

## **BREATHE**

**Kara Lassen Oliver**

### **STUFF YOU WILL NEED**

- straws
- paper lunch sacks
- paper
- pens
- copies of **devozine** meditations “Breathe“ and “Pilates” (available at the end of this session)
- Bibles
- large sheets of paper
- markers
- Invite a yoga or pilates instructor to lead 20–30 minutes of exercise; or have available a yoga or pilates DVD or video.

### **CHECKING IN**

Before you meet together, take a few minutes to be still and to pray. Pray for each person in your small group.

Open the session with the exercise below, and then talk about the questions that follow.

When everyone arrives, ask people to gather in a circle. Explain that the group is going to experiment with several different types of breathing. After each one, group members are to jot down a brief description of a situation or feeling that came to mind as they were breathing.

Provide each person with a straw, a paper lunch sack, a sheet of paper, and a pen. Then ask people to breathe in each of the following ways, making their notes after each one:

- Breathe slowly in and out through your nose only. Take 3–5 deep breaths.
- Put the straw to your mouth and try to breathe in and out through your mouth only. Take 3–5 deep breaths.
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Take 3–5 deep breaths.
- Hold your breath for 10 seconds. (*Keep time for the group by counting aloud from 10 to 1.*)
- Place a lunch sack over your mouth and nose and breathe. Take 3–5 deep breaths.

**What different feelings came to mind as you tried each of the ways of breathing?**

**What different circumstances or experiences came to mind?**

**What is the connection between God and breathing?**

## **EXPLORING THE WORD**

The meditations in **devozine** this week trace a beautiful progression in our understanding of breath from creation to the modern fitness craze, including yoga and pilates.

Ask people to form five groups (one or two people may do the work of a group). Assign to each group one of the following **devozine** meditations (available at end of session) or scripture passages: “Breathe,” “Pilates,” Genesis 2:7, Job 34:14–15, and John 20:19–23.

Ask each group to complete its assigned reading and to name the power, capacity, or benefits of breath. Then bring the groups back together. Invite volunteers to report what their group discovered about the power and benefits of breath. List their responses on a large sheet of paper.

Invite people to discuss these questions:

**How do the power and benefits of breath also apply to prayer?**

**In what ways are breathing and praying the same? How are they different?**

## **SHARING IN PRAYER**

If you have invited a local yoga or pilates instructor to your session, ask him or her to lead your group in 20–30 minutes of exercise. If you have chosen to use a yoga or pilates DVD or video, invite group members to participate in one session.

As people relax at the end of the exercise, invite them to pray together The Jesus Prayer as you offer these instructions:

*Breathe in, saying, “**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God.**”*

*Breathe out, saying, “**Have mercy on us.**”*

Ask them to continue praying this breath prayer for 3–5 minutes. Then conclude the prayer by saying, “*Amen.*”

## **TAKING IT FURTHER**

This week, practice breathing. Choose a simple common occurrence—hearing a car horn, seeing the color blue—as a reminder to breathe deeply.

## **BREATHE**

**Rachel Wong**

The Lord replied, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest."  
Exodus 33:14 (NIV)

I can't believe it.  
I won't.  
I won't let these tears fall;  
but the more I think  
about my day,  
the harder it gets.  
Breathe.  
I try.  
I'm rushing home,  
keys ready,  
tears streaming  
like rivers.  
it starts to rain.  
Breathe.  
The wind catches me in the face,  
enveloping me all at once,  
like a sigh,  
wrapping me in a cloud of calm;  
and I truly breathe  
for the first time all day.

**JUST BREATHE:** I'm trying to be more conscious of my breathing, not only in yoga class but also in my everyday life. When I make time to focus on God as I breathe, I experience a different form of breathing. God breathes into my life, my bad attitude, my daily stresses and gives me peace and joy. I have a new outlook on my day because I know that God is in control.

## PILATES

**Robin Bradley Hansel**

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

Ephesians 3:16 (NIV)

Not long ago, I taught myself to breathe again. Unlike traditional yoga, in which you relax as you exhale to facilitate a greater stretch, Pilates focuses on exhalation as the contraction of the deep, core abdominal muscle structure. The hardest part of the exercise occurs in the act of breathing out rather than in.

This was a difficult concept for me to learn. Suddenly, breathing out meant the opposite of relaxing, stretching, and releasing. It was all about strengthening, centering, and drawing inward. I felt a frustrating sense of mental disconnect and physical weakness.

Yet each morning I practiced Pilates, and my exercise time gradually became my time alone with God. Silent centering and intent focusing on strengthening my body from within helped me learn to ask for Jesus' help when the exercises were too difficult. Remembering that the Hebrew word for *breath* is also the word for *spirit*, I began to focus on this image as I worked out.

My practice of Pilates provided me with a new, exhilarating connection to the Holy Spirit. As I learned to let go and ask for help, I grew stronger in my body and my faith.

**MAKE THE CONNECTION:** Write about the ways you have experienced the connection between body and spirit. How has physical exercise strengthened your inner being?