



breathing room

READER'S GUIDE

Prelude: Breathing

1. Read and reflect on Psalm 18:16–19 (Message). What word or words stand out to you (p. 11)?
2. Have you ever experienced the feeling of “hitting your critical line,” the sense that you can no longer hold things together or you no longer want to manage in the ways you have in the past? What were the circumstances?
3. When you read the quote, “We do not deserve to keep hurting ourselves” (p. 13), what comes to mind for you? Are you aware of any ways you have been hurting yourself?
4. Leeana writes, “As long as we feel the need to hold our breath, hold it all together, we will never experience space, grace, breathing room. We’ll be floundering in the void. But if we will let go, surrender, let the crash happen—validate that the struggle we are feeling actually exists—we just might be able to get the help we need to really live” (p. 17). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Chapter 1: Confessing to the Trees

1. Leeana confesses to the trees, “I wish everyone would just leave me alone” (p. 20). What would you confess to the trees?
2. What holds you back from turning toward your struggle?
3. Name something difficult in your life that you’ve minimized or denied because you believed that it wasn’t a worthy struggle.
4. Do you agree with what Parker Palmer said, that “we are all heartbroken” (p. 23)? Why or why not?

Chapter 2: Talking Back to the Brain Vultures

1. What is one lie the brain vultures are consistently trying to get you to believe about yourself? About someone else?
2. Leeana writes about her friend Jamie completely reframing a set of events so that Leeana could stop beating herself up. Is there a lie you’ve been believing that could be reframed to tell a completely different story?
3. Share one sentence, idea, or truth that resonated with you from this chapter.



Chapter 3: Eating Your Shadow

1. Leeana writes that she feels like she is “running, running, running all the time” (p. 38). Do you identify with that feeling of having to stay ahead of something that’s chasing you? In what way?
2. Name something you have rejected about yourself—a trait or quality or way of being that you have disassociated from. Why do you feel contempt for that particular part of you?
3. What do you fear you could be—i.e., exceptional, unexceptional, common, uncommon, remarkable, unremarkable?

Chapter 4: Beginning Again

1. When you hear the quote, “Always we begin again” by Saint Benedict (p. 46), what area of your life comes to mind? Where do you most need to begin again? Or, with whom do you most need to begin again?
2. Share a time when you lost it and had to face yourself and someone you loved. Was it more difficult to face the other person or yourself?
3. Leeana encourages us to “step into the broad grace we have been offered for this mercies-are-new day” (p. 48). Share an area of your life where you are most in need of God’s broad grace.

Chapter 5: Borrowing Prayers

1. Do you agree or disagree with the idea from this chapter that it’s OK to fall silent instead of pretending in our prayers to God?
2. Are there any borrowed words that you pray? Poetry, Scripture, song lyrics, bumper stickers?
3. Share about your personal history with prayer. What are some of the helpful or harmful messages you’ve internalized about prayer?
4. How might the line “Prayer is much more about being human than being holy” (p. 51) change how you view or practice prayer?

Chapter 6: Sharing Real Life

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt isolated and stuck? Share about that experience.
2. Leeana writes, “I’m the kind of person who, if I’m honest, would prefer control over help” (p. 60) and “Letting others in is a better way to live, even though it requires bringing down our defenses and allowing for the possibility that being seen and being known might be more meaningful than being in control” (p. 61). In what area of your life might you be choosing control over help?
3. Share about a time when God made a home for you through the care and love of other people.
4. Do you struggle with letting other people into your life in an authentic way? Why or why not?
5. Share about a person in your life who has been a trusted and honoring companion to you. What traits do they possess that have made them so trustworthy?





Chapter 7: Rejecting Frantic

1. Name something (a relationship, a dream, a desire, a decision, etc.) you are holding in your hands that God might be asking you to hand over to him?
2. When Leeana is feeling threatened and defensive, her friend Tina tells her, “This is not an urgent matter” (p. 66). What are you currently making urgent that, upon closer inspection and some breathing room, might not require your urgent response after all?
3. “Working hard and working out of a place of anxiety are not the same thing,” Beth tells Leeana (p. 66). Are there ways in which you are working out of anxiety—striving, proving, breathless?
4. Leeana ends the chapter with a list of the true and actual “urgent matters” in her day (p. 69). Make a similar list of your own. What are the things God’s asked you to attend to?

Chapter 8: Googling for Help

1. The chapter opens with the Serenity Prayer: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference” (p. 71). Name one thing in your life you cannot change and need to accept. Name one thing in your life you need to change and can.
2. Step 1 of 12-step stated, “We admitted we were powerless—that our lives had become unmanageable.” Have you ever been in a situation when something was unmanageable and you were powerless? Share about that experience. Is the word “powerless” a stumbling block for you? Why or why not?
3. Leeana writes: “One of life’s great lessons is that we cannot fix ourselves. We need help. It feels needy to need help. Oh well. Let’s get it anyway” (p. 77). Do you agree or disagree that you cannot fix yourself? Is there an area of your life where you are feeling a nudge or invitation to get help?

Chapter 9: Being Nongodly

1. Share about your own experience with believing that if you can’t be superhuman, then you’re subhuman. In other words, how have you pushed past your own limits and then felt shame when you couldn’t be more or do better?
2. Read and reflect on the passage Leeana includes on page 81, “The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.” What word or phrase stands out to you in that passage?
3. What is something about your humanity that bothers you?
4. Sometimes we need to be reminded of what really matters. Leeana shares about seeing a daddy with his baby girl asleep on his shoulder and how that scene helped her remember the “deeper anchors of life” (p. 83). What helps you remember what really matters?





Chapter 10: Writing Letters

1. The chapter begins with a quote from Nathaniel Branden: “Self-acceptance is my refusal to be in an adversarial relationship with myself” (p. 85). In what ways have you been an adversary to yourself? Worked against yourself? Not been on your own team?
2. Throughout *Breathing Room*, Leeana mentions pieces of her journey in Emotions Anonymous. What is one truth from 12-step that she’s shared that has resonated with you?
3. Practice getting in touch with the older, wiser version of yourself and then write your own letter of amends to yourself. What do you need to forgive yourself for? What do you need to change? If you’re in a group setting, share a few of the details you’ve included in your letter.

Chapter 11: Stealing Time Like Stephen King

1. Name a desire. What has encouraged you to pursue that desire? Or what has kept you from pursuing that desire?
2. What is something you could steal a bit of time to do that would fill your soul?
3. In what ways have you allowed parts of your soul voice to be silenced?

Chapter 12: Getting Life under Your Nails

1. Is there an activity or hobby you enjoy that could help get your hands moving and also help you find your way back to yourself?
2. On page 98, Leeana talks about the redemptive quality of “found art,” the idea that true beauty isn’t always constructed of the glamorous and the perfect. Share about something in your life that wasn’t beautiful on first glance but ended up having beauty in and through it in unexpected ways.
3. What is saving your life right now?

Chapter 13: Creating a Room of One’s Own

1. Leeana opens the chapter with a quote from C. S. Lewis’s *Till We Have Faces* (p. 107). Is there something you are longing for? Is longing a “sweet thing” to you or does it make you uncomfortable?
2. Leeana shares about getting caught in a manic outburst looking for a “solution” to the anxious energy she’s feeling. Do you ever look for a “solution” or “quick fix” that you believe will solve things you’re struggling with. If so, share about what you perceive will fix your life. If I could only _____, then I would feel better. Or if I only had _____, then I would feel better.
3. Do you have a special place you visit that helps you check your soul pulse?
4. Reflect on the idea of “ultimate belonging” (p. 109). Have you ever experienced or glimpsed the sense of ultimate belonging? If so, share the circumstances—how that felt, where you were, how you saw yourself in that moment, and how you saw God in that moment.





Chapter 14: Piercing the Membrane

1. Have you ever sought out a guide to help you navigate a particularly acute season in life? What was that experience like for you?
2. Leeana's spiritual director, Beth, tells Leeana that "maybe this is a time to think about mothering yourself" (p. 115). What would it look like for you to take a step toward "mothering yourself"?
3. Does reaching out come naturally for you or is it a struggle for you? What are some of the things that hold you back from reaching out when you need help?
4. If God is inviting you to reach out, share about what that might look like for you.

Chapter 15: Wielding Power Tools

1. Share about a time you were comforted in the midst of mourning.
2. Are you someone who would rather "be strong" or be "doing fine, thanks" in the midst of your struggle? Why does letting go, spilling open, and allowing the grief in feel difficult?
3. Is there a grief in your life you need to observe? Write or share about that grief.

Chapter 16: Chanting

1. A sentence arrives for Leeana that helps her navigate the panic she's feeling: "Things won't always feel the way they do right now" (p. 129). How might this mantra be helpful to you in your own life right now?
2. What are healthy and/or unhealthy rituals you tend to reach for when you are feeling squeezed?
3. Leeana writes, "One of ways we can be there for ourselves like we would a friend is to be gentle when things are difficult" (p. 131). What is one way you can choose to be gentle with yourself instead of demanding or bullying?

Chapter 17: Going to the Ganges

1. What is the "fog" in your life right now? Write or share about the lack of clarity you're experiencing.
2. Share about a time when God brought a miracle to your front door—one you weren't expecting but saved you somehow.
3. Leeana writes, "I believe the holy work is to look into the fog and see ourselves—scared, fragile, human—and take our pained self by the hand and lead him or her toward help" (p. 135). Reflect on this sentence and share something that emerges from your reflection.

Chapter 18: Saying No to the Bad Pants

1. Have you allowed yourself to be in a restrictive relationship—with your pants, with a significant other, with food, with a family member, with a friend, with yourself?
2. Reflect on something you are currently doing at your own expense.
3. What do you turn to in an attempt to make yourself feel better that only ends up making you feel worse?





Chapter 19: Offering Permission

1. Leeana writes, “In the absence of our true self, we are a thousand different versions of who we were meant to be” (p. 146). What is a “face” you put on to mask what is really going on inside you?
2. Name something you need to take personal responsibility for.
3. I need to offer myself permission to _____.

Chapter 20: Channeling Your Inner Navy SEAL

1. Share a real or perceived impediment in your life. How could you channel your inner Navy SEAL when you think about that impediment?
2. What is one small, manageable commitment you could make to yourself and follow through on? Is there someone in your life you could celebrate the follow-through with?
3. Share one thing from this chapter that resonated with you.

Chapter 21: Figgling

1. Leeana opens the chapter with a quote from Richard Rohr: “We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking” (p. 161). Reflect on this quote. Ask God to show you an area in your life where you may need to “live” (act) instead of merely “think” (analyze).
2. What outdoor activity nourishes you? When was the last time you were able to participate in that activity?
3. What helps you reconnect with whimsy, laughter, silliness?

Chapter 22: Practicing Plenty

1. In this chapter, Leeana talks about needing to see abundance where there was deficit. Share about an area of your life where you perceive deficit. Complete the sentence: There is not enough _____.
2. How does God communicate his abundance to you? What reminds you of plenty?
3. Share something you find beautiful, something that expands your senses and buoys your soul.

Chapter 23: Wandering Like a Gypsy

1. Is there an area in your life where you feel like you’re “on the bench”? Write or share about your experience of feeling sidelined.
2. Share about a transition you’ve gone through in your life. What was something challenging about that transition? What was something unexpectedly beautiful about that transition?
3. Reflect on the story of Naaman on pages 177–78. How are you like Naaman?
4. Leeana writes, “When we take that next right step, our one part courage is met with a thousand parts God’s grace. And we can make a long journey that way” (pp. 179–80). Is there a “next right step” God might be inviting you to take?





Chapter 24: Believing Your Body

1. Take a moment, close your eyes, and scan your body from head to toe, stopping to take inventory. Are you carrying pain? Tension? Anxiety? Worry? Nausea? Heaviness? Exhaustion?
2. What might your body be trying to tell you?
3. Share about a recent dream you've had. Is there anything significant to you in that dream?

Chapter 25: Letting Go

1. Leeana writes, "We so often project our own feelings toward ourselves onto God, assuming he thinks of us only and always in the ways we think of ourselves" (p. 197). How might God see you differently than you see yourself?
2. Is there something in your life that is causing you to feel ferocious or intense?
3. Leeana talks about something changing inside her when she had her third child. The ferocious intensity she had been feeling softened. She received the gift of perspective. Share about a time you received helpful perspective that provided truth for you to hold onto.
4. Leeana concludes the chapter with this line: "The opposite of holding our breath isn't inhaling. It's letting go." You've been reading quite a bit about the theme of letting go. Is there something God might be inviting you to let go of?

Chapter 26: Watching the Gutter

1. As Leeana shares in this chapter, sometimes our past struggles can get stuck in our bodies and we need help flushing them out. Consider your own life story. Do parts of your past have power over you or show up when you least expect it?
2. What is one way you have become more compassionate toward yourself as a result of reading this book? Or one way that you need to?
3. Leeana ends this final chapter with the words from e. e. cummings she shared in chapter 5, "I who have died am alive again today" (p. 204). After reading *Breathing Room*, is there a part of you that has awakened or reawakened, a part of you that went into the water and is now experiencing a rebirth?

Postlude: Continue

1. Leeana lists the 26 chapter titles as practices she's encouraging us to "continue" (pp. 205–6). Choose a few from the list that particularly resonate with you.
2. Reflect on the word "continue." What are you taking away from *Breathing Room* that you want to continue?
3. As I finish this book, I am grateful for _____.

