potential Benjamin”—the guy I hoped he’d be in the future. My *yes* would be to the man he was today

and could potentially be for the rest of our lives. Could I commit to this man if he never changed? Thinking you can change another person is foolish. The only person I can control is myself—not anyone else.

I had been drawn to Benjamin because of his faith, his character, and his priorities. We shared those things on a deep level. In that moment, the Holy Spirit whispered to me, *You think you want to own your own company and you can hire a nanny to raise your kids. Whatever. Say yes to this man, and all will be well.* I did. I knew when the time came for us to have a family, we'd figure it out. Together.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Our first three years of marriage were hardly the “happily ever after” Disney promised. It turned out that marriage was hard work. Looking back, I realize that I was a piece of work. My husband was in the limelight, and I felt like I was competing for recognition. Everything about marriage felt so unfamiliar. We'd dated for years in college, but this was different. We were now living together and trying to do life with each other. Both of us are the oldest in our family, and we're super prideful, convinced we're always right.

That first year was especially tough. I remember one

argument in particular that produced a moment I'll never forget. Benjamin had these signings around the city where people stood in line to get their picture taken with him or get an autograph. Sometimes I'd join him at these events after work to get some time with him. One night I was sitting off to the side, irritated about our most recent tiff, when a woman came up to me.

"You're so lucky to be married to Ben!" she said. "He is so nice!"

I put on the best fake smile and replied, "He is nice."

Since we weren't speaking to each other, *nice* wasn't exactly the word I would have used to describe my husband at that moment. He was stubborn and disciplined and smart and so many things I didn't yet have the words to express. Yes, he was nice. But he sure could make me mad.

I loved Benjamin and wanted to be a good wife to him, but I was mostly trying to prove my worth. My focus was on me and what I could accomplish. This often resulted in butting heads with my new husband, who was working out his own stuff.

We'd been married about seven months when we realized we needed to seek some help. We loved each other; we just wanted to learn to like each other more. So we sought out some wise counsel from Paul and

Virginia Friesen, the couples' Bible study leaders for the Patriots, where Benjamin was playing at the time. (We've continued to do check-ins with them for more than fifteen years now.) We also went to a Christian marriage conference put on by an organization called Pro Athletes Outreach, and we liked it so much we've gone every year since. As we applied what we learned to the everyday moments of our marriage, our relationship became stronger. We now have the privilege of serving as directors of the event (called the Increase Conference).

By year three, we had put in the work—every day. During those years, God changed my heart in a lot of ways. Benjamin's and my love had grown, and now we were on the same page. We started discussing and praying about starting our family. We wanted to try for four kids.

Much to our joy, we got pregnant pretty quickly. We were giddy—it felt like we were sharing this wonderful secret. We were falling in love all over again.

We knew becoming parents would change us both forever, so we wanted to enjoy every moment before things took a radical shift. Together we planned a trip—a babymoon—and went out of the country.

The tiny island we stayed on was stunning. Our room overlooked the ocean, and the beach was beautiful. It

would have been glorious . . . except I was so sick! The hormones from the pregnancy left me alternately ravenous and nauseated.

Benjamin knows how much I love to eat, so one night he made reservations at a romantic spot overlooking the ocean. We got all dressed up, and for once my nausea dissipated. Everything on the menu sounded good to me. The meal I ordered tasted great. Success! Then, as we headed back to our room, I broke into a run for the bathroom. Sure enough, I was sick again. *This is miserable, I thought. What a waste of money! We're in this enchanting place, and I'm spending all my time in the bathroom!*

As I lay on the floor, sick of being sick, the door opened. Quietly this six-foot-three, 250-pound man came in and lay down on the cold tile next to me. He didn't say anything; he just held me. In the middle of feeling so bad, I was enveloped in peace.

I'm not alone, I thought. He's in this with me. When I was at my weakest point, Benjamin valued me. I sensed the Holy Spirit saying to me, *Kirsten, you chose your man wisely.*

FAMOUS FOR WHAT?

Benjamin pretty much stayed under the radar for his first decade in the NFL. He made a lot of great plays

and had a good reputation, but any notoriety he got was for the work he did in the community. As his wife, I'd pray for him to prosper. I prayed for the Lord to use us as a couple. I'd say, Lord, let him catch the winning touchdown. Or, Lord, let him find favor with this new team.

And Benjamin did prosper. He had an amazing sixteen years in the NFL (which is an exceptionally long career) with four teams: the New England Patriots, the Cleveland Browns, the New Orleans Saints, and the Baltimore Ravens. He was even nominated by the Saints and the Ravens for the Walter Payton Man of the Year Award. Still, he wasn't in the spotlight during most of his football career. National fame came into our lives in an unexpected way.

He wrote a Facebook post.

For as long as I've known Benjamin, he's been a writer and a deep thinker. One night we were at Target with our four kids, all four years and younger. We'd just left a community event and stopped to help a couple on the side of the road. After we helped them get a hotel room for a couple of nights, we stopped at Target to get a few items for them. I stayed in the car with the kids while Benjamin went inside.

The not-guilty verdict in the Ferguson case had been

announced the day before, which had us in a strange headspace. I'd seen Benjamin typing his thoughts on the notes app of his phone, but that was pretty typical.

While Benjamin was in the store, VeggieTales kept the kids entertained in the car. Suddenly my phone started blowing up with texts from people who had seen Benjamin's Facebook post. This was a surprise to me because neither of us used social media much at the time. I thought Benjamin had pretty much forgotten it was even out there. His phone had powered off, so he had no clue that his post was going viral—shared almost half a million times—and was receiving national media attention. People appreciated the way he approached the topic of race with clarity and compassion and how he shared the gospel.

Suddenly everything in our world shifted.

I'd been praying that Benjamin's work in football would gain him a platform to share Jesus. With this viral post, I felt like God was saying, *Sit back, Kirsten. I've got this.* Benjamin's integrity and his extraordinary discipline on and off the field set the stage for him to share his faith in a totally unexpected way. God created a "for such a time as this" moment, ushering us into a new season as a family.

When I think of this, I'm reminded of Ephesians

3:20, which promises that God is able to do “immeasurably more” than all we ask or imagine. Isn’t it strange how our most ambitious thoughts are tiny compared to God’s?

SOMETHING TO SAY

When I worked as an intern at Chick-fil-A, I met my good friend Lauren. She invited me to join her at a Christian women’s conference, where the speaker talked about lies the enemy uses against us. His goal? To keep us from the glory we’re given in Christ to share with the world. Each of us has at least one lie that’s specific to our story, and it typically comes to us when we’re young.

I was happy to be at the conference, but the idea of having to discover and confront a lie I believed about myself didn’t appeal to me. Still, not one to back down from hard things, I did the work of confronting my own lie that weekend. This turned out to be a game changer. Truly, it was a *life* changer.

When it’s quiet, the lie I hear the enemy whisper to me is this: *You have nothing to say.*

Maybe you can relate.

Maybe the enemy whispers, *You’re not special. What you feel doesn’t matter. Your opinion is worthless.*

They're lies. Every one of them.

I'm ashamed to admit I believed this falsehood about myself. I knew my worth. I knew my intelligence. My parents raised me in the faith, with a strong moral compass. Discipline came naturally to me, and I had lots of ambition. Most of all, I was determined to live out my faith in a big way. Even so, speaking up was hard for me. Somehow I doubted the value of my own words.

So here I am, almost twenty years later. I've learned that the right words at the right time can be intense. Powerful. Life giving. As Scripture says, words have the power of life and death. Of course, some words are just noise. But words that are lovingly, respectfully shared about what we think, feel, and know? Words that are shared to speak truth and lift one another up? Words that are spoken to bring glory to God? Those words are worth sharing.

So yes, I have something to say. Something worth sharing. It starts with this: sister, take a breath.

I have a heart for my sisters who struggle, like I do, in the day-to-day. My deep desire is to invite you in to come and breathe with me.

My heart longs to speak to you. To encourage you, challenge you, and help you grow. I'm sharing from a place of love, truth, and realness. I won't take our

time together for granted. Come as you are, with no judgment.

This isn't a how-to book; it's an act of sisterhood. I'll share "how I do life" as a starting place for our conversation. You'll probably laugh with me—and maybe cry a little too. Just know these two things: I will tell you the truth, and I won't shame you.

My hope is that, by the time you close this book, you'll feel emboldened and energized. And that you, too, will invite other sisters to breathe with you.

SISTERS

Every morning before my feet hit the ground, I whisper two prayers: "God, give me my manna for the day. Nothing more and nothing less. And Lord, all I have is five loaves and two fish. That's all I got. Please multiply them and let there be some left over. Amen."

In writing this book, I aim to share my experiences and insights about learning to breathe. I've homed in on topics that come up again and again in my intimate circle, on our podcast, and in my teaching ministry. I pray that as I share some life hacks and insights, you will be amazed at what God does with our loaves and fish.

Just a word about my use here of the word *sister*. I'm a believer and follower of Jesus Christ. That faith

animates pretty much everything I do, so it's bound to come up in the chapters ahead. But whether you share that faith as my sister in Christ or are just curious about me and my life, please know that I welcome you into this space as a child of God, wherever you are.

There's a Latin phrase I love: *imago Dei*. It means "made in the image of God." You are *imago Dei*. You're God's own child, and you reflect His glory.

It's my privilege to share this journey with you, sister.

SISTERS ALLOW YOU TO

be yourself

AND CHEER YOU ON

TO GO FURTHER THAN YOU

DREAMED POSSIBLE.

BREATHING LESSONS

Truth Talk

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

J E S U S

I'd finally made it back to the gym after baby number five. With all respect to all my sisters with ripped abs, I just don't enjoy working out. My favorite part of a workout is when I'm done. That salty pine smell and the clanging of metal weights invigorates some people, but me? The sight and smell of it at 5 a.m. had me wanting to crawl back in bed.

But Baby Eden was finally sleeping through the night, and getting out of the house felt like a small escape.

Maybe at the gym I could actually get something done. Maybe I'd sweat a little, log some miles, focus for a bit. Because in my day-to-day, with all the mouths to feed, diapers to change, laundry to wash, and schoolwork to oversee, I felt like my wheels were constantly spinning. That morning I wanted a win.

We'd recently moved to Baltimore for Benjamin to play with the Ravens. We still didn't know many people, so I'd gone online to find a gym and eventually booked time with a trainer. When I walked in, she greeted me with a smile and an outstretched hand. She was a tiny thing who appeared really strong—a look I was going for. This was starting off in the right direction.

My research had revealed that she had a PhD, so I figured she knew what I needed to do to get the baby weight off. The way she moved told me she was probably a dancer. I wondered if we'd be a good match.

After some weights and cardio, we finished the workout and she asked if I'd be open to incorporating some Pilates into our regimen. I was hesitant. I'd tried Pilates before and didn't like it—or maybe it didn't like me. So I asked why she thought this would be beneficial.

“Your core is weak,” she told me. “Although you can do the movements, you're using the wrong muscles, and you aren't using your breath correctly.”

Wait. What? Did I need to remind this PhD who I was?

She wasn't looking at a first-timer. I'd played high school and college athletics, I'd pushed out five babies, and I'd worked out my entire adult life. And did I mention I'd pushed out five babies?

My trainer pointed out that a good rule of thumb is that the body should exhale during exertion. "For example," she said, "on a pull-up, exhale while pulling the body toward the bar, then inhale on the way back down. Repeat."

Duh, I thought, I knew that . . .

As I held back an eye roll, I managed to laugh. "My breathing might be a little off, but I'm still here!" I said. "I must have been doing something right for the past thirty-six years, right?"

The truth was, I was insulted. I knew my body was a temple. I took good care of myself. And being married to a pro athlete, I'd spent countless hours preparing well-balanced, nutritious meals. As a mom, I cared for the health of my kids. And on top of that, there I was in the gym, with a weeks-old infant, putting forth my best effort. Didn't she know who she was dealing with?

BREATH IS BASIC

I'm so glad I held my tongue. Breath, I nearly said, is super basic. I've watched all my babies take their first breath. It's miraculous, sure, but it happens naturally, with no lessons. Nobody has to be taught how to breathe.

But then I started to wonder. Maybe she had a point. Exertion requires energy, and a deep hit of oxygen is probably needed most right after exertion. As a mom of a newborn, I thought it sounded pretty good to replenish my energy. By the end of that first grueling session with my trainer, I realized she was 100 percent right. Breathing might come naturally. But it isn't as simple as I'd thought.

BREATHING
MIGHT COME
NATURALLY.
BUT IT ISN'T
AS SIMPLE AS
WE THINK.

Back home, I started to notice my breathing throughout the day. I'd catch myself taking short breaths. Why was that? Short, shallow breaths might keep me alive, but they weren't sufficient for giving me the energy I needed. My body required real, deep breaths.

Sometimes I'd even notice I was *holding* my breath, especially in times of stress, like when my toddler bumped into something. I'd hold my breath, waiting to

see whether he'd cry or carry on. Or when Benjamin got hit on the field. Or when I realized we'd be moving—again.

I was breathing. But I was depriving myself.

What my trainer had said was true, and until I accepted this truth, I'd be stuck.

I started repeating it throughout the day: *Exhale during the hard part; inhale to renew.* I said it when I was driving in traffic. When my kids argued. When my plans were interrupted.

That focus calmed me, restored me. It was nothing short of a breakthrough. As it turns out, breath is literally the stuff of life. And I'd been neglecting mine.

BREATH IS
LITERALLY THE
STUFF OF LIFE.
AND I'D BEEN
NEGLECTING
MINE.

BREATH = TRUTH

Remember how God formed the first human being in the book of Genesis?

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

GENESIS 2:7

Did you catch that? God breathed *life* into Adam.

That same spirit—literally God’s own breath—animates our lives. Without breath, we are just bags of bones and dust. Literally.

But something else happens in the next chapter of Genesis. Lies enter the world. Specifically, lies about God spoken by the “father of lies” (John 8:44).

Truth is a lot like breath. Jesus called himself “truth” in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (NKJV). And when we read the Gospels, we find Jesus speaking the truth over and over again. Even when it was inconvenient. Even when it was unpopular. Even when it cost him greatly. Even when the cost of speaking truth was His own life.

In Jesus, there is no deceit. We might be deceived, but He never is. I want to be open to hearing and receiving the truth. I almost shut out the trainer when she was trying to share reality with me. I’m so glad I let it in. Our need for truth is as deep as our need for oxygen.

“YOU ASKED FOR IT, MOM”

Accepting truth is sometimes easier said than done.

Recently I asked my family to share some hard truths with me. As a parent, I correct my kids a lot. The Bible

instructs me to do that—it's my job to train them and teach them. Their dad and I correct them because we love them. We regularly teach them that we aren't perfect, and we don't expect perfection; we simply want what's best for them, just as our Father in heaven wants what's best for us.

So the other day I sat down with the kids and asked each child to tell me one behavior of mine that's hard to deal with—something I can change or improve. At first they thought this was a joke. Or maybe a trick. Wouldn't they get in trouble if they offered something critical? I assured them this was an open invitation—a chance to *respectfully* speak the truth in love.

“Bring it on,” I said. “You won't get in trouble. I really want to hear the truth.”

Their responses were enlightening. The older girls wanted more quality time with me, while the other responses varied from not liking that I make them eat cereal for breakfast (I cook a full breakfast six days a week, so child, please. That ain't changing.) to my youngest feeling like I was mad at her when she called me to wipe her bottom in the bathroom. It was a good time of connecting for all of us. I left that conversation feeling known and loved—and committed to loving my people better.

Even if we've been living with a lie, we don't have to stay in that place. We can breathe through the hard part.

Exhale and inhale.

Is the truth easy? No. But I'll take an imperfectly said truth over a lie 100 percent of the time.

ULTIMATE TRUTH

Compassionate truth originates with God. To find and know truth, I spend time in the Word. Benjamin and I read a passage of Scripture on our own and then text our notes about it to each other daily. I try to do this before everyone gets up because otherwise life happens and people need me for . . . basically everything! Benjamin and I do Bible studies with the kids as well.

I honestly get so excited about digging into Scripture. It's something I look forward to—unlike going to the gym! The beautiful thing about it is, the more time I spend in God's Word, the more grounded I am in God's will for me. God's will is always good and perfect—and true.

I'm breathing that in—and breathing it in deep!

Your Turn to Take a Breath

Notice your breath right now. Try filling your lungs all the way to your lower belly. Hold it for four seconds, then release all the air till there's none left. Do this at least four times—maybe more, if you have time. How does it feel to focus on this simple, life-giving activity?



OUR NEED FOR TRUTH

is as deep as

OUR NEED FOR OXYGEN.