

The Atmosphere of Praise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:1, 2, 9–12, 20–26; Ps. 104:29; Dan. 5:23; Luke 15:7; Rev. 21:4.*

Memory Text: “The Lord God formed the 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, NIV*).

A few years ago, a family of five went to a cabin in the mountains for a short Christmas vacation. One evening they shut all the windows tight in order to keep cold air from coming in, and they turned the furnace on full blast in order to keep the cabin warm through the bitter night.

The only problem? The whole family died because the furnace had used up all the oxygen in the air!

As most of us know, we can live a few weeks without food, a few days without water, but only a few minutes without air.

Air, clear pure air, is vital to our existence. Impure, polluted air is the cause of many acute and chronic disease conditions often attributed to other causes. Every year millions of people, especially children, suffer terribly from breathing polluted air.

With oxygen going to every organ of our body, it is no wonder we need air as fresh and as clean as possible.

The good news about fresh air is that not only is it free, in most cases people can have access to it.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 22.*

To view and/or download a Hope Channel program on this week's lesson, visit www.lifesbeat.org.

The Creation

Read Genesis 1:1, 2. From these texts, how would you describe this primeval earth?

The earth at that point was obscure; there was darkness, a void, formlessness. However difficult for us to understand exactly what was present or what was happening, it is clear that there was no created life at this time on the earth. Yet, even amid this primeval chaos, God's presence is made manifest. This is revealed in the words, "and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." We can, for now, only speculate on what that means.

According to the texts, over the next few days, God began the process of preparing the earth for life. Genesis 1:3–10 shows us part of this process. Notice the recurrence of separation and division. God separates light from darkness, God separates the waters of the firmament, God separates the land from water. All the way through, there are these major divisions of these prime elements. After these initial divisions have been completed, God then brings forth the first life on earth.

Read Genesis 1:9–12 and Genesis 1:20–26. What does God create next? What conditions were needed in order for this to happen; that is, what was needed in order for this part of creation to be able to survive?

God had a great master plan for His creation. It called for many types of living things—things that would require constant support to survive. As the Creation story unfolds, it is clear that God planned for many of His created beings to live on dry land. It also is clear that He knew that these creatures would need oxygen in some form for sustaining life. We see this plan realized on day two of Creation, with the separation of the waters and the creation of the atmosphere. The space between the waters above and below was thus prepared to receive the rest of the creation that was to follow.

The Creation account teaches that the Creation was a very orderly, planned, and meticulously executed event. It leaves no room for chance of any kind. What does that tell us about the character and power of God? How could this realization about God help you in whatever struggles you might be going through now?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Acts 17:25*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Compare and contrast the importance of pure, fresh air with the importance of spiritually breathing the atmosphere of heaven.

Feel: Sense the honor and responsibility of breathing God's breath of life moment by moment.

Do: Breathe deeply, not only of God's good air but of heaven's fresh breezes that come from communion with Him.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Heavenly Air

A The vitality imparted to the blood that comes from breathing fresh air is equivalent to the vitality imparted to our spiritual health through breathing the atmosphere of heaven. What benefits can you list for both these activities? What are the steps to attaining these benefits?

B Which factors in our environment produce fresh air and which jeopardize our air supply?

II. Feel: God's Breath in Us

A Every breath we take can be traced to the breath God breathed into Adam's nostrils. What relationship is awakened in our hearts toward God when we acknowledge our indebtedness to Him for every breath?

B How does God continue His daily life support to us, and how can we make sure we benefit from His gifts?

III. Do: Breathe Deeply

A God supplies the atmosphere both on this earth and in heaven. What must we do to benefit from His provisions?

B What daily activities do we need to practice in order to reap those same benefits?

▶ **Summary:** Breathing deeply of fresh air and partaking daily of the atmosphere of heaven are essential to our physical, mental, and spiritual health.

The Necessity of Air

In the creation of the animals that populated the earth, one thing they shared in common was the need for oxygen to sustain life. Air is a combination of gases in which oxygen forms about 21 percent of the total product. (Our entire atmosphere weighs about five thousand trillion tons!) Other component gases include nitrogen, argon, helium, hydrogen, and small amounts of trace gases. The amount of oxygen in the air is the ideal percentage for the breathing requirements of the creatures God made. It is another testimony to the carefulness and precision that God used in creating us.

What was the unique way God used air in the creation of Adam? *Gen. 2:7*. How does this account differ from the account of how God created the other creatures? What does this tell us about ourselves, about our uniqueness in the eyes of God?

Air obviously was important in the creation of all animals, in that all these animals need air to exist. Yet, the creation of humanity was different. God “breathed” into Adam the “breath” of life. Air, life-giving air, was certainly a component of this miraculous act of Creation, for right after God breathed this breath into him, Adam became a living soul. When Adam was first formed, with all his organs, with all his flesh, with all the physical components needed for life, he still was lifeless, kind of a *corpse*. One more thing was needed, and that was life itself, which only God, the Life-Giver, could provide.

God did just that, and we ourselves partake every day of this gift of life. Indeed, the gift of life, carried with that breath, has been shared by everyone in the human race since then. Through our first father, Adam, the breath of God has been passed on to all of us. And through the act of breathing, we keep that original breath of life alive in us. Each breath we take should remind us of that original breath breathed into Adam!

Take a deep breath. Unless you have respiratory problems, it seems so simple, so natural, so easy, and yet it is really a miracle from God—a legacy passed on to us from Eden. How thankful are you for the gift of life? Why wait until your life is threatened before you stop taking it for granted?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Spiritually and physically we need a constant supply of fresh air to live.

Just for Teachers: Anyone who nearly has drowned, or who has had the breath knocked out of him or her in a fall or sports collision, or who has escaped from the smoke of a burning building can testify to the agony of living without oxygen and the relief of breathing again. Science confirms that the body needs a constant supply of air. This should not surprise biblical students, for Adam was just a husk of dust until God breathed into him life-giving air (*Gen. 2:7*). What is true physically is even truer spiritually. There is no spiritual life without the ever-present Spirit. In Hebrew and Aramaic the word translated as “spirit,” “wind,” and “breath” is *rûach*. It is the vital element without which life cannot exist. Our current study focuses on the necessity, both spiritually and physically, of pure atmosphere.

Opening Activity: Have a contest to see who can hold their breath the longest. Give members a chance to share personal stories about struggling to breathe or about living in areas in which smog and air quality were persistent hazards.

Discussion: What spiritual lessons can these stories about the need for a constant supply of fresh air tell us about our need for a constant supply of God’s Spirit?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Because it takes no longer than about five minutes to convince even the healthiest athlete that there is no life without air, one might question the necessity of studying the subject for a week. It would be wonderful if it took only five minutes to convince others about its spiritual counterpart! Not only should our study lead us to assess carefully our duty to breathe the best air physically and spiritually, it also should lead us to a deeper appreciation for the God who made life possible in the first place.

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The Air Over Our Heads

“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (*Acts 17:25, NKJV*).

Look up the following texts: Daniel 5:23, Psalms 104:29, 146:4. What do they tell us about the link between life and breath?

The air has many protective qualities. On a global level, the air and its suspended water vapor protect the earth and its people from solar radiation and from the cold vacuum of outer space. The air recycles water and many chemicals to moderate the climate. Within this atmospheric envelope, life is found over a very wide range of altitudes and temperatures. Some life-forms require a high level of light and warmth. Other things require only a little light and very little heat to survive. Some animals require large amounts of oxygen, others only a scant amount.

On a more personal level, high-quality fresh air is the best suited to transfer oxygen to the blood through the lungs and to carry off the carbon dioxide that the body produces. This high-quality air is most available in natural environments, where trees, plants, and flowing waters are found. The plants absorb the carbon dioxide in exchange for renewing the oxygen content of the air.

We recall that God placed Adam and Eve in a garden setting surrounded by plants of all types and watered by a river that flowed through the Garden and became the headwater for the great rivers of the antediluvian earth.

The message for us, then, is that in order to obtain optimal health, fresh air is crucial. We should seek to do all that we can in order to breathe the cleanest and freshest air possible.

A person carries about two quarts of oxygen in the blood, lungs, and body tissues at any given time. Every cell in our bodies requires air in order to work, and when that supply is cut off, life cannot exist. Indeed, brain cells deprived of oxygen for more than four minutes begin to die, and the person will, as well.

How often do you take advantage of fresh air? What changes can you make that would give you more access to it? Sometimes it would take nothing more than opening a window.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. The Necessity of Air** (*Review Genesis 2:7 with the class.*)

We may approach this subject for the purpose of encouraging healthy breathing habits; but let us first remember that God's action, physically and spiritually, is required to provide the air we breathe. This acknowledgment awakens a deep appreciation for His love and care and encourages us whenever we are tempted to doubt Him.


Astronomer Hugh Ross outlines several atmospherically related conditions that must be fine-tuned in order for life to exist, such as, "23. oxygen to nitrogen ratio in atmosphere—if *larger*: advanced life functions would proceed too quickly; if *smaller*: advanced life functions would proceed too slowly. 24. carbon dioxide level in atmosphere—if *greater*: runaway greenhouse effect would develop; if *less*: plants would be unable to maintain efficient photo synthesis. . . . 28. oxygen quantity in atmosphere—if *greater*: plants and hydrocarbons would burn up too easily; if *less*: advanced animals would have too little to breathe."—*The Creator and the Cosmos* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1995), p. 141.

God fine-tuned the atmosphere so that we can breathe. How could we ever doubt Him! How could we take lightly our duty to maintain pure air for all and employ personal healthy breathing habits?

Consider This: In the light of God's gracious care in providing a clean atmosphere for us, what is our responsibility for maintaining clean air? What habits might we personally establish to ensure that our own bodies take in adequate amounts of the available air? What responsibility do we have in providing a clean spiritual atmosphere in our communities?

II. Bad Air, Good Air (*Review Genesis 1:26 with the class.*)

What is the Christian's social and environmental duty in the twenty-first century? "Calvin also urges us to be good stewards of God's creation. While Calvin may tell us, in accord with his understanding of the Bible, that we have the right to subdue nature and exercise dominance over it, he also tells us to assume responsibility for God's creation. Stewardship over creation means that we should treat creation with the same loving care as Jesus would if He were in our place."—Tony Campolo, *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson,

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Bad Air, Good Air

One of the great challenges that many people face, especially those living in cities, is that the air often is dirty and polluted. Other factors working against fresh air include tobacco smoke, especially when it is recirculated in office buildings. Breathing dirty air can lead to numerous health problems, including migraine headaches, nausea, vomiting, and eye and respiratory ailments. In some parts of the world, millions of people, especially children, suffer life-threatening illnesses from breathing bad air, often from poorly ventilated cooking facilities.

In contrast, good clean air usually may be found in abundance in natural outdoor environments, especially around evergreen trees, green plants in mountains and forests, near moving waters such as oceans, lakes, and waterfalls, and after rain. It is estimated that the algae in the ocean provides almost 90 percent of the oxygen in our atmosphere, with the rest coming from plants. Live plants in your own home can help to clean the air there and remove carbon dioxide.

How important, then, that we do our best to breathe clean air. Exercise outside, as opposed to indoors, especially in the morning, if possible. In addition, especially for those who work inside, it is important to be able to take breaks at regular intervals in order to get outside and breathe fresh air, if possible. After just a few moments outside, a person often will feel refreshed and reinvigorated. It's so much better to sleep at night with a window open, even just a little, so that we can enjoy the benefits of fresh air while sleeping.

“In order to have good blood, we must breathe well. Full, deep inspirations of pure air, which fill the lungs with oxygen, purify the blood. They impart to it a bright color and send it, a life-giving current, to every part of the body. Good respiration soothes the nerves, stimulates the appetite, and aids digestion. And it induces sound, refreshing sleep.

“The lungs should be allowed the greatest freedom possible. Their capacity is developed by free action; it diminishes if they are cramped and compressed. Ill effects follow the practice so common, especially in sedentary pursuits, of stooping at one's work. In this position it is impossible to breathe deeply. Superficial breathing soon becomes a habit, and the lungs lose their power to expand.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Health and Healing*, pp. 151, 152.

Our personal situations vary; some folk have a lifestyle and situation in which about all they ever breathe is fresh, clean air; others, due to where they live and work, might find fresh air a precious commodity that they covet as much as a thirsty person does water.

Whatever your situation, how important it is for the best health to take advantage of fresh air when you can get it.

Read Genesis 1:26. What does this imply about our responsibility to the created world we have been given?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

1992), p. 23. (*Compare Romans 8:19–23.*) In other words, believers cannot play ostrich and bury their heads in the sand. We are called to speak out, offer better methods, protest (if necessary), to secure clean air. Let our personal habits be harmonious with our environmental concerns, too, unlike the heavy smoker who curses the oil refinery’s pollution!

Consider This: What do you suppose God expected of Adam and Eve when He put them in charge of planet Earth? What do you think that He expects of us today, as their successors? Others, who seem to worship nature itself, sometimes look critically at Christians, who, to their way of thinking, seem more concerned about making products inexpensively than they seem concerned about good stewardship of the planet. Is it possible for Christians to join hands with them for the purpose of purifying the environment, without accepting their spiritual foundation of natural theology or nature worship? What benefits, as well as dangers, might be involved?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: If it is important to contend for healthy air quality in our physical environment and if it is important to practice personal discipline in breathing well, how important must it be to provide the best spiritual atmosphere possible? We must not forget that, according to Paul (*Romans 8, etc.*), it is the Holy Spirit, the “God-breath,” that alone brings spiritual vitality. So, how do we apply what we learn about oxygen, nitrogen, carbon monoxide, and pollution to materialism, narcissism, pornography, and the media? Do we have a duty to contend for a positive spiritual atmosphere in our world, as well as in the church? Why, or why not? Do we have a personal duty to receive the Holy Spirit on a constant basis? Discuss the reasons for your answer.

Activity: Select a class project from the suggestions below and discuss how believers corporately, not just individually, can improve the atmosphere.

Project 1 (spiritual atmosphere): At the office sexually demeaning remarks toward the female office staff and crude sexual humorous language are everyday occurrences. The boss rather would ignore them than deal with them, even though he personally does not approve.

Project 2 (spiritual): The local cable channel has announced that it is adding a new channel in your area. You are aware of the channel

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The Atmosphere of Heaven

The study so far this week has emphasized the *physical* properties of the atmosphere that God created for His family on earth.

We use the word *atmosphere* to describe not only the physical environment of air that surrounds us but also the attitudes, feelings, emotions, support, and affirmation of those around us, which create an atmosphere that may be positive or negative.

“Every soul is surrounded by an atmosphere of its own—an atmosphere, it may be, charged with the life-giving power of faith, courage, and hope, and sweet with the fragrance of love. Or it may be heavy and chill with the gloom of discontent and selfishness, or poisonous with the deadly taint of cherished sin. By the atmosphere surrounding us, every person with whom we come in contact is consciously or unconsciously affected.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 339.

One may thrive or die, depending upon the nature of such atmospheres. Let us now consider the atmosphere of heaven—a spiritual atmosphere of praise and joy—and study the effect it can have on the lives of believers here and now on earth.

What can you learn about the atmosphere of heaven from these texts? *Job 38:6, 7; Pss. 103:20–22; 148:2; Luke 15:7; Rev. 21:4.*

The atmosphere in heaven is clearly one of joy and praise to God. Several of the texts above call for the angelic host to praise God. It is a rich experience to see in the mind’s eye these mighty beings of light gathered about the throne of God in praise for His love, mercy, and grace. Heaven must be a place where joy, praise, and happiness reign.

The good news is that we may, by accepting the abiding presence of Christ and the Father in our lives (*John 14:23*), begin to experience these things now. We are called to action, to breathe the pure air of heaven now and be surrounded by the atmosphere of the heavenly home as we complete our sojourn on this earth.

What kind of atmosphere surrounds you? That is, your words, your demeanor, your attitudes; are they more reflective of the lowlands of earth or of the promises of heaven? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your need to change?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

because it is available in another community in which you have relatives. It specializes in crude humor and sexually explicit drama.

Project 3 (physical): Plans for a new factory just have been announced in the media. The company has a poor environmental record and has seriously damaged the air quality of several cities in which it operates. The local media has suppressed that news, because the project will provide much-needed jobs in a depressed economy.

Project 4 (spiritual): You have well-behaved children, but they seem to show little interest in spiritual things. There is little evidence that they ever read the Bible, except to complete school assignments, and there is no apparent prayer life.

Project 5 (physical): Your brother-in-law is a chain smoker. Your sister was sure he would change after they married, but now they have four small children in the home, and he smokes more than ever. What can be done to improve the children's lives without alienating the father?

Project 6 (physical): Ventilation in the paint room (at work) is inadequate. The employer acknowledges the problem but states that nothing will be done because of the cost involved. He fears that he cannot remain competitive if he spends money to remedy the condition. Whistle-blowers have been fired in the past.

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The recommended activity is one way to combine the emphases on our spiritual and physical atmospheres. It also may provide a bonding time for your class members and their families.

Activity: Be it the middle of spring or autumn, now is a good time for an outdoor picnic. The benefit of fresh air is apparent, but the atmosphere of friends and fellow believers makes the picture almost complete. Complete the picture by creating a photomontage that you frame for your class meeting place. The pictures that class members collect of people and places for their photomontage should be representative of the clear, sunny atmosphere of heaven! At the picnic discuss ideas for improving the spiritual atmosphere in your classroom or workplace, among your relatives and in your social clubs. How can you become a “breath of fresh air”? Close by singing “Breathe” (by Marie Barnett) or another song or hymn that emphasizes God’s wonderful provisions for us through nature. (Optional: If you don’t know the Barnett song, invite your youth to sing it for you. They will know it.)

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Not Judging, but Doing,” pp. 123–152, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*; “Growing Up Into Christ,” pp. 67–75, in *Steps to Christ*; “General Hygiene,” pp. 151–154, in *The Ministry of Health and Healing*.

“God calls upon His people to arise and come out of the chilling, frosty atmosphere in which they have been living, to shake off the impressions and ideas that have frozen up the impulses of love and held them in selfish inactivity. He bids them come up from their low, earthly level and breathe in the clear, sunny atmosphere of heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 607.

“Those with whom Christ dwells will be surrounded with a divine atmosphere. Their white robes of purity will be fragrant with perfume from the garden of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 135.

“Although there may be a tainted, corrupted atmosphere around us, we need not breathe its miasma, but may live in the pure air of heaven. We may close every door to impure imaginings and unholy thoughts by lifting the soul into the presence of God through sincere prayer. Those whose hearts are open to receive the support and blessing of God will walk in a holier atmosphere than that of earth and will have constant communion with heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 99.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is the general quality of the air where you live? If you live in the country, it is probably very good, and you can breathe plenty of it. If in the city, what challenges do you face?
- ❷ The question of air pollution is a serious one. What can you do as an individual, even on a very small scale, that could help with this problem? What are our obligations as a church to try to help alleviate this problem?
- ❸ “In fellowship with God, with Christ, and with holy angels, they are surrounded with a heavenly atmosphere, an atmosphere that brings health to the body, vigor to the intellect, and joy to the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 513. How can the class assist each other in realizing this goal?
- ❹ Do you know people who have been suffering some sort of health problems due to poor air quality? If so, how could you help? Why not help them spend some time in a place where the air is pure and fresh?
- ❺ Bring a health professional to class who could explain in more detail the benefits of fresh air.