



Every time
we breathe,
we breathe
the name
YAH-WEH

Breathe the Name

Sunday, January 4, 2026, Aledo UMC

Rev. Dr. David R. Schultz

Psalter, Psalm 8¹

- ¹ Yahweh, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.
- ² Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is humankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?
- ⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,
- ⁸ the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ Yahweh, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Sermon, “Breathe the Name”

Throughout January, the sermons you hear will all connect with the practice of making New Year’s resolutions. Unfortunately, the resolutions people make are often so ambitious that

¹ This version draws from NT Wright in *Psalms for Everyone*; and the NIV

they are forgotten by Martin Luther King Day. The solution might be to make easier resolutions, and that's what I'm presenting today.

On this first Sunday of 2026, I am suggesting a simple but foundational New Year's resolution, and it's drawn from Psalm 8. And it's simply: **Breathe.**

In the 2000 movie *Cast Away*, Chuck Noland, played by Tom Hanks, reflects on surviving a plane crash and washing ashore on a deserted island. He survives on that island for the next four years when debris washes ashore, providing him with a makeshift raft and the opportunity to sail away and be rescued by a cargo ship.

After his rescue, Chuck says, "I knew somehow that I had to stay alive. Somehow. I had to keep breathing, even though there was no reason to hope. And all my logic said I would never see (home) again. So that's what I did. I stayed alive. I kept breathing. And one day that logic was proven all wrong because the tide came in and gave me a sail. And now here I am. I'm back...(and) I have ice in my glass."

Then, despite surviving, Chuck reflects on his many losses while he was alone on that island and says, "I know what I have to do now. I gotta keep breathing. Because tomorrow the sun's going to rise. Who knows what the tide could bring."²

Who knows what the tide could bring. So he had to keep breathing.

When Candice was expecting our first child, we took classes together which emphasized proper breathing techniques for the mother as she goes into labor. And I figured out that the father could also use some of those same breathing techniques!

I've always sensed that knowing how to breathe is important, but I didn't realize how important it was until I checked in with the American Heart Association this past week. They advocate taking slow, deep breaths which can prompt several positive responses within your body.

Deep breathing can:

- Help to manage stress and even pain
- Reduce feelings of anxiety and depression
- Stabilize (or lower) your blood pressure
- Send more oxygen to your body's organs
- Promote calm, by affecting your nervous system³

Of course, you go on breathing without ever thinking about it. Breathing is involuntary, but it's also controllable. You can control your breathing with just a little effort. That means you can get the many benefits of deep breathing whenever you need to!

I think that's what Anna Nalick had in mind in her 2005 single, "Breathe." In the first verse, she describes getting a phone call at 2 am from a friend who pleads, "Can you help me unravel my mistake?" Her mistake is that her boyfriend has just become her ex-boyfriend.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKLVAel7MU8>. Accessed December 31, 2025.

³ <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/breathing-brings-benefits-infographic#>. Accessed December 30, 2025.

Anna's advice is simple and to the point. "So cradle your head in your hands / And breathe, just breathe."

In the second verse, Anna describes a 21-year-old serviceman at Fort Bliss, Texas, who, even at that young age, is struggling with alcoholism. And she wants to help him, but she's unable to reach him. The best that she can do is to cradle her head in her hands "and breathe, just breathe."

In the third verse, Anna describes her struggle trying to write a song. It's a struggle because it's intensely personal. The thought of singing the words makes her feel like she's naked—fully exposed on stage, in front of the crowd. And she's afraid that her words will be misunderstood. But then she dares her audience to sing along with her. And as we join her in song, we're invited to "breathe. Just breathe" along with Anna Nalick.

So what do Chuck Noland and Anna Nalick have to do with Psalm 8? The answer is in understanding *onomatopoeia*.

Onomatopoeia connects with our language and how words are formed. Onomatopoeia comes from the Greek word *onoma* which means "to name," and *poiein*, which means "to make." Onomatopoeia refers to words that imitate or evoke the sound they refer to. Put another way, these words look like they sound.⁴

Some examples include animal sounds like *hiss*, *caw*, *moo*; mechanical sounds like *click*, *clang*, *buzz*; impact sounds like *boom*, *thump*; vocal sounds like *murmur* or *babble*.

Some examples include:

- Bacon *sizzled* on the pan.
- The tires *screeched* as he slammed on the brakes.
- Kellogg's has used onomatopoeia to market Rice Krispies with their *Snap! Crackle! Pop! slogan*.

And that brings us to Psalm 8. Most translations begin with "O Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is your name." That follows the Hebrew practice of not uttering the name of God. But in the original, Psalm 8 actually begins with the name *Yahweh*. But the name *Yahweh* is considered so sacred that it is never pronounced by Jews. Instead, Jews will substitute words like *Adonai* or *Elohim* which mean "Lord" or "God." But Jews will not use the name *Yahweh* because of the commandment which says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

So where did this name *Yahweh* originate? The first appearance of the name is way back in the Creation narrative of Genesis 2:4. But perhaps the most well-known appearance of the name *Yahweh* is in Exodus chapter 3 where Moses is being called to deliver the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. And Moses has some reservations, so say the least. In verse 13—

¹³ But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to

⁴ From <https://www.supersummary.com/onomatopoeia/>. Accessed December 30, 2025.

them?”¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I am who I am.”^[b] He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’ ”¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘[YHWH] the [Elohim] of your ancestors, the [Elohim] of Abraham, the [Elohim] of Isaac, and the [Elohim] of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.”⁵

Later in Exodus 6:2, we read—

² God also spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am [Yahweh].”³ I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as [El Shaddai] but by my name ‘[Yahweh] I did not make myself known to them.

Yahweh is connected to “I AM” which is how we most often interpret the name Yahweh. So Exodus 3:14 is typically translated “I AM who I AM.” And Bible scholars have filled entire seminary shelves with books about the name—or names—of God.

And while the name of God can be complicated and perhaps even difficult to understand, there is something else at work in the name Yah-weh. And it is quite simply that Yahweh may be an example of onomatopoeia. Scholars who study such things tell us that *Yah* mimics the sound we make when we breathe in; *weh* mimics the sound we make when we breathe out.

Yah...weh.

The reverse is also true: you can breathe out *yah* and breathe in *weh*.

Yah...weh.

I find it profoundly ironic that the Hebrew people refuse to utter the name *Yahweh*, yet they breathe it with every breath.

Genesis 1 and 2 present two different Creation stories. In Genesis 1:26, we are created in the image of God.

In Genesis 2:7, we find no reference to being created in the image of God but we read that God breathed into the man—*weh*—and as God exhaled into the man, the man inhaled the breathe of God—*yah*—so filling the man with the presence of God that the man came to life.

No doubt many of you have seen *The Ten Commandments* starring Charlton Heston as Moses. In that dramatic scene at the burning bush, the voice of God booms from within the flames. But could it be that God revealed his presence to Moses more profoundly and yet more intimately than that? Could it be that with every breath Moses took, he breathed in the presence of God?

No wonder Jesus, after his resurrection, said to his disciples—

²¹ “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

⁵ NRSVUE. However, the NRSVUE uses “Lord” and “God” respectively. I have taken the liberty to change these to “YHWH” and “Elohim,” based on my understanding of the original. Also in Exodus 6:2.

And that brings me back to my New Year's resolution for you: Just breathe the name Yahweh.

Yah-weh.

When pressures of life overwhelm you, just breathe the name Yahweh. When anxiety and depression get the best of you, just breathe the name Yahweh and feel the calming presence of the Holy Spirit. For God, who breathed life into Adam, still breathe his life into us. So as you inhale, breathe in the presence of God. And as you exhale, share the presence of God with those around you. And at the beginning of this year, know that God is as close to you as your breath. For he is Yah-weh, God with us.