



The God Who Ceased to Breathe: Restoring the Fire of Faith

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Why does faith feel hollow? A living, covenantal God was replaced by an impersonal, philosophical ideal.

Have you ever wondered why your faith sometimes feels boring, distant, or even disconnected from real life?

Almost as if it stopped breathing? Sure, it may look polished on the outside—reverent language, familiar rituals—but inside, it feels hollow, breathless. Where's the fire? Where's the passion that once burned hot in your soul?

I think about this a lot. And I believe the problem isn't necessarily your faith, not exactly. Perhaps it's the version of God you were handed down from European

Christianity: flawless, yes, but distant, unmoving, untouchable. Beautiful, yes, but cold, or at least seeming uninvolved. What if that version of God doesn't come from scripture? What if it comes from philosophy? And what if the God of scripture isn't breathless at all? What if He walks, weeps, and speaks—and still calls your name?

Maybe faith feels dry not because it's untrue, but because something vital is missing: a God who is present and breathing. But what if the God we've inherited isn't the God of scripture, but the God of Greek philosophy ([Hopkins](#)), a God who is abstract and breathless? My purpose today is to trace how Christianity drifted from a relational, covenantal, embodied God to an abstract, breathless idea, and how the Restoration calls us back to fire, presence, and breath.

When Faith was Fire

The God of Abraham is the God who walks in gardens and dines in tents. He speaks from burning bushes and thunders from mountaintops. Yet, He whispers in stillness, too. He is near. He hears the cries of slaves, sees the tears of barren women, and calls shepherds, wanderers, and prophets. He makes covenants sealed with sacrifice, smoke, and fire. His faithfulness isn't distant; it's fierce and generational, extending mercy to generations of those who love Him. He is not just spirit. He appears. He wrestles. He rejoices. He weeps. He binds. He is not merely King. He is Bridegroom. Father. Redeemer. Friend. His laws are not rules imposed from afar, but the terms of a relationship written on hearts. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph Smith. A God not of distance, but of nearness. A God who dwells with us. A God who calls us to adventure!

Step into the scene with me: Abraham stands under an open sky, begging God to spare a city. Fifty. Forty. Thirty. Ten. Each time, God listens and responds. Hagar flees into the wilderness, abused and alone. But God finds her by a spring. He calls her by name, and she names Him “the God who sees me.” ([Genesis 16:13](#)); the first foreign, exiled slave to name Him in scripture. Jonah runs from Nineveh, boards a ship, and sinks beneath the waves. But even in the belly of rebellion, God pursues him. Not to punish, but to redirect. Grace swallows him whole and spits him back

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onto purpose, to show grace to the Ninevites. Hannah weeps at the temple, her prayers soundless, her soul broken. The prophet Eli mistakes her for drunk, but God, yes, this God who enters our present, hears the prayer no one else hears. This barren woman becomes the mother of a prophet, not because she follows a system of rules, but because she communes with the living God. Faith is fire. God works with people. Imperfect people. That's fire.

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When Faith Lost Its Fire

Somewhere along the way, God stopped speaking and started “being.” The God who once walked in gardens, whispered in dreams, and thundered on mountaintops was slowly replaced by a principle—eternal, unmoved, and untouched. Greek philosophers, like Plato, taught that truth and perfection meant being above change, above feeling, above relationship, above anything material or physical. To them, the highest truth is abstract and unchanging, like a flawless idea, and not a living person. Philo of Alexandria took those ideals and fused them with Hebrew scripture, reframing the God of Abraham as the Logos—rational, remote, and impersonal ([Runia, 1986](#)). Over time, this vision took hold. God became less someone to walk with and more something to explain, intellectually. We didn't mean to lose Him; we just began to prefer concept over covenant. He stopped being the God who hears and responds, and started becoming the God who simply “is.” (See Elder Holland's “[The Only True God and Jesus Christ whom He has Sent](#)”; Also Elder Maxwell's explanation of the Hellenization of Christianity in “[From the Beginning](#).”)

When God became a concept instead of a presence, worship began to hollow out. Church became ritual: beautiful, yes; majestic, yes; but often cold. We stand and sit at the right times, recite the right words, sing the hymns, and bow our heads. But sometimes, we leave wondering if anyone on either end is truly listening. Prayer, once a conversation with a living God, becomes a kind of performance. We worry more about saying the “right” thing than pouring out our real hearts. We filter our words for acceptability, not vulnerability. Even commandments, which were once invitations into deeper covenant, start to feel like items on a spiritual to-do list, items to worship. And the routine feels like this: obey, report, repeat. Instead of being drawn into God's presence, we measure our worth by how well we keep score with, and report on, the commandments.

And yet, I believe something inside us aches for more. We long not just to follow rules, but also to feel known (1 Corinthians 13:12). We don't just want to be obedient. We want to be held. But in a system where God is perfect but untouchable, holy but inaccessible, it's easy to lose that hope. The truth is, when we turn God into a concept, we don't just lose warmth, we also lose relationship. We keep the worshipful words but miss out on the voice that draws us near to God. Faith becomes less like a fire in the bones and more like a principle to memorize. And deep down, many of us feel it: it's breathless.

To see how far we've drifted, look at the contrast: two very different visions of God—one abstract and distant, the other relational and near.

The Conceptual God of Plato	The Living God of Joseph
Universal – Exists above and beyond all things; impersonal and pervasive.	Personal – Present with His people; walks, speaks, listens, and enters into covenant.
Immutable – Unchanging by necessity; unaffected by time, space, relation, or circumstance.	Faithful – Unchanging in love and purpose, yet responsive in covenant and relationship.
Intangible – Without body, form, or physical presence; pure spirit or essence.	Embodied – Has a glorified body; seen, heard, and even touched.
Impassible – Incapable of emotion, pain, or change; beyond suffering.	Emotional and Invested – Weeps, rejoices, grieves, and responds with mercy and justice.
Sovereign Laws – Submits to and operates through universal, abstract laws.	Covenantal Lord – Creates, commands, and condescends; binds Himself to His people in love.

In the above table, you may notice that you can replace the words “The Conceptual God of Plato” with the words “Principle,” or “Laws of Nature,” or “Christianity’s version of Deity in the Trinity,” and the concepts explained under this title remain the same. That is because a portion of our culture has embraced Platonism as our form of truth. We may thus become tempted to worship this Platonic truth. The downside to this type of worship is a faith that feels platonic; and like a platonic relationship, our relationship with God feels hollow. This isn’t a critique of sincere Christian belief or the deep love many Christians have for God. Rather, it’s a reminder that theology is often shaped by the cultural and intellectual forces of its time. My aim isn’t to dismiss Christian tradition but to point out that the Restoration invites us to recover a more relational, embodied view of God.

When Breath Was Restored

What happened in a quiet grove in 1820 was more than a revelation. It was a return of the breathing God. Let me take you back: It is a quiet spring morning. A teenage boy,

confused by the religious noise around him, walks into a grove of trees—not to start a revolution, but simply to plead for his soul. The earth is still damp from winter. With awkward faith and a heart full of yearning, Joseph Smith kneels to pray. And heaven breathes again. Light pierces through the trees, brighter than the sun, descending gently until it rests upon him. In that moment, two glorified Beings are standing before him. They call him by name. They answer his prayer. This is not metaphor. It is encounter. This is not abstraction. It is relationship. Joseph sees with his eyes and hears with his ears. God has a face, a voice, and a body. This isn't a footnote in theology; it is a rebuke of centuries of silence. It shatters the idea of a distant, untouchable God and reintroduces the God who walks, speaks, weeps, and calls.

When Fire was Restored

The God of Joseph Smith **reveals Himself** to be personal. From this vantage point, doctrine and principles become means to helping the children of God connect with Him. What is an intimate encounter becomes a relatable truth. Truth as person. The Restoration doesn't just give us new scripture. It gives us back a God who is present and invested. The God who appeared to Joseph is not an abstraction; He is Father. He is personal. He is faithful, not in the sense of being unchangeable by constraint, but in being unwavering in love, yet responsive in relationship. He listens, teaches, corrects, and comforts. This God is not intangible. He is embodied. He has a glorified, tangible body, as seen and testified to in both ancient and modern scripture. He appears, speaks, blesses, and even wrestles (**Genesis 32**). He is emotional: He rejoices in our growth, grieves in our rebellion, weeps at our suffering, and shows mercy. As **President Russell M. Nelson testified**, "Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son want you back home with Them! ...They will do anything within Their power that does not violate *your* agency or *Their* laws to help you come back" (original emphasis). His laws are not distant principles to which He submits; they are extensions of His character: relational, covenantal, and purposeful. He is not merely the Lawgiver; He is the Covenant-Keeper. He does not stand distant from creation; He enters it. He does not float in abstract perfection; He binds Himself to imperfect people, again and again, with grace and patience.

This is the God of Joseph—not a god of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God who breathes, who speaks, who suffers, and who saves. The God who does not merely exist above all things, but who is "through all things", and "in

all things”, the very light of truth and life ([Doctrine and Covenants 88: 6-13](#); there you notice nature is not governed by laws of nature, but by the light of Christ coming from the presence of God). It is this relational, covenantal, embodied God that the restoration calls us to remember and to worship anew. For example, in [Genesis 18](#), Abraham’s negotiation with God over Sodom’s fate directly contradicts the philosophical concept of an impassive deity. Rather than an untouchable, unchangeable God beyond space and relationship, we see a divine willingness to engage in dialogue, consider human appeals, and adjust judgment based on our intercession. Indeed, as Abraham boldly negotiates from fifty righteous people down to just ten, God responds each time with patience and flexibility. This scriptural account reveals a God who is present, responsive to prayer, emotionally engaged, and who operates through covenant relationship rather than abstract principles, showing divine power through compassionate condescension rather than detached perfection.

The Restoration doesn’t just offer corrected principles, it also offers a relationship. Even within the Church, we sometimes drift into speaking of “the Atonement” as if it were a separate, mystical force—an abstract principle we tap into, rather than a person we turn to. But as [President Russell M. Nelson warned](#), “There is no amorphous entity called ‘the Atonement’ upon which we may call for succor, healing, forgiveness, or power. Jesus Christ is the source. Sacred terms such as Atonement and Resurrection describe what the Savior did, according to the Father’s plan, so that we may live with hope in this life and gain eternal life in the world to come. The Savior’s atoning sacrifice—the central act of all human history—is best understood and appreciated when we expressly and clearly connect it to Him.” When we speak of Atonement, we are not referring to a principle or a process—we are referring to a person. The danger of abstraction is not just philosophical—it’s spiritual. When we disconnect sacred acts from the Savior who performed them, we risk turning our worship toward abstract theology.

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In truth, the restoration calls us to trade aesthetic form for fire, to move from verbal precision to presence. In this restored gospel, truth is not an abstract concept floating above us; it’s a voice that speaks, calls, and answers. The Atonement is not a cosmic

force we tap into, it's Jesus Christ Himself, kneeling in a garden, bleeding from every pore, reaching for us with nail-scarred hands. Obedience is no longer a transaction to earn favor, it's a covenant, a relationship that binds us to a God who already loves us, already chose us, and walks beside us. And everything changes. Reading scripture becomes less about mining for principles and more about meeting a living God in the text. Prayer stops being a ritual and starts becoming a conversation. Forgiveness stops being a moral ideal and becomes an act of healing a relationship. Love ceases to be a virtue we aim for and becomes a way of binding ourselves to one another and to Him. The Restoration invites us to more than abstract faith—it invites us to communion with the divine. It is thus not about being good enough for God, but it's about belonging to Him. As [Elder Christofferson said](#), “In the end, it is the blessing of a close and abiding relationship with the Father and the Son that we seek.”

So where's the fire? Maybe it's not gone, just buried. Buried under quiet disappointments, unanswered prayers, and Sunday routines that feel more like obligation than encounter. Buried under the pressure to perform, to be perfect, to check every box, and to pretend we're fine. But fire doesn't need to be created from scratch; it only needs to be rekindled. The Restoration invites us to a return. A return to the God who feels, who speaks, who weeps, and who walks with His people. The same God who walked in Eden, who made covenants with Abraham, who sat by wells and called out to fishermen and tax collectors. He's still calling. He hasn't changed. Maybe we have. Maybe we've traded intimacy for intellect, mystery for management, presence for performance. But even now, He invites us to come back, to walk with Him.

The God of Hagar still sees. The God of Hannah still listens. The God of Elijah still whispers. The God of Joseph Smith still answers prayers, even when the words come out uncertain. What He wants is not our polish, but our presence. Not flawless prayers, but open hearts. Not public perfection, but quiet surrender. He wants to dwell with us, not someday, but now. Faith doesn't have to be breathless. It doesn't have to be cold. It doesn't have to be a thing you carry alone. So let faith become less about checking the boxes and more about experiencing the flame. Let it be less about reciting and more about responding. Let it be alive again, not because you master a system, but because you hear Him speak. Because you feel Him weep. Because you find Him walking beside you in the ordinary places—at the kitchen table, on your drive home, in the quiet after everyone else is asleep.

God walks through silence, yet burns in flame,
And in the hush between heartbeats,

He calls your name.

About the author

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Yohan Delton was born in France and educated in Catholic schools. He holds a Ph.D. from BYU and is a professor of psychology at BYU–Idaho. He is devoted to leading others to Christ.