

Breathe

Less stuff, more life

Update 12: Spring 2009

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www.ibreathe.org.uk

Stand Up and Be Counted

Could you take the Promise of Life?

What holds us back from living differently? Each year, Lent gives us the perfect illustration. We don't know what to give up; and, if we do, it's hard to see it through on our own. We are held back by lack of inspiration, lack of commitment and lack of community.

Nearly four years into the Breathe Journey, we're asking the same questions. What can give us clear inspiration on simpler living? How can we follow through on this? And how can we support each other along the way? These questions have led us to develop a *Promise of Life*.



What is the *Promise of Life*?

The *Promise of Life* is what you could call an aspirational covenant. Instead of generally intending to 'be nicer' or 'live more simply', it fleshes out what this might look like. Instead of being just an email in an inbox, a website to visit or a Direct Debit leaving our bank account, the *Promise of Life* is a commitment you can make for a 12 month period. And instead of doing it all on our own, it's something we can do together.

The *Promise of Life* isn't a law, it's a hope. It isn't a destination you're expected to have reached, but a path you choose to travel. It's about trusting the God 'who richly

provides us with everything for our enjoyment'. It's about determining to be 'openhanded' with others. And, in pursuing a life of giving, 'to take hold of the life that is truly life' (see 1 Timothy 6:17–19 and Deuteronomy 15:7–8).

When we make a promise like this, we break out of our isolation as individual consumers, we break the consumer pattern of fickle allegiance, and we find that the ultimate *Promise of Life* comes from God, whose ways we're walking in.

How Does it Work?

On the morning of 25th April, everyone at the Breathe Conference will be given the opportunity to step up to the challenge. If you're not able to be there, you can still join us in it. We'll try this for a year, and along the way we'll tell stories. You could try it with your family, friends, small group or church. How about it?

Promise of Life

Because life is a gift, we live thankfully
Savour what we have
Pray for what we need.
No longer hurried, distracted, or worried,
We'll walk through each moment with God.

Because everything is a gift, we live with open hands,
Tread lightly on the earth
Share freely our homes and our things.
No longer restlessly chasing identity,
We'll be known by our love not our logos.

Because giving is a gift we live generously,
Give ourselves deeply to family and community,
Give joyfully to those in need.
No longer caught in the consumer dream
We'll invest in the kingdom of love.

*More details about the conference are available at www.ibreathe.org.uk. This will be the last Breathe Update in this format – watch this space after Easter for how we can follow up the **Promise of Life** together.*

Simplicity and the City

Bruce Wilson hails from South Africa. He's been living in London for the best part of five years with his wife Karin-Marie. He works as an architect in the City of London in a practice of 45 people, mainly on educational building projects. In his spare time, he loves spending time with his wife Karin-Marie, running marathons, and volunteering for Tearfund. More recently he's been using Breathe's *Promise of Life* as a way of reflecting on the life he aspires to live.



What issues do you face as a Christian at work?

My difficulty is that if Jesus is LORD, then my turnover is not lord. Yet, I dedicate 70% of my waking life to my turnover. I know the Gospel has no space for the profit motive, so I am constantly challenged to find real value in my work, not what profit I gain for the company and salary I earn. Another key issue is that as a white collar worker, I seem entirely defined by what I do – so if someone asks 'who are you?' I say 'I am an architect' not 'I am Bruce' or 'I am a son of my Father.' How quickly I forget where my true identity lies.

In what ways have you tried to engage with this struggle and what have you changed because of it?

Most importantly for me, I take lunch breaks to pray. I use the Methodist covenant prayer (and now Breathe's *Promise of Life*) as a Rule. I have also sought after work projects that are more people-focused, and after a couple of years this is paying off. I'm now getting increasing work in projects that

will make a significant contribution to people's quality of life. I am hoping to move to the point when I am free enough of the city and its trappings to be prepared to lose all of it – then I will be truly transformational.

Give us some examples of how you've tried to live generously and simply whilst working in the city?

Here's a radical statement: I am happy with my wage. By City standards my salary is very ordinary; globally, however, I'm in the top 3% of earners. This shift in perspective has given me the freedom to give money away and not worry greatly about the recession. On the home front, my wife and I have done three things that have given us a lot of peace: we've ditched the TV, we intentionally eat breakfast together, and we've got a moratorium on shopping (our flat is small).

What do you think Jesus thinks of your working as an architect?

I think Jesus delights in everything we do that is life-giving, and weeps over the things we do that aren't. Architecture is certainly a combination of these two things. Christ's call on my life is, as in all things, to seek first His Kingdom.

What advice would you give to someone in the city who struggles with the tension between work and faith?

As Richard Rohr says, we desperately need to stop competing and comparing. I am slowly learning that the Gospel cannot be viewed through a commercial lens. The more time we spend with the poor, the more we will find Christ and get some of the sense of perspective that is profoundly lacking in the City. We certainly need to be as gentle as doves and shrewd as snakes to navigate the business world as Christians; equally, we need to stay in it – this world needs us.

Breathe Conference 2009

Sat 25th April, 10am-3pm (coffee from 9:30)
Crèche from 10am-12:30 for under 3s

St Paul's Hammersmith, West London
Queen Caroline Street, W6 9PJ
(opposite Hammersmith Tube station)

Speaker: Pete Greig (24/7 Prayer), discussion, worship, sharing stories about generosity, community, and counter-cultural spirituality.

£5, unwaged free. (bring lunch or buy locally)
Register on the door, or email editor@ibreathe.org.uk

www.ibreathe.org.uk

Breathe, a Christian network for simpler living, in partnership with:



tearfund

formation

developing spectacular ordinary lives



Choose the Lyrics to your Life

Lily Allen – *The Fear*

The Fear hit number one in the UK singles chart in February. While some pop websites have called the lyrics 'ironic', fashion magazines have pointed out that Lily once allegedly spent £100,000 in one shopping trip. Lily herself says, 'It's about being a little disenchanted with the way the world is: namely our obsession with celebrity culture, money, consumerism, fake tan, that kind of thing...'

*I want to be rich, and I want lots of money
I don't care about clever, I don't care about funny
I want loads of clothes, and ****loads of diamonds
I heard people die while they're trying to find them*

*And I'll take my clothes off and it will be shameless
'Cuz everyone knows that's how you get famous
I'll look at the sun and I'll look in the mirror
I'm on the right track, yeah, I'm on to a winner*

*I don't know what's right and what's real anymore
And I don't know how I'm meant to feel anymore
And when do you think it will all become clear?
'Cuz I'm being taken over by The Fear*

*Life's about film stars, and less about mothers
it's all about fast cars, and cussing each other
But it doesn't matter, 'cuz I'm packing plastic
And that's what makes my life so ****king fantastic*

*And I am a weapon of massive consumption
And it's not my fault, it's how I'm programmed to function
I'll look at the sun, and I'll look in the mirror
I'm on the right track, yeah, we're on to a winner*

*Forget about guns, and forget ammunition
Cause I'm killing them all on my own little mission
Now I'm not a saint, but I'm not a sinner
And everything's cool as long as I'm getting thinner*

U2 – *Breathe*

How about this for a contrast? U2's latest Album *No Line on The Horizon* was released in March. It includes this track, named *Breathe* (thanks lads!).

*16 of June, nine O five, door bell rings
Man at the door says if I want to stay alive a bit longer
There's a few things I need you to know. Three
Coming from a long line of travelling sales people on my
mother's side
I wasn't gonna buy just anyone's cockatoo
So why would I invite a complete stranger into my home
Would you?*

*These days are better than that
These days are better than that*

*Every day I die again, and again I'm reborn
Every day I have to find the courage
To walk out into the street
With arms out
Got a love you can't defeat
Neither down or out
There's nothing you have that I need
I can breathe
Breathe now*

*16th of June, Chinese stocks are going up
And I'm coming down with a new Asian virus
Ju Ju man, Ju Ju man
Doc says you're fine, or dying
Please*

*Nine O nine, St John Divine, on the line, my pulse is fine
But I'm running down the road like loose electricity
While the band in my head plays a striptease*

*The roar that lies on the other side of silence
The forest fire that is fear so deny it
Walk out into the street
Sing your heart out
The people we meet
Will not be drowned out
There's nothing you have that I need
I can breathe
Breathe now*

*We are people borne of sound
The songs are in our eyes
Gonna wear them like a crown*

*Walk out, into the sunburst street
Sing your heart out
Sing my heart out
I've found grace inside a sound
I found grace, it's all that I found
And I can breathe
Breathe now*

What is Breathe?

- A space to think about how we handle money, time and possessions in a Christian way
- Non-judgemental, realistic and simple to be part of
- We want to:
 - Appreciate** life more fully
 - Refuse** the consumer dream
 - Connect** with others
 - Choose** a more generous lifestyle

***Breathe** is a Christian network for simpler living. It represents orthodox Christians of all kinds and is overseen by Friends: Jeremy Williams, Phil Whittall, Chris Webster, Rev Mark Powley and Holly Ellson.*

Snow Sabbath

West London is not known for its close community feel. But when the South East had the worst (best?) snow for twenty years, the roads ground to a halt, many people couldn't get to work, and something wonderful unfolded across the capital. The Guardian called it London's Day of Innocence. Here three of the staff at St Paul's Hammersmith, venue of this year's Breathe Conference, tell the story of that day.

Perry May Ward

There are 24 houses in our cul de sac, but there isn't much community. There's a family we're on smiling terms with, but that's about it. On that Monday, though, we went out into the street and all the children were playing together.

I got a text from a friend, just saying: snowball fight at Gironde St 11am. There were four of us, and we played in the street like never before. I haven't laughed like that in years. Local kids joined in, too. It was unforgettable.

Ash Meaney

Some students made an igloo in the middle of our road. When people drove their cars up the road, instead of beeping and getting angry, they got out to have a look and take pictures. Round the corner, the hospital staff were throwing snowballs at passers by.



Keir Shreeves

It was great, but also sad that it takes something like that to get people talking and make us stop. It was a kind of enforced Sabbath. For once you had an excuse to speak to people on the street, to watch out for each other and to celebrate creation. It was like a Céilidh!

Food for thought

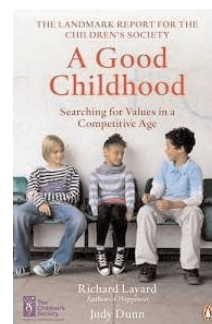
"There are different kinds of freedom, and the kind that is most precious you will not hear much talked about in the great outside world of winning and achieving and displaying. The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways. That is real freedom. The alternative is unconsciousness, the default setting, the "rat race" – the constant gnawing sense of having had and lost some infinite thing."

David Foster Wallace

Taken from web.me.com/echosounder/site/welcome.html

Good Childhood Report

The Good Childhood report was published by The Children's Society on 5th February. It concluded that: 'Most of the obstacles children face today are linked to the belief among adults that the prime duty of the individual is to make the most of their own life, rather than contribute to the good of others... Excessive individualism is causing a range of problems for children including: high family break-up, teenage unkindness, commercial pressures towards premature sexualisation, unprincipled advertising, too much competition in education and acceptance of income inequality.'



If you want to discuss this further, why not come along to the Creating Good Childhoods Breathing Space on 25th April.

Join Breathe

To stay in touch with Breathe or join us on the Breathe journey send a blank email to in@ibreathe.org.uk. Or contact us at Breathe, c/o St Paul's Church, Hammersmith W6 9PJ