



O<sub>2</sub>

Study Guide

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Study Guide for Richard Dahlstrom's

## **O<sub>2</sub>: Breathing New Life into Faith**

Questions by Nancy Eckardt

Your physical body needs oxygen in order to survive. Inhale, exhale...one leads naturally to the other. Inhale too long, and you feel as if your lungs will burst. Exhale too long and you get light-headed.

The same rhythm is essential in the life of faith. You inhale life-giving strength from God through things like prayer, study, solitude, and silence. You exhale generosity, hospitality, and service to the poor. If you try to do one without the other, you won't last very long.

This fresh perspective on the classic disciplines of the faith will empower you to process the oxygen of the Spirit. Discover how you can develop a balanced spirituality that reflects the life of Jesus and keeps your faith growing strong.

## O2 Memory Verses

### Chapter 1 Exhaling

#### **Luke 4:18-19**

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

### Chapter 2 Inhaling

#### **Romans 12:1-2**

1 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

### Chapter 3 Journey

#### **Hebrews 11:8**

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

### Chapter 4 God’s Kingdom Story

#### **Matthew 5:13-14**

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”

### Chapter 5 Service

#### **Philippians 2:3-4**

3 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

## Chapters 6/7 Hospitality/Living Generously

### **Romans 12:10-13**

10 “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

## Chapter 8 Creation

### **Psalms 19:1-2**

1 “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.”

## Chapter 9 Solitude

### **Psalms 73:25-26**

25 “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

## Chapter 10 Prayer

### **John 15:5**

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

## Chapter 11 Problems with the Bible

### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

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

## Chapter 12 Healthy Devotional Times

### **Psalms 119:10-11**

10 “I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

Chapters 13/14 Silence/Sabbath Rest

**Hebrews 4:9-11**

9 “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

Chapter 15 Celebration

**2 Corinthians 5:17**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Chapters 16/17 Developing Breathing Practice/Seeing it all Together

**Philippians 3:12-14**

12 “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

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# Breathless

1. Is there a time when you have considered leaving the church?  
If so, describe the circumstances.
2. What role does the church play in the formation of your worldview?
3. From this introduction, what can you say Richard hopes us to gain from this book?
4. Can you describe an experience when you desperately needed to inhale?  
Exhale?
5. Which is most difficult for you, inhaling or exhaling?  
How is this expressed in your life?

## Part One – The Case for Breathing

### Chapter 1 – Waiting to Exhale

1. How does your Christian faith inform the perspectives you hold regarding care of creation, treatment of the marginalized, and other ethical issues?
2. Would you be counted as one whose faith is disconnected from one's daily choices? How does your faith impact your relationships, your choices?
3. What impact should your faith have?
4. Do you have a passion to do something “good” that doesn't seem to be supported by the church?
5. What initially drew you to Christ? How has your understanding of faith changed? What has influenced these changes?

Chapter 1 - Waiting to Exhale (continued)

6. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). Where do you see yourself in this scripture?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How do we contribute to the movement of history toward perfect reflection of the glory of Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Can you think of an area in your life where you have adapted to culture in a way that is contrary to the way of Christ? If so, describe the situation.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. On page 26, Richard asks “What if the starting point of our message was simply an invitation to step into the work God is doing, to follow Jesus by embodying a hopeful new world order? What would this mean?” How does this differ from your own understanding of coming to the Christian faith?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Think of a time when you were invited to be a part of something bigger than yourself. What was your reaction?

## Chapter 2 – Spiritual Asthma: The Need for Inhaling

1. On page 32, Richard points out our tendency to use others as a measuring stick for our own behaviors surrounding silence, solitude, Sabbath, or prayer. How does your assessment of others play into your self-assessment?
2. On pages 32–33, Richard writes a paraphrase of Psalm 73. If you were paraphrasing this psalm, what examples would you use to suggest that the inhaling disciplines are of no value?
3. Can you name “authors” who have written scripts on your life, for good or for bad? Describe some of the scripts they wrote. How do the inhaling disciplines currently act as a context for developing your worldview?
4. On page 39, Richard lists reasons why the practice of the inhaling disciplines may not be a part of our lives. Which one(s) do you hear yourself using?
5. On page 44, which of the listed disciplines seem to be the most difficult for you? Which are the easiest for you?

## Part Two – The Exhaling Disciplines

### Chapter 3 – Journey

1. When have you moved out of your comfort zone? What compelled you? How was the experience different than what you had imagined?
2. On page 51, Richard writes, “Every encounter with God in the Bible was an invitation to leave the present behind and move into a different future.” Where might God be inviting you? How are you responding to his invitation?
3. How do you hear and recognize Christ’s voice? What other voices may give you false comfort or direction?
4. Can you describe a situation when you were moving in the direction you thought Christ was calling you, and the way got more difficult? How did you respond?



## Chapter 4 – Artisans of Hope: Stepping into God's Kingdom Story

1. On page 64 – 65, Richard writes, “A world where God rules will be radically different from the one we presently occupy. It will be a world where oppression has ended, light has overcome darkness, and the poor finally get some good news.” How do you respond to this? Where do you see your place in this?
2. What are some examples you can think of that show an increased rule of God in the world?
3. How is Christianity viewed by your unbelieving friends and acquaintances? How do you know what their views are?



## Chapter 5 - Service

1. How have negative experiences with Christians impacted you in the past? How do they impact you now?
2. As a Christian, describe an experience you have had with a non-believer.
3. Read the 2nd paragraph on page 81. If you had the self-knowledge that Jesus had, how would it affect your actions?
4. Have you observed or experienced acts of service outside cultural norms, and if so, what was the reaction?
5. How do you respond to the evil which has occurred over the years in the name of Christ?
6. How would “playing to lose” alter your life?



## Chapter 6 - Hospitality

1. How would you define hospitality?
2. Describe your experiences with hospitality.
3. How do electronics shape your life with others? Would you say they have improved your relationships? Why or why not?
4. How has your financial situation influenced your life? What do you do with others to stay connected with them?



## Chapter 7 – Living Generously

1. How would you describe your relationship with money?
2. How would our daily news be different if it was not filtered through the economic lens?
3. How do you respond to Adam Smith's view regarding how we make economic decisions (top of page 109)?
4. Name five things you now own that you could get rid of and not miss. What decision-making process went into acquiring them in the first place?
5. Describe a time in your life when you overextended. What did it cost to recover?



## Part Three – The Inhaling Disciplines

### Chapter 8 – Inhaling Creation

1. How has creation contributed to your faith?
2. Think of a profound experience you have had with God in creation. What did you take away from the experience?
3. What are some barriers to seeing God revealed in nature for you?
4. Can you think of an experience you have had with nature that caused you to respond with humility? What other emotions were at work as you experienced this?
5. How would you describe your relationship to creation?
6. How could you “get up, get outside” more this next month?

## Chapter 9 - Solitude

1. Describe a past memory that may trigger deep emotion for you.
2. What ways do you find yourself avoiding being alone?
3. Read the boxed text on page 142. Can you describe a time when you saw loneliness as a wound? As a gift?
4. Have you ever felt a deep sense of aloneness? If so, describe the experience. How did it shape you?



## Chapter 10 – The Intimacy Invitation: Prayer

1. What are your assumptions about prayer? Which of the assumptions named in this chapter resonate with you and how?
2. How do you avoid intimacy?
3. Share an experience of intimacy when you felt particularly close to God or others?
4. Can you think of something you have asked of God that He granted? What was your response? Has there been something you asked for that He did not grant? If so, how did you respond?



## Chapter 11 – Word Problems: Assessing Our Problems with the Bible

1. After reading Prothero's findings on page 173, how do you respond?
2. Why would a bestseller be unread?  
Why do you think people are buying but not reading?
3. Would you say the reading of Scripture has a role in living lives of purity? Why or why not? How important is this?
4. Read the parable on pages 175 and 176. Where do you find yourself in this story?



## Chapter 12 – The Word that Works: Recovering a Healthy Practice of Bible Reading

1. How do you see the metanarrative of God in your own story?
2. Can you think of a time when you have “shown up” and been surprised by what you’ve heard from God?
3. Share an example of when an encounter with Scripture challenged you to change your ways, your attitude, and/or your choices.
4. Describe an area in which you have seen Christ shape you. How did you see that shaping?
5. Where are you in the process of daily Bible reading? What works? What doesn’t work?

## Chapter 13 – Silence

1. Can you describe an experience with silence and how it affected you?
2. How would you describe your comfort level with silence?
3. What are your hindrances to silence?
4. How might silence lead you to a different way?

## Chapter 14 – Sabbath Rest

1. What directs the choices you make regarding commitments, level and type of activity?
2. In what area(s) of your life do you feel to be on your own, independent of God and others?
3. Identify a way that you might be working against your own rhythm?
4. How do you spend Sabbath time? What have you gained through a time of Sabbath?
5. How do you incorporate rest into your life? What benefits do you find?
6. How easy is it for you to say no? How do you make decisions regarding your time?

## Part Four - Integration

### Chapter 15 – Celebration

1. Can you remember the last time you celebrated? What were you celebrating?
2. Can you remember a time of celebration as a child? What made it memorable?
3. On page 224, Richard writes, “statistics indicate the relationship between happiness and material well-being is far less direct than we’d like to think.” How do you respond to this? Why might this be true?
4. Toward the bottom of page 228, Richard writes about the woman who came and anointed Jesus’ feet. What did she understand that perhaps the others around her didn’t? Do you “get it”?
5. Can you think of a time when something has curtailed your means of blessing others?



## Chapter 16 - Rule of Life: Developing a Breathing Practice

1. Describe an area in your life that needs to change.
2. In the last paragraph on page 238, Richard describes Christ's vision. Where do you see yourself in Christ's vision?
3. How would you describe your Rule of Life?  
What values direct your choices?
4. Have you ever had a soul friend? Describe the qualities you appreciated about the relationship.
5. Think of a time when you saw Jesus in one of his followers. What did you see?

## Chapter 16 - Rule of Life (continued)

6. On page 243, Richard quotes Sophie Scholl: “Belief is no simple thing. It demands constant strain and struggle. It has to be mastered over and over again. And to be a true Christian: that is the most difficult thing of all, because we are never, ever able to truly follow Christ - except perhaps through death.” How do you see this quote playing out in your experience? In your practices and relationships?
  
7. Share a time when you experienced failure. How did it shape your view of the future?
  
8. How has the value you put on the inhaling and exhaling disciplines changed over the years? What has influenced that change?
  
9. What are your thoughts on the use of spiritual disciplines? What are your feelings about them?
  
10. In what area could you challenge yourself over the next few months?





Prayer Requests:

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## Prayer Requests:



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