

**WIND
John 3:1-17**

1. Anyone here ever a teacher or professor that had the gift of taking something fairly simple—and making it **very** complicated? Or have you ever read a university textbook—and had to re-read a paragraph 326 times to understand it? God shows up here on this planet—the one who thought up quantum physics, micro-biology, chemistry and teenagers—and teaches eternal truth using everyday things. Things like seeds, rocks, wine, water, perfume—things even kids can understand.. Jesus apparently wasn't trying to sound intelligent or profound—He just wanted **everyone** to have life. -One of the images Jesus used was **wind**. How many of you know what **wind** is? Everyone, right? Which is why He picked it! We've experienced gentle breezes—and wind we thought was going to turn us inside out!
 - a. Years ago, I was traveling with a band out in the mid-western US—somewhere in Kansas or Nebraska, when we drove through an abandoned town that was **very** creepy. This town had obviously been hit hard by a tornado—and it was mostly made up of buildings that were either blown down—or blown out.

-In the mix of buildings was an old movie theatre with pieces missing—and all of it's windows blown out. Spray painted on the plywood that boarded up the windows was the message: **Now Showing: GONE WITH THE WIND!**
 - b. Anyone know what wind is? Simply put, it's **air in motion**—caused uneven heating of the earth's surface. Warm air always rises—and then the cool air moves in to replace it—and that air movement, in addition to the earth's rotation, makes the wind blow. I got that from **Weather Wiz Kid's!** That's about my speed when it comes to science!
 - c. Every single day, the news tells us **something** about the wind; about a tornado in Oklahoma; about a hurricane on a Florida coast. And if nothing else—it blows in a change of weather from Illinois—or Manitoba.
 - d. Wind is increasingly becoming a popular source of power for generating—as irony would have it—**hydro-electric**. For years, civilizations have harnessed the wind to grind grain, pump water and move ships. Now we're realizing that wind, if properly used, may provide the cleanest, cheapest source of electricity—one that never runs out of fuel! How cool would it be if during the day we drove electric cars that were charged up over night using wind-power! Like it or not, the wind is at work right now—even as we speak—spreading dandelion seeds **all over your lawn!**

-Well, Jesus uses this very familiar illustration to describe the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. And it's a profound analogy—how you can't actually **see** the wind, but it's extremely powerful and affects everything we do. And today, I want to talk about the Spirit as well. Not simply for the sake of having more information about Him—but in knowing how to live in and access His power!

2. This image Jesus used came up in a late-night conversation he had with a guy named Nicodemus.

This is **not** your ordinary run-of-the-mill person; He's a well-known, well respected leader and teacher. Kinda the Chuck Swindoll of Israel. In our culture, he would have a downtown office and multiple Ph.Ds. after his name. Let's read what happens:

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' *The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit.*" (John 3:1-8 NLT)

- a. We aren't told why Nicodemus waited until after dark to see Jesus—maybe for some privacy and uninterrupted time. And, unlike other Pharisees, he's very respectful of Jesus and what He's teaching and doing. Well, Jesus cuts right past all the small talk—and tells Nick that if he ever wants to see the Kingdom of God—and be part of it—he needs to be reborn from above.

-Now, that must've totally shocked Nick—because he's not only a good, religious person—he **teaches** the Bible! And Jesus says, "You need a brand new start. You need a **new** birth—if you ever want to taste the power of this eternal Kingdom God is initiating!" He could've just as easily said, "Nice work climbing the ladder, Nick—but it's leaning against the **wrong building!**"

- c. Now, Nicodemus seems to be clueless as to what Jesus is asking of him. "I'm **way** bigger than my Mom—and she's getting pretty old—so how do I...well, you know—go back into her womb...?" Maybe he was saying, "The cement of my life has been set for a **long** time—I don't think I can change!"

-But Jesus doesn't back down. He **restates** his case—and says that a person can't be a part of God's Kingdom without being born naturally—of water (a reference to human birth)—**and** the Spirit. Humans can give birth to humans—they do it all the time; but only the Spirit can initiate a Spiritual birth.

- d. Now, this is where things get **very** interesting. Jesus has mentioned the Spirit several times up to this point—and how His power transforms people so thoroughly—it's like being reborn. The root word for the Holy Spirit is **pneuma**—the same root for the word *breath*—or *wind*. And **wind** is the analogy Jesus uses to describe the powerful, but invisible way the Spirit works. Can you see the connection between **breath** and **life**?

- It wouldn't at all surprise me if maybe a breeze came up about then—and they could feel it on their faces and hear it whispering through the olive trees. I can imagine Jesus saying something like, “Feel that breeze? **The wind blows wherever it wants.**” The wind is invisible, powerful, untamable and unstoppable. Wind is what keeps **everything** moving on this planet—cools what needs cooled, waters what needs watered—and dries what needs to be dried. And Jesus says, “Just like the wind moves invisibly—changing everything **outside**, the Spirit, the **breath of God** moves invisibly changing everything on the **inside!**”

3. We don't have time today to track through every encounter or teaching of Jesus on the Spirit—but I do want to lay a foundation. We first encounter the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry when He is baptized by John. It's there that you see the Father, Jesus, Son of God and the Spirit all together. Let me read the account written by Matthew, a disciple of Jesus:

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” (Matthew 3:16-17 NLT)

-The descending of the Holy Spirit on Jesus is the hinge-point—the starting point of Jesus' ministry. It was **after** that that He began healing, forgiving, casting out demons and teaching. And that's precisely why Jesus told his disciples after His resurrection to wait for the Spirit before trying to do **any** form of ministry.

- a. On his last night with his disciples, Jesus talked very specifically about the next phase of ministry; that He would be gone—and that they would carry on in the power of the same Spirit—the **Counselor; Advocate**. In fact, He said something to them about the work of the Spirit that I find amazing.

But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment...When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, ‘The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.’ (John 16:7-8, 13-15 NLT)

-How could it be to **their** advantage that He's going away? Well, it's apparently because that will launch the Spirit's work of bringing about repentance in the hearts of people. He is the Spirit of Truth—and will launch the message of the Apostles worldwide—and the writing of the Bible.

- b. On the Day of Pentecost—the birthday of the church—that's precisely what happened. It's when the Spirit comes on Jesus' disciples on the Day of

Pentecost that Jesus' analogy of wind takes on new meaning. Let's read what it says:

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. (Acts 2:1-6 NLT)

-The Spirit did exactly what Jesus said He would. He gave **them** the power and courage to proclaim the message of repentance and forgiveness and new birth—and convinced those who listened that they needed to respond!

-And when the people—3000 of them—responded by repenting of their sins and being baptized, it became clear that this Spirit would **always** be at work in the world. He would prepare the hearts of people to respond to the message of grace—and he would give ordinary people the power and courage to those willing to be used to speak God's message.

- c. Jesus made a very interesting statement when He had some of the religious leaders telling him that he had gotten his power to heal and do miracles from Satan.

So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven—except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come. (Matthew 12:31-32 NLT)

-Why is it that someone can damn Jesus, lie about Him, curse Him—and be forgiven—but if they do that to the Spirit—they won't be? It's because, as we read earlier, the Spirit of God is the One who works in the interior of people's lives to convict them of sin and convince them of truth. To reject Him—to call the Spirit of God **evil**—is to reject the very One who speaks to your soul. To cut Him off is like cutting off your own oxygen supply. Anyone know what happens when you can't breath? You die. You can't **live** without breathing!

- d. Rocco Morabito, a famous photographer, died a few weeks ago. In 1968 he won the Pulitzer prize for this photo. **[PHOTO]** He was driving home, when a 26 year old lineman was hit with a massive jolt of electricity and knocked lifeless. The person working next to him knew CPR. The photo is called, **The Kiss of Life**. And because of it, this lineman lived!

-At the very beginning of our human story, the Bible says that God created us out of clay—and He gave us the **Kiss of life**. And we've carried that **kiss of**

life on ever since—from one generation to another. But ever since we rebelled and death was introduced to the human race, the only way to bring the gift of eternal life—is the transforming **kiss of life** from the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said,

Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' (John 3:7-8 NLT)

4. Interesting, isn't it, how Jesus uses this concept of wind; breath; Spirit. When a baby is born, it gasps for air.

When we are born **anew**—we gasp for the **Breath of God**—the Spirit! That's what Nicodemus is struggling to understand. Listen to how Jesus finishes his conversation.

No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:13-17 NLT)

- a. When he refers to the **bronze snake on a pole**, Jesus is referring to the point in Israel's history where God brought judgment on the Israelites because of their rebellion. Thousands of poisonous snakes infested their camp—and people were dropping dead all over the place. God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake, lift it up on a pole—and everyone who looked and believed would live. Jesus said, I will be hung on a pole as a symbol of God's judgment on sin—just like that! **Whoever believes will be saved.**
- b. We've all been bitten by the old snake from that original Garden. Jesus is our only hope. And our ongoing **trust** in what God has done through Jesus as an act of love brings the Spirit's kiss of **life**. Jesus, lying in the tomb, cold and decaying after his crucifixion, was the first to receive this kiss of life—through the Holy Spirit, the **breath** of God. Romans says this:

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. (Romans 8:11 NLT)

-Just so we're clear; our parents give us physical life, but the **only** one who can give us eternal life is the Spirit. When we place our trust in Jesus—the Spirit gives us the kiss of life.

5. Can you see the powerful imagery through the Bible on the Spirit, the wind, breathing, the breath of life? In the OT, the word for the Spirit of God is **Ruach**—Breath. Jesus used this imagery of the **wind**, the **breath**, the **Spirit** of God—and I'd like to tease out this imagery a little.

-The Spirit—**pneuma—breath** of God is always moving everywhere—just like the wind. He’s working in places—and in people—you would never expect Him to work in. And He’s at work in me—and in you—**right this very second**. Sometimes He works in us to comfort us, to cool us down when we’re angry and frustrated—or to sooth us when we’re wrecked. But sometimes He works more like the **Wind**—doing **major** re-arrangement at the core of our lives—because to just stay the same means death!

-Now the deal is that **we’d** like to be able to see Him, nail him down, figure Him up, speed Him up, slow Him down. We want to **control** Him. But Jesus says here, “Nope! Can’t do that. Can’t track Him down. Can’t figure out where He’s going. But you **can** see where He’s at work—just like you can tell which way the wind is going by looking at the trees. Just **cooperate!**”

6. Now, here’s the ongoing question I think some of us ask: **How do I cooperate? How to I access this amazing power for my life?** One saying of Jesus that I have found **so** comforting over the years is this:

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13 TNIV)

-God is so glad to give His Spirit to people like you and me...**if** we’ll just **ask!**

I’d like to close this morning by using three different images. The first is a **window**. Anyone here ever been in a house that’s been boarded up—and all closed up for a long, long time? How many of you felt good about breathing the air? It’s not stuff you want to fill your lungs with, it is?

-In fact, sometimes when archaeologists break into a space that’s been closed up for a long time—like a chamber in a pyramid, breathing the air can potentially do damage.

- a. The solution is...? **Open the windows and doors!** Let the wind blow through and fill the space with fresh air. Several years ago, our family went to Hawaii and stayed in a small condo owned by a friend. **Cheap** Hawaii—if you can imagine that. We opened the door—and hit a wall of hot, smelly air. The saving feature is that the condo was about 60 feet from the ocean—with a constant breeze.

-Now, would it make sense to you if someone lived in there—and never opened the windows or doors or blinds? Only if the person was a germ-phobe—or **had something to hide!**

- b. Here’s the question. When the Spirit offers to come into this stuffy compartment called our soul—to breath life and joy and hope and forgiveness into us—**why wouldn’t we throw open the windows and doors?** I simply want to ask—have you **ever** invited Him to do that? Truth is, sometimes down in the core of our lives we have secrets—darkness that we don’t want him messing with. And so we **live**, breathing this dark, stale musty air—getting more and more sick by the day.

-As we learned last week, Jesus once came to a **very** sick and warped and air-locked church in Laodicea—and offered them life. Health. Himself. He told them,

Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.
(Revelation 3:20 NLT)

-That's the offer. The handle to the door is on the **inside**. Jesus can only bring the life of the Spirit to people who will open the doors and windows of their lives. Have you ever done that? Would you?

7. Something else I found out about wind—and I found it out through running. Running **into** the wind—**bucking** the wind—is **exhausting**. Running with the wind at your back is **so** much easier. Now, my problem is that I round a mile long course near our house—and it's roughly in the shape of a circle. That means that about half the time I'm bucking the wind—and, thank God, half the time I have the wind at my back. -The question for you and me is—will we stop fighting the Spirit—bucking what He's trying to do
Kicking, screaming, running in the other direction—and just go with Him; let **Him** carry us where He is calling us to be?

-Paul, an early church leader spent the first part of his life fighting Jesus—until God knocked him off his horse one day and said, "Why are you persecuting me? Why are you fighting against what I'm trying to do in your life?" Later on, in speaking about the Spirit, Paul says that we basically have two choices; the **way of the Spirit**—or the **way of the flesh**—the way our natural, rebellious desires push us in. And He said that the **way of the flesh is death**; but the **way of the Spirit is LIFE!** Friends, we **are** spiritual beings—and without the Spirit, without the breath of God—we die. Instead of goggles—how about a **sail!**

-Where is the Spirit moving in your—and are you cooperating—or are you in a fight to the death? Let's be clear—the Spirit won't die—**you** will! Choose the way of the Spirit! Choose **life!**

8. One more analogy. **Breathing**. When I was little, I had a problem breathing—when I needed to. When I got hurt, I would cry so hard I couldn't catch my breath—and I'd pass out. It scared my Mom half to death. So she asked the doctor what to do about it. He told her to tell me to remember to take a deep breath before crying—and if I forgot to give me a smack on the butt to remind me. Of course, she felt terrible about it because I was such a **wonderful** child!
-Well, my Mom's gone now. So when I cry and forget to take a deep breath—Lori fills in and hits me. Gladly
- a. We don't have to be without air very long before we're in **deep** trouble. And our body craves it.
Have you ever tried holding your breath under water? You come up thinking you've just set a new world record of 23 minutes—and it was actually **43**

seconds! If we're deprived of air for even 5 minutes, it can cause irreversible brain damage—and even death.

- b. We **desperately** need to breathe—and we **desperately** need the Holy Spirit—the **Breath** of God. We need the life **only** He can give. We need His power. We need His wisdom. We need the kind of love only He can bring. And the question is—**How do we access His power in our daily battle with fear, doubt, weakness, pride and selfishness?** And my best answer is—**breathing.**

-Our first thought is, “Of course—I need to just **breathe in** the **Breath** of God. But breathing isn't just about breathing in, is it? There are **two** steps in breathing. And the first step is not **inhaling**. It's **exhaling**. Exhaling rids our body of CO2 and other wastes—and makes room to breathe in the oxygen our body needs.

- c. I see spiritual exhaling as repenting of sin, confessing our need and our weakness—and in doing so, making space for God in those places of our lives where we need Him most. John, an early church leader writes these words:

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. (1 John 1:8-10 NLT)

-How many of you **know** what sin is—and when you've sinned? Here's the deal. We **know** when we've crossed the line. We **know** when we've violated our own moral code. Remember, the Spirit of God is not an “it” or a “gas” or a “fluid.” He's a **Person**. He's full of truth. He convicts us of selfish and destructive things. The question is really not **knowing** sin—it's **admitting**, “I've sinned!”—to God and others. To **confess** means to **say the same thing as God.**

-But **we don't want to!** Our tendency, instead of humbling ourselves, is to play these little games. To blame, excuse, re-direct attention. “Who me?” We'd **rather** damn others and call God a liar than own failure. Why? Because it's embarrassing. We feel weak—and small. But if we want to **breathe**—there's no alternative.

- d. But confessing and cleaning house is **not where it ends**. Therapists can make you feel better and rehab can help you kick habits. Lots of religions and groups can help you **stop doing stuff**. The difference in what Jesus lived and taught and died for is that once the **house** has been swept clean—it needs to be occupied by a **different** Guest; the **Spirit**—the **Breath of God**. If not, Jesus said the old guests come back and do even **more** damage.

-That's why Paul says,

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. (Ephesians 5:18 NLT)

This is literally speaking of an *ongoing filling of the Spirit, the Breath* of God—just as regular as breathing. And *He's* where the power comes from!

9. A number of years ago, I was out running one Saturday—doing my usual course. On this particular day, I was struggling—crying, really, on the interior of my soul. I was struggling with all these feelings of personal failure; struggling with stupid things I'd said and done. I can't remember it all—except this deep, deep groaning.

-With all this sadness weighing me down, I became aware of my breathing. Gasping, really. And I remembered an old song I'd heard years before called, *Breathing Out and Breathing In*. I couldn't remember the words—but I knew it was about breathing out failure—and breathing in the Spirit.

-That day I thought, "What if along with all the CO2 and other junk I were to exhale this sadness and junk from my heart?" So consciously began to think of the junk I wanted to breathe *out* of my life by confession, and how I wanted to breathe in the presence and power of God's Spirit to fill and transform that empty space and fill it with the power, purity and grace of God. What happened next was transforming--and I want to pass on a little of it to you this morning, kind of in the same way I prayed it. Maybe it will help you.

- a. God, I feel so powerless, so small today--so I breathe out my weakness, and I breathe in the amazing power of your Spirit you've promised.
- b. I breathe out my inadequacy, my inability to change myself--and I breathe in the **complete** adequacy of your Spirit, your presence to transform me.
- c. I breathe out my secret desires for things that will contaminate my soul and destroy my life--and, Lord, I breathe in your purity.
- d. Lord, I breathe out my hardness of heart, my tendency to choose not to look at the brokenness and pain of this world, and I breathe in the tenderness and compassion of your Holy Spirit.
- e. I breathe out my impatience, my unwillingness to wait, my tendency to snap and growl at my children--and I breathe in the gentleness and patience of Your Spirit.
- f. God, I breathe out my confusion, my frustration, the turmoil I feel when because I don't know what to do, and I breathe in your wisdom--the immense wisdom you have in knowing **all** things--even the future.
- g. I breathe out my restlessness, anxiety and worry, my preoccupation with the problems and issues facing me, and I breathe in the same Peace Jesus

promised to his disciples, and to **anyone** who would come to Him and find rest for their souls.

- h. Lord, I breathe out my selfishness--my innate bent to look out for #1, **ME**; I choose to die to myself--and breathe in the servanthood of the Spirit.
- i. Jesus, I confess and own up to my greed, my preoccupation with managing my money and stuff, and I breathe in the generosity of the Spirit.
- j. God, I breathe out my critical spirit, my grudge-holding, my bitterness and I choose to remember that I have been forgiven for the awful, selfish, cruel things I have done to you and others--and I breathe in the love, forgiveness and gentleness of the Spirit.
- k. Lord, Healer--I breathe out my tiredness, my emotional and physical exhaustion and the jadedness and dullness it brings, and I breathe in the Spirit's restoring power and endless energy.
- l. God of all truth, I breathe out my lies, the half-truths I tell myself, my temptation to shade the truth I tell to others to protect their opinion of me, and I breathe in the freedom of the Spirit's courage and truth-telling.
- m. I breathe out all my cowardliness, all my pre-occupation with what others think, and I breathe in the courage of Jesus who sweat blood and willingly laid himself on the cross to be nailed to it.
- n. I breathe out my hurt, my pain, my wounded feelings, and I breathe in the Spirit's grace for me, His healing of my heart.
- o. I breathe out my pride and arrogance and determination to get my own way, and I breathe in the humility of Jesus.
- p. I breathe out my sadness and heaviness of heart, and I breathe in the Spirit's joy and hope--the thrill of being loved and cherished by the God of this universe.

-And that day, as I prayed—as I breathed all this junk out of my life to make room for the Spirit—and specifically invited Him in to that aching space in the core of my life—I was changed. I will **never** forget that moment.

-You can't have life without the Breath of God—the Spirit of God. You **need** Him! Would you make room in your heart—and **invite** Him in to fill and possess **all** of you—with **All** of Him?