

INTRODUCTION

Water glides peacefully downstream, smoothing the river's edge, nibbling rocks away from their beds. No human feet have trampled the tall grasses and wildflowers along the bank; only a narrow trail created by thirsty deer and bear and other woodland animals breaks the growth undulating in the breeze.

Except—to the side a man stands beside a hammock, looking expectantly toward the hill. A feast spreads sumptuously across a woven blanket; a first-aid kit, a jug of water and a book of poetry complete the ensemble.

Sunlight drains from the sky; still he waits. Throughout the night, into the next day and the next, he waits.

He waits faithfully.

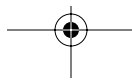
Finally footsteps pound on the nature trail, and he opens his arms. His face nearly breaks in half with his delight.

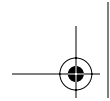
You rush past him. Your breath comes in gasps. You splash some water on your face, throw a smile in his direction and run back up the hill.

He resumes his position. Waiting. Waiting to cover your exhaustion with the warm blanket of his love, to offer absolute rest. Waiting to soothe the hot brow, rub ointment on blistered feet, pour water for the parched throat.

Waiting.

How long has it been since you met the Shepherd of your soul at the water's edge, since you took his arm and walked beside the tranquil waters, letting the beauty of his love and creation speak peace to your rattled soul? How long since you experienced more than a splash of cool water on your face, only to run off again in an endless race? More than a verse and a hurried prayer en route to the car or kids or daily commute?





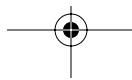
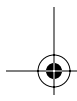
King David really believed that the “Lord is my shepherd.” His psalms often begin with him crying out to God for help, deliverance, revenge; David is stiff with anger or prostrate with pain or bent double with guilt. We read on to where he takes the Shepherd at his word, following him to still waters. Between the beginning and end of many of David’s psalms is resolution. Problems aren’t solved, but God restores his heart, refocuses his vision, soothes his pain.

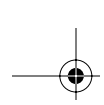
The author of Psalm 23 seemed rational and accepting of rest, of God taking care of him, of the importance of soul restoration. David’s present tense framing of the chapter points to his experience of life under the good Shepherd. Surely David wasn’t an armchair theologian, a spoiled rich king living in a castle, never trusting these theories. He didn’t just stroll about protected lawns and down to the stream, reclining for a bit while soldiers guarded him and women fed him grapes. Look at his life: David’s family was messed up; people were always trying to kill him, even his closest relatives and friends; he connived and manipulated and just plain sinned. As king he reigned for many years, not on a throne but leading a ragtag bunch of fighters and stone throwers through wilderness and desert, sleeping in caves, running for their lives.

This concept of rest seems pivotal for a life of faith. Either God can take care of us or he isn’t God—at least he’s not a good God or an all-powerful God. Or maybe he’s only the God of the good events and not God in the valley of the shadow, in the places that feel like death. He’s only God when we feel goodness and mercy nipping at our heels, or feel the guiding staff, or when a banquet pops up in the middle of a battle with our enemies.

Maybe God isn’t so good in a crisis, or God ducks out the back door at the first scent of trouble. Maybe we believe he’s a good-time God, that the bill of goods we bought reads “Bad things only happen to people who don’t trust God.” We really believe God is the great Magician rather than the great Physician, and we shouldn’t have “issues” once we know Jesus.

We *shouldn’t* have problems with fatigue or depression or anger or control or abandonment. No dysfunction *should* ripple into our families. Our jobs *should* be advancing or at least stable and preparing us for retirement.





We *should* be bursting with love for everyone, be perfectly married or living joyfully though single. We *should* be living a victorious, effortless and powerful life.

Our “shoulds” and their accompanying guilt exhaust us. And I don’t know a single person living like that. If I did, I wouldn’t believe their assessment of their lives. Because bad things happen. This isn’t heaven yet, as much as we’d like it to be. As much energy as we spend pretending that “it is well, it is well with my soul,” is it really?

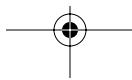
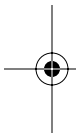
Probably not. A personal retreat allows us room to be honest with God about how imperfect we are, how disillusioned we are about our life and our inability to live holy and wholly this side of heaven.

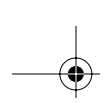
THE PERSONAL RETREAT

Sixteen years ago, when I first began taking personal retreats—setting aside a day or two to be alone with God—I ran to God’s arms for a day each month, fully aware of my flaws and sin. Each month I had to choose whether my problems with fatigue, emptiness, abandonment, balance, depression, anger, control, impotent Christianity and money would separate me from God and everyone I love, or lead me to God and to wholeness. As I continue to seek God in solitude, creativity and happiness, and the level of love in my relationship with God increase, so these subjects too are included.

The chapters in *Resting Place* allow us to unpack the baggage we haul around, using these issues as a starting point for our time with God, whether that is an overnight getaway or an afternoon alone in a quiet place. It is not necessary to read the chapters in order, but rather allow the Holy Spirit to highlight which subjects are important at this time to restore a resting heart.

A personal retreat is simply a concentrated and consecrated time with God. It is that resting place where we remove ourselves from the demands of our life and allow God to speak in an unhurried setting. Retreat centers scattered around North America work perfectly for the personal retreat, but a state park, a friend’s empty home or some other setting works well, as long as solitude is possible and distractions minimal.





I don't run errands or check off a to-do list on a personal retreat, but I use specific tools that open my heart to God's presence and hush my soul. However, retreats aren't about running away from the world. They prepare us to love and serve those around us. Eventually, as God took me deeper into times of solitude, he also led me into a new ministry involving writing and speaking.

FOR YOUR RETREAT

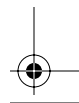
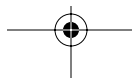
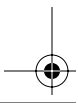
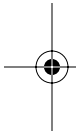
The chapters include everything you need for a day away with the Shepherd. In each chapter you'll find the following tools that help us hear God's voice over our own bleating. Choose those that work best for you; a personal retreat needn't include every discipline mentioned.

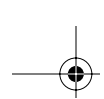
Quotes to Contemplate

Hebrews 1:1 tells of the "great cloud of witnesses," and not long after rushing into the world on my own, I realized how badly I needed some witnesses to rise up and speak to me, guiding my journey toward wholeness. The quotes in this section are from soul models, either contemporary or classic, who have journeyed well and honestly, offering a guiding hand to steady our steps.

Meditate on Scripture

Scripture either validates or negates others' words, and God promises that his Word will not return empty. Here we interact with God's Word as it pertains to the chapter. One means of being with God through Scripture is an ancient method called *lectio divina* ("sacred reading," pronounced either lex-ee-oh or lek-tee-oh). This four-part process includes slow, measured reading and hearing of a verse or brief passage. Wait for a word or phrase or image to rise up from the reading, then move to meditating. Hold that before God. This deepening place and prayer allow God to expand it within and help us apply it. The stillness of contemplation follows, a silence that comes from being in God's presence. Over time, the stages of *lectio divina* become more natural, and Scripture becomes living and active.





Journal Your Thoughts

For centuries people have journaled to demonstrate their struggles and God's abounding love, power and presence. Psalms, Jeremiah, Lamentations and other portions of Scripture read like journals, reminding us that "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways" (Proverbs 14:8). Regardless of journal type—handwritten or computer generated, spiral or hardback—the process becomes a type of detox, where we spill the contamination from living as imperfect people in an imperfect world; it serves as both confessional and prayer partner, offering accountability as we move through our days. This is not a legacy or keepsake to leave for others but a chronicle of our soul and God's work, and it charts our progress toward restoration.

Respond in Prayer

These include confession, praise, thanksgiving and petition, inviting God to search our hearts, cleanse us and set us free to praise and petition. Going boldly to his throne, we receive grace and find mercy.

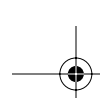
Consider Creation

"The heavens declare the glory of God," but I get caught up in the things of this world and lose sight of the beauty around me. But beauty speaks of God's creative love for me, and on a personal retreat I delight in time alone in nature, even if it is observed through a window rather than experienced through a walk. God's genius and joy bloom in nature, and when I notice, I feel his love for me in new ways.

Seek Stillness

Henri Nouwen defined discipline as "the effort to create some space in which God can act. . . . It means somewhere you're not occupied, and you're certainly not preoccupied. It means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned on or counted on." Stillness and silence allow us to hear God and our own hearts, rather than the thumping of life run on the fast track. Here we settle in, shove aside words and give God our





attention and our heart, inviting God to be present to us. Whether we hear direct words or he simply enfolds us in his love, this is a resting place that ultimately restores focus while renewing our hearts.

Reflection Questions

Soul friends ask me caring but often hard questions, beckoning me into the catharsis of change and growth. They are application questions, requiring that I take stock of who I am, where I have come from, who I will be and how I will be different. In lieu of a personal visit from a friend or spiritual director, the questions in this section allow us room to apply what God seems to be pressing into our hearts.

Hymn of Praise

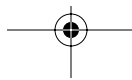
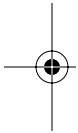
Music reaches otherwise inaccessible parts of our soul. Music frees our spirit to embrace God in new ways, opening us to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Hymns, a rich tradition of Christian worship, become an integral part of restoration, of finding God as our resting place. Whether you can carry a tune or sound like a wooden bell when you sing, whether you sing them or read them aloud meditatively, the lyrics' depths allow God to speak to the soul.

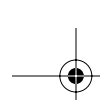
Examen of Conscience

Integrated in our personal retreat is the prayer of examen. This discipline is typically practiced at the end of a day, though it works at any time. Examen invites a twofold searching. Richard Foster calls these an "examen of consciousness," inviting God to search through our day with us to discover where we sensed or lost his presence; and an "examen of conscience," where we invite God to search our hearts for areas that need healing, purifying, cleansing.

FOR USE IN A SMALL GROUP

Resting Place is designed for individual and group use. Small groups may choose to slip away on retreat, using a chapter or two from the book as their guide. The tools in each chapter easily facilitate a small group meeting, allowing





guidance for interaction as well as group contemplation and group *lectio divina*. Simply select a few of the disciplines and let the Holy Spirit facilitate the time together after discussion. Prayer and silence are life-giving in a group setting, and the hymns can be read slowly aloud as a group or as a form of meditation.

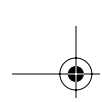
Resting Place is an invitation to journey through our fatigue to God's heart and into restoration. The book weaves together the issues that keep us from finding God as our resting place, the joys that emerge from that process and occasionally some thoughts from Psalm 23.

Is there a longing for deep rest buried under the chaos of daily life and work and play, the pressure of duties and commitments and oughts? Read, slowly, the words to Psalm 23.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside quiet waters.
he restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.





Breathe deeply. What happened in your chest when you read those words, easing into them? What happened in your soul as you pictured the scene of restoration, of rejoicing?

The One who led David beside still waters waits for us to put our hand in his and to follow the overgrown path to the water's edge.

What keeps us from taking his outstretched hand? What will we gain—what will we lose—if we reach for him and hold on?

Come. Take a walk with me. And we will see.

