

Caring for One Another

Renewal: What Restores My Soul?



Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- What is something that brings you comfort or rest after a tough day?
- Share a place or an activity that brings comfort and peaceful feelings to your heart.

What Does the Bible Say?

Mark 6:30-32

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

Think About... (optional, depending on time)

- What do you notice in this text?
- Make yourself comfortable and maybe even close your eyes. Imagine Jesus saying this directly to you today... “Come away to a deserted place all by yourself and rest a while.” What images come up for you? How does it feel to hear those words from Jesus to you?

What Do Others Say?

There was a room in our old house that I called “The Happy Place.” It was a small room that had once been a screened porch that the former owners had closed in. There was enough room for a comfortable chair, a big bookcase, and a TV. The ceiling was beadboard that was stained a warm color with a patina that comes with age and exposure to the elements. It added to the coziness of the space. Outside the large windows was a magnificent ginkgo tree whose leaves created a barrier to the outside world. It was a space where I would go to curl up, often with one of my puppies on my lap, and allow myself to unwind from the demands of the day or week.

One summer, my husband Andrew’s side of the family was gathering for a reunion in Indiana. Our daughter was recovering from back surgery, so she flew to the reunion while our young grandkids road in the car with us—10 hours, each way. Since our daughter still had limited mobility and needed a lot of rest, we took charge of the kids much of the week. It was both a complete delight and completely exhausting.

I'll never forget arriving back at our house after spending the week with lots of family and doing a second 10-hour drive. Andrew and I piled our daughter and her kids into their car for the drive back to their house, kissed each other and said, "I'll see you later." Each of us promptly retreated—me to my Happy Place and Andrew to his basement office. After a few hours we emerged long enough to run around the corner to pick up a pizza, fill a plate for each of us, and return to our respective zones. We knew ourselves and each other well enough to know that we needed time to refill our buckets and a little sacred space in which to do it.

When we are in the midst of doing or caring for others, it is tempting to just keep going. It is tempting to not listen to our bodies or to push down our own emotions. It is tempting to neglect what we need to sustain our work, because the needs of others feel more pressing and urgent. But Jesus doesn't expect us to just keep going, and going, and going. Our Creator wove rest into the fabric of creation and gave us the gift of sabbath. Jesus often retreated by himself to pray. Clear on his mission, he would walk away from the throngs of people making demands on his energy and time in order to recharge for what was important; and, when the disciples had been coming and going and doing and doing, Jesus encouraged them to join him in retreat saying, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

There is grace in Jesus' invitation. There is grace in being seen by Jesus. There is grace in saying "enough"—or enough for now—and stopping. There is grace in being released from wanting to do it all perfectly. There is grace in not having to do it all by our own power.

When we are caring for others—whether it is for a short time, in a crisis, or for an extended time—carving out space and time for rest and renewal is essential. In her book *The Struggles of Caregiving*, Nell Noonan encourages caregivers—people caring for loved ones with significant support needs over a long period of time—to tend to their own physical, mental, emotional *and* spiritual needs, but these are wise words for anyone who acts in care for another. She writes, "Within God-times, we allow our breaking hearts and weary souls to meet God at the deepest level of our suffering and struggle. When that occurs, a wonderous thing happens: God consoles and strengthens as only God can." Something else happens too. In receiving from God, "we learn to console others in the ways God consoled us."*

—Reflection written by Jeanne Hartfield

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Think About... (select one or more questions)

- How was finding comfort and peace modeled for you as a child? How is that similar to or different from how you find comfort and peace today?
- What keeps us from taking care of ourselves and finding times of restoration?
- What are some of the activities or situations that are depleting for you? Who or what reminds you to stop, pause and rest?
- Who is someone who does renewal or rest well? What have you learned from them?
- Andrew and Jeanne knew instinctively what was best for one another, but that doesn't always happen. When you need rest, how do you share that with others, if at all?
- As we care for one another as friends, family or in community, how do we know when someone else needs rest? What can we do to help make rest possible for them?
- In the reflection, Jeanne names the simultaneous feelings of complete delight and complete exhaustion. What is the value of recognizing and naming both? What helps you to acknowledge a mix of emotions, rather than focusing on only one feeling?
- What is the difference between leisure time and restorative Sabbath time?

Prayer

Ask someone in the group to read this slowly as a prayer for the group. Allow some silence at the beginning and end of the prayer. Sit in a comfortable position and imagine yourself held in the loving arms of God. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes.

Psalm 23 (Contemporary English Version)

You, LORD, are my shepherd.

I will never be in need.

You let me rest in fields
of green grass.

You lead me to streams
of peaceful water,
and you refresh my life.

You are true to your name,
and you lead me
along the right paths.

I may walk through valleys
as dark as death,
but I won't be afraid.

You are with me,
and your shepherd's rod
makes me feel safe.

You treat me to a feast,
while my enemies watch.

You honor me as your guest,
and you fill my cup
until it overflows.

Your kindness and love
will always be with me
each day of my life,
and I will live forever
in your house, LORD.

Amen.

Connecting Faith with Daily Life...

(for individual reflection & action)

- Find someone who will encourage you to renew your soul. Ask them to check in with you once a month or more often.
- Think about how your time with God is renewing. What faith practices are restorative for you? How can you integrate them into your life?
- Identify the activities or a location that is restorative for you. Write this down or share it with someone, so it is easy to find when you most need it.
- In difficult times, there can still be the paradox of exhaustion and gratitude. Spend a few minutes writing a few things you are thankful for, even if today is a tough day.

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