



READY  
SET  
REST

The Practice of Prayer Retreating

VOL 1

alicia britt chole



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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955)

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.*

*We are quite naturally impatient in everything,  
to reach the end without delay.*

*We should like to skip the intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being on the way  
to something unknown,  
something new.*

*And yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through  
some stages of instability –  
and that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you;  
your ideas mature gradually – let them grow,  
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.*

*Don't try to force them on,  
as though you could be today what time  
(that is to say, grace and circumstances  
acting on your own good will)  
will make of you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say what this new spirit  
gradually forming within you will be.  
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing  
that his hand is leading you,  
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
in suspense, and incomplete.*





# CHAPTER 1

## THE WHY

“You’re going where???”

“ON A PRAYER RETREAT.”

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“With whom?”

“JESUS.”

(( ( S I L E N C E ) ) )

“What are the two of you going to do?”

“SPEND TIME TOGETHER.”

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“Aren’t you always together?”

“WELL, YES.”

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“Then why go on a prayer retreat?”

## YES. LET US START WITH THE “WHY?”

I am going to guess that over the last several hours you have thought about God, prayed to God, prayed for others, and lived toward a sincere hope that your life is making a difference in this world. I am going to further guess that over the last several days, you have interacted with Scripture, engaged in some form of study or devotion, invested time in a good book or an inspiring song, and participated in a faith community.

### So why add the discipline of prayer-retreating?

Because—in the words of Bernard of Clairvaux—there is a difference between living like a canal and living like a reservoir:

The man who is wise...will see his life more like a reservoir than a canal. The canal pours out as it receives. The reservoir retains the water until it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself... Today there are many in the Church who act like canals; the reservoirs are far too rare. So urgent is the love of those through whom the streams of heavenly teaching flow to us that they wish to pour it forth before they have been filled. They are more ready to speak than to listen, impatient to teach what they have not grasped, and full of presumption to govern others while they know not how to govern themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Spiritually, canal-only living results in an anxious, barely-enough-ness that over time becomes deeply wearisome.

We read to have something to quote.  
We study to have something to teach.  
We sleep to have strength to serve.  
What comes in immediately goes out:  
    wisdom,  
        energy,  
            hope,  
                love.

And when we do pause to “rest,” we often default instead to *escaping* (which we mistakenly refer to as *relaxing*) in a sincere attempt to refill our souls with something other than living water.

Reservoirs, in contrast, give from overflow.<sup>2</sup> Living water fills them so completely that they water everything near them with ease. Without a doubt, transitioning to reservoir living is strenuous. However, once disciplined intervention creates a reservoir, overflow is close to effortless.



Reflect on Clairvaux’s quote. Does your current spiritual life most resemble a canal or a reservoir?

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## CHAPTER 2

# SOLITARY PLACES

### CLEARLY, THIS IS HOW JESUS LIVED.

He emerged from thirty years of relative obscurity with a reservoir so overflowing that it watered souls near Him with every step He took and every word He uttered. Then, throughout His public ministry, His life was enriched by extended times alone with His Father.

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. (Matthew 14.13)

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1.35)

Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went

away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mark 6.31-32)

At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. (Luke 4.42)

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5.15-16)

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (Luke 6.12)

Jesus' example grants us permission (and perhaps even a directive) to retreat to solitary places for extended prayer. Think of prayer-retreating as a scheduled rain for your reservoir. Living water from heaven refills us as we enjoy Jesus' company on long walks or delight in Jesus' artistry in the canvas of the sky.

### Consider yourself officially invited:

To read a book that you have no plans of quoting.

To study a passage that you have no intention of preaching.

To sleep well and nap often because rest is a gift from God.

To allow living water to collect and rise and from the overflow offer to others

wisdom,

energy,

hope,

and love...

that is sustainable.



Does the thought of befriending solitary places of prayer fill you with anticipation? Stress? Joy? Procrastination? A desire to eat chocolate?

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## CHAPTER 3

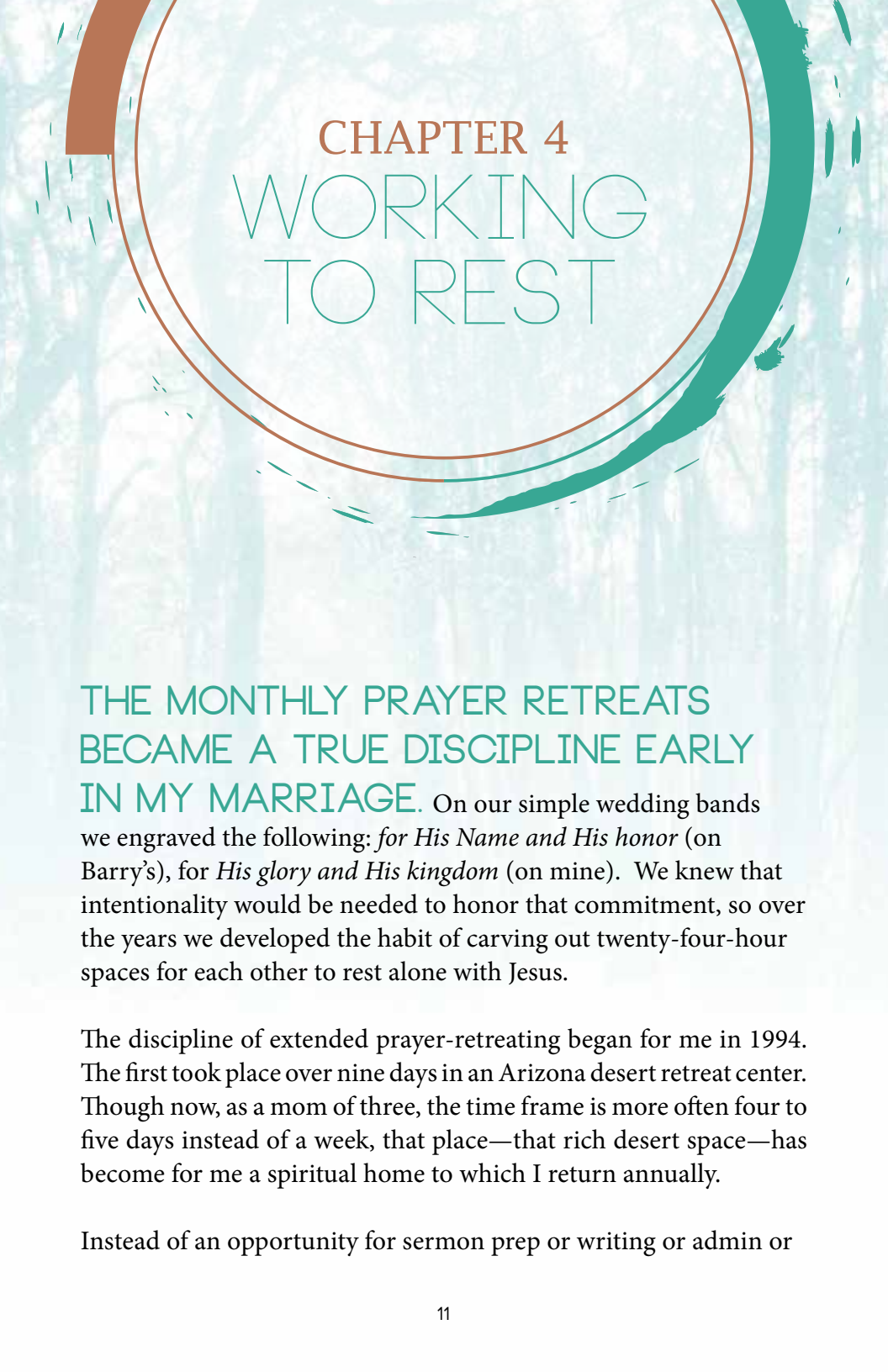
# A DAY A MONTH

THE REST OF THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS DEVOTED TO HELPING YOU EXPLORE AND/OR ENHANCE A RHYTHM OF REGULAR RETREATING.<sup>3</sup> What is offered in these

pages is simply an example from a life that has relished prayer-retreating for over twenty years. As someone who from the very beginning of new life in Christ has enjoyed rather longish devotions, the power of prayer-retreating took me somewhat by surprise.

I unsuspectingly encountered the concept in my twenties on the page of a small book written by a weighty pen. All the surrounding paragraphs faded as I became captivated by a simple string of words. Though less than a sentence, this phrase has proven to be more than enough for a lifetime.





## CHAPTER 4

# WORKING TO REST

### THE MONTHLY PRAYER RETREATS BECAME A TRUE DISCIPLINE EARLY IN MY MARRIAGE.

On our simple wedding bands we engraved the following: *for His Name and His honor* (on Barry's), for *His glory and His kingdom* (on mine). We knew that intentionality would be needed to honor that commitment, so over the years we developed the habit of carving out twenty-four-hour spaces for each other to rest alone with Jesus.

The discipline of extended prayer-retreating began for me in 1994. The first took place over nine days in an Arizona desert retreat center. Though now, as a mom of three, the time frame is more often four to five days instead of a week, that place—that rich desert space—has become for me a spiritual home to which I return annually.

Instead of an opportunity for sermon prep or writing or admin or



catch-up, I view these set-apart spaces like the expensive perfume poured out by the woman on Jesus' feet before His betrayal (Matthew 26:6–7). These retreats are love offerings: gifts with no strings attached. Neither to receive an answer nor to resolve a problem, the retreats are for whispering, “I love You.”

**Yes, it takes serious *work* to create space for *rest*.** There are schedules to manage and responsibilities to delegate and budgets to consider and “to-dos” to postpone or pass on or leave (gasp) undone. But without question, the work is worth it.

Barry and the kids agree that I return from prayer retreats with greater clarity, patience, and joy. Barry returns with a renewed perspective and the contentment that can only come from hearing Father God's affirmation, “This is my son, whom I love.” In other words, cultivating attentiveness to God's presence refreshes our reservoirs.

Your season and schedule may lead you to develop quarterly retreats and monthly Saturday afternoons or annual weekends and weekly Monday mornings, etc. Whatever their configuration, what makes these spaces rich is *intentionality* and *regularity*.

Plan for them.

Schedule them.

Guard them as you would any meeting with a king.



Write out a definition of rest. Then ask God to reveal any passivity toward this underestimated spiritual discipline.

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## CHAPTER 5

# HONEST BEGINNINGS

YOU MAY BE READY TO EMBARK  
ON YOUR RETREATING ADVENTURE  
YESTERDAY OR YOU MAY BE  
STRUGGLING WITH HESITATIONS.

Often the true hindrances to prayer-retreating are not the first ones that come to mind. Initially our realism may dismiss the whole prayer-retreating concept as impractical. After all, think of the plans that will have to be changed and the hidden (and not-so-hidden) costs of time away and the sheer inconvenience to ourselves and to others.

But since Jesus modeled a good number of habits that His culture deemed impractical, the initial “obviousness” of such objections may begin to lose a bit of their influence when we consider that the pursuit of health—not of ease—must guide the stewardship

of our spiritual lives.

Such an acknowledgment opens the way for us to face a few true hindrances to focused time away with God. As a spiritual mentor, I count it a breakthrough to hear someone say:

*Honestly, it's too painful to get still,  
which is why I keep moving.*

*I don't know what I'd do with space.*

*What if I don't feel anything?*

*What if I don't hear anything?*

*It'll just confirm my fear that I'm not  
close to God and God doesn't want to  
be close to me.*

Often the true  
hindrances  
to prayer-  
retreating are  
not the first  
ones that  
come to mind.

Though we could take these concerns one-by-one, consider their roots, measure their fruits, and apply Scripture to them, I am instead going to simply say, “Bravo. Honesty is a friend of intimacy. Pack up your *what-ifs* and bring them with you.”



List any “what ifs” you are bringing into your prayer-retreating adventure.

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## CHAPTER 6

# PREPARING THE WAY

MY DREAM IS THAT PRAYER-RETREATING BECOMES A REGULAR DISCIPLINE IN YOUR LIFE: A MONTHLY PAUSE THAT GROWS INTO A TREASURED “GIVEN” IN YOUR SCHEDULE.

**Learn from your friends.** Our next step is to invest in some action-inspiring research and planning. Via Twitter, Facebook, phone, or email, ask family and friends a few questions:

Has anyone out there taken a twenty-four-hour (or day-long) prayer retreat?

If so, please share with me any words of wisdom you've gleaned from your experience (principles, practices...what worked, what didn't, etc.)

Does anyone have suggestions for places to go for a retreat?

What one book (other than the Bible) would you bring on a retreat?



Record the highlights of your research below:

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**Get practical with Jesus.** What would it take for the two of you to experience a twenty-four-hour retreat? Look at your calendar together. Circle several dates that are possibilities over the next few months. Then, identify details that would need to be covered.

Who could pet sit?

What friend could fill in for you at church?

What meetings and deadlines do you need to postpone?

If you are a parent, who could help take care of your children?

If finances are a factor, what would it take to stay-and-pray at









## CHAPTER 7

# DATES AND SPACES

JESUS MADE HIS DISCIPLES GET INTO THE BOAT AND GO ON AHEAD OF HIM TO BETHSAIDA, WHILE HE DISMISSED THE CROWD. AFTER LEAVING THEM, HE WENT UP ON A MOUNTAINSIDE TO PRAY. (MARK 6:45-46)

The time has come to follow Jesus' model in Mark and give directions to those near us, dismiss the crowds around us, and go up on a mountainside to pray.

Thousands of years after Jesus' example, what practical steps can we take toward adopting Jesus' holy habit of solitary prayer retreats?

**Set a date.** Yes, even before you know what you will do on your

twenty-four-hour retreat, set aside time in your calendar. Mark it *booked*. Inform your team or friends or family. These spaces are *made*, not *born*. Something else will have to be postponed or cancelled, especially in the beginning. Though it sounds (and may initially feel) like a contradiction, whatever you placed on pause will actually benefit in the long term by your absence because you will emerge from the discipline of retreating more clear-minded, creative, and kind. Twenty-four hours is wonderful, but if an overnight seems too difficult, set aside a day (such as sunup to sundown) as a first step.

**Select a space.** Now that you have carved out time, make a reservation for your retreat. If overnight is not a possibility, consider an all-day retreat at a safe park, inspiring chapel, running trail, peaceful library, or art museum. (In other words, choose a quiet place that is not your normal hangout—for example, not your friends’ favorite café.) Call ahead to make sure the venue is open and not hosting a gala during your visit. For overnight retreats, consider the following:

## Monasteries, Convents, and Solitudes

Google *monastery + convent + your city, state* or ask a local Catholic church if there are any monasteries or solitudes in your area.

Catholic retreat centers often have simple guest rooms with a bed, chair, and desk. Many provide vegetarian meals and the opportunity to experience prayer time or vespers in a common chapel.

Solitudes are more private—often you will not see a soul—but they will be even quieter than monasteries, which may have other guests.

Most often, these options only request a free-will offering for your stay. Try to cover utilities and meals. If possible, also leave extra as a

gift for the ministry.

## A Bed & Breakfast

Search your area for B&Bs with THICK walls to ensure quietness. When I am considering this option, I call the owner, explain why I am coming, and ask whether he/she anticipates that day to be relatively quiet. Even recently I had an honest owner say, “Oh, we would love to have you come to our B&B, but that weekend may not be the best for your purpose. The other rooms are filled with a wedding party.” B&Bs provide an opportunity to rest in comfortable surroundings: fall asleep in a fabulous chair, take a long bath, or enjoy hot tea by a fireplace.

## A Friend’s House or a Hotel

Perhaps you have a friend with a cabin, a garage apartment, or a peaceful residence that is empty all day while the family is at work or school. If your friend is happy to give you the keys, be sure to leave their home cleaner than you found it and send a gift card or offering to cover utilities as a thank-you.

Hotels can also be a good option, depending on their noise levels and atmosphere. As with the B&B, ask the manager for a quiet room (away from the high school baseball team). Be sure to pray over your room as you begin your time, and devote the space to Jesus. Then be wise: unplug the TV and the phone, put away the travel magazines, and visually make the space conducive for prayer and reflection.

## Rest Inn Rivendell

Bring some friends with you on a journey to our prayer retreat home in Branson, Missouri, where every room has been customized for prayer, reflection, and rest! Groups can reserve the home for personal





## CHAPTER 8

# PACKING TO GO

**YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE DATE AND MADE YOUR RESERVATION.** Now, let us consider how to pack light—both physically and emotionally.

**Pack.** Bring your favorite Bible, plenty of fabulous pens, pencils, and highlighters, a means of searching the Bible (concordance or e-Bible), and a journal.

Carefully select a few books that you feel will nourish your spirit. My favorites are Lawrence and Laubach's *Practicing His Presence*, Nouwen's *In the Name of Jesus*, and Foster's *Devotional Classics*.

Please consider unplugging and making this retreat a no-media, low-tech zone. If at all possible, fast from texting, TV, and social

media and only use your phone for urgent calls.

Set up an auto-respond for email and alert your closest circle of friends that you need their help guarding this space. Personally contact those who might be truly traumatized by your lack of instant availability and give them the number where you are staying in case of an emergency.

Give thought to your retreat surroundings. What would be relaxing for you? Consider bringing a guitar or hiking boots, some painting supplies or a fishing pole, quality teas or specialty coffee. Some may ask, *How about bringing a good movie?* I really enjoy a good movie, but when I am preparing for a retreat I ask myself, “Can I truly talk with God and listen for His voice while doing \_\_\_\_\_?” If the answer is *no*, I leave it at home.

Regarding music, if it tends to be a filler for you (i.e., background noise) you may want to consider fasting third-party tunes (music made by others as opposed to music you create in the moment with your voice or by playing an instrument) for your first few retreats, to help you discover the power of silence. I love to worship, and decades into the discipline of monthly prayer retreats, silence is still my favorite song.

You may want to bring ear plugs, a sound machine, or your pillow if you are a light or sensitive sleeper and, of course, all the stuff your mom always reminded you about (sunscreen, bug repellent, medicines, toothpaste, walking shoes).



What items would you like to bring on your retreat?  
What do you think you should leave at home?







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## CHAPTER 9

# START WITH "WITH"

**START YOUR RETREAT THE MOMENT YOU LEAVE FOR IT.** God is with you. It is okay to picture Jesus ready for a road trip in the passenger seat. He is more excited than even you are to have extended time alone together. Talk with Him. Tell Him if you feel awkward or frivolous or distracted or giddy or numb.

**Ready, Set, Rest!** “With” is the key word for your entire retreat. What you *do* during your retreat—reading, walking, writing, or singing—is not nearly as important as Whom you do it *with*. You are not alone. Think *with* Jesus instead of just thinking *about* Him. For example:

(while packing) “You know that I’ve felt drawn to this book for two years. I’m so glad to read it with You. Draw my

attention to anything You want to emphasize for my life.”

(on your drive) “Jesus, so glad we missed rush hour traffic so we can have more time together on the trail. I know that You’ve obviously seen all the paths at the retreat center, but I’d like to take the longest one because I’ve never been on it before. Is there anything You’d like to show me?”

(relaxing with a hobby) “Oh Jesus, I forgot how much I love to paint with You! Guide my mind as we paint together. Remind me of Your attributes as my Original Artist.”

Talk with Jesus as though you could see Him. We spend so much time alone in our heads, talking with ourselves. On retreat, think *with* Him.

Together, check into your guest house or B&B or hotel. Unpack and get comfortable. You have entered an expanse of twenty-four hours alone with God. Glorious! And...now what???

In time, we all establish a rhythm for these sacred spaces of prayer. Below are a few suggestions from my personal retreats to serve as a possible starting template.

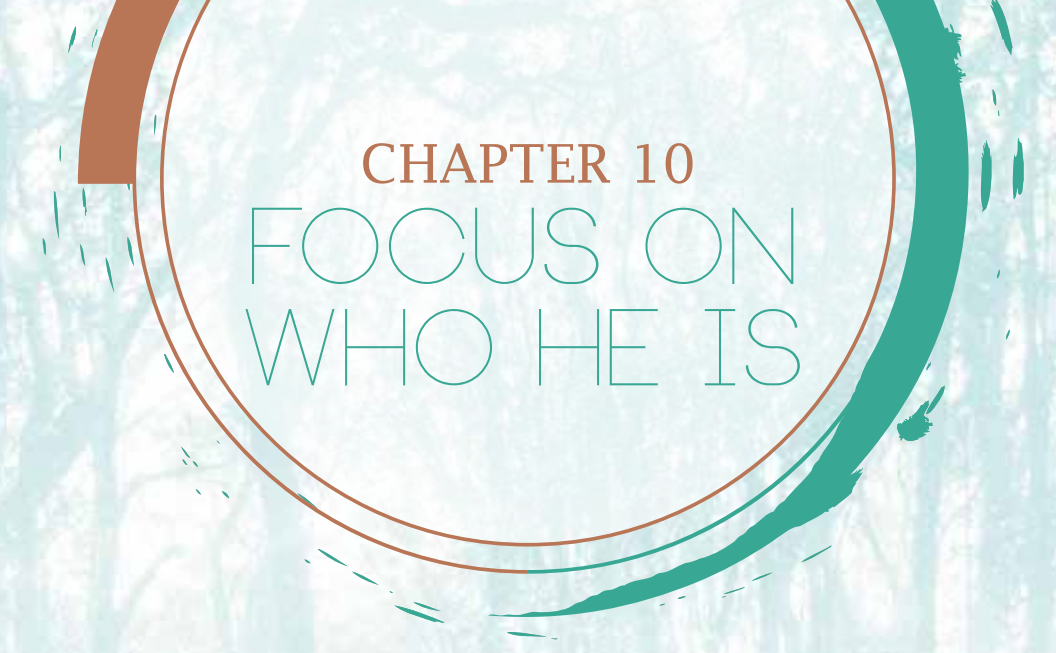
**Submit your mind to God.** Following Jesus with our feet is often easier than following Him with our minds. Forgive me if this non-athletic girl uses the phrase clumsily, but from the first moments forward we need to get our head in the game.

Since breath is among the first gifts of the Spirit we all received, I begin prayer retreats by whispering, “I love You” to Jesus and taking deep, celebratory breaths—each of which reminds me of God’s faithful presence. This physical act decelerates my mental





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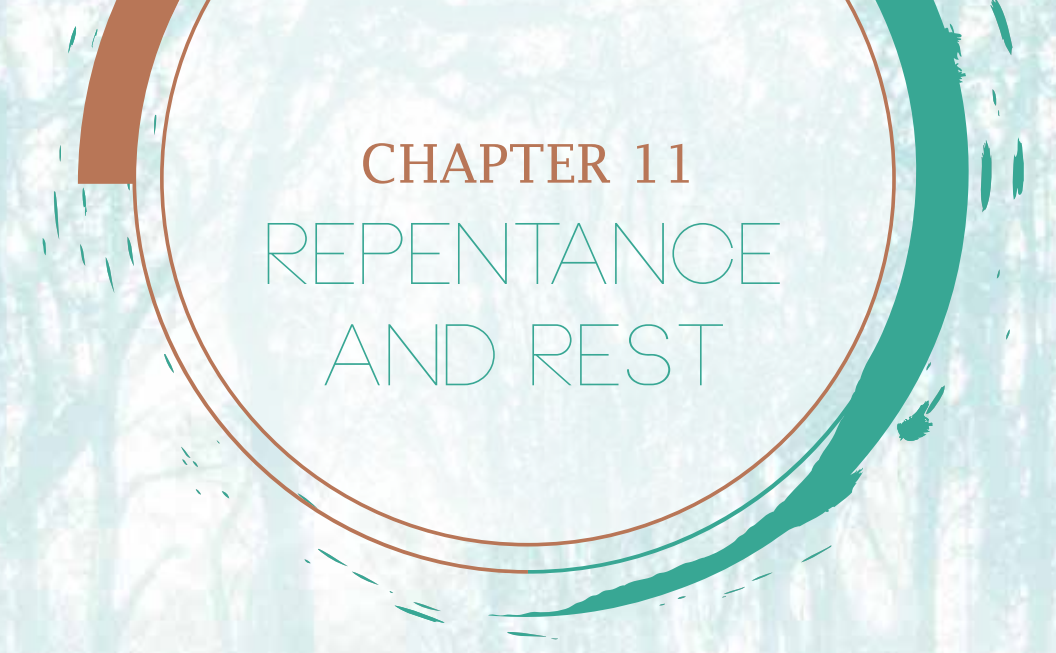
## CHAPTER 10

# FOCUS ON WHO HE IS

**DEDICATE THE NEXT BLOCK OF TIME TO WORSHIPPING GOD VIA SCRIPTURE-PRAYING.** As I am by nature a reflective soul, journaling or reading would be a more intuitive starting point for me. But over the years, I have found it immeasurably healthier to begin thinking about who God is rather than thinking about who I am or what my current challenge, hurts, or questions happen to be. For the first portion of your retreat, I encourage you to shelve the burning questions. As one of my mentors, Sister Rebekka, once said to me, “Seek His Presence, not His provision.”

**Declare God’s attributes.** Occasionally I declare God’s attributes by singing rich hymns like *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, but more often I worship through Scripture by reading truths about God straight from the Word. This is not a pre-planned script. I simply open the Bible and use my voice to declare God’s attributes aloud.





## CHAPTER 11

# REPENTANCE AND REST

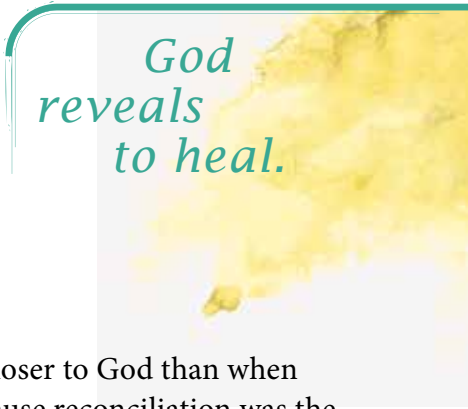
**FOCUSING ON GOD'S CHARACTER ALMOST ALWAYS GUIDES ME SAFELY INTO REPENTANCE.** Worship is a purging force. As we mentally magnify God, the revelation we receive of personal sin is clean, i.e. condemnation-free, because it is overshadowed by God's goodness and grace instead of initiated by self-perfectionism or some fear-inspired "witch hunt" for error.

**Joyfully embrace repentance.** When I become aware of sin, I confess it to God quietly. I may kneel or bow my head and ask for God's forgiveness. Since God reveals to heal, I thank Him for loving me enough to convict me of sin. After waiting in silence for a few minutes to listen and journal, I continue with worship. With each cycle of worship and repentance, my heart becomes lighter and a deep joy begins to swell in my soul.



Consider these words from Dr. Basilea Schlink:

It is almost incomprehensible how much new, divine life is born out of contrition and repentance. All true joy, all power and authority in our ministry in the Kingdom of God depends upon whether we live in the blessed state of repentance, weeping over our sins and humbling ourselves before God and man as we admit our guilt. Therefore, let us give everything for this one gift of grace.<sup>5</sup>



*God  
reveals  
to heal.*

Dr. Schlink taught that we are never closer to God than when we are asking for His forgiveness, because reconciliation was the cause for which Jesus surrendered to crucifixion. These moments of repentance are an integral part of—not a departure from—our focus upon worship.

**Rest.** Scripture-praising eventually leads me into a peace-filled pause. Then, I will often take a nap. I put in my ear plugs, snuggle under a blanket, and sleep as long as I can. Fabulous! As I fall asleep I think of Father God's eyes watching over me. These times of rest are holy too. They refresh body and spirit.

I have spent entire retreats simply cycling from worship through repentance into rest. Depending on wiring, some may feel the need to emerge from a retreat with something tangible like an answer to a burning prayer or a new teaching. Personally, solutions and productivity are not what I hope for from a prayer retreat. Answers cannot fill a reservoir. God's Presence can.







## CHAPTER 12

# WAITING

**WAIT.** Worship, repentance, rest...and then for me comes a time of *waiting*, which is an internal posture of attentiveness. We wait upon God because He is worthy of waiting for—whether or not He ever speaks.

The challenge in waiting is, not surprisingly, disciplining our minds. For almost everyone, this is the most strenuous—and eventually the most rewarding—aspect of retreating. Getting physically and mentally still can seem an unreachable goal, especially for highly productive souls, who can easily conclude: “It’s impossible. My personality is just not cut out for this. My mind is everywhere except where it’s supposed to be!” Without question, stillness will be easier for some than others. However, if disciplining the mind is difficult, retreating is all the more essential.

Brother Lawrence offered this counsel:

If your mind wanders or withdraws from the Lord, do not be upset or disquieted. Trouble and disquiet serve more to distract the mind further from God than to recollect it. The will must bring the mind back in tranquility.<sup>6</sup>

So what do we do, then, when our minds wander off for the tenth time in one minute? Smile. Thank God for grace and turn your thoughts back toward Him. This may be frustrating to hear, but from my perspective as a spiritual mentor, if you spend all twenty-four hours herding your thoughts back to Jesus thousands of times, your retreat has been an outrageous success.

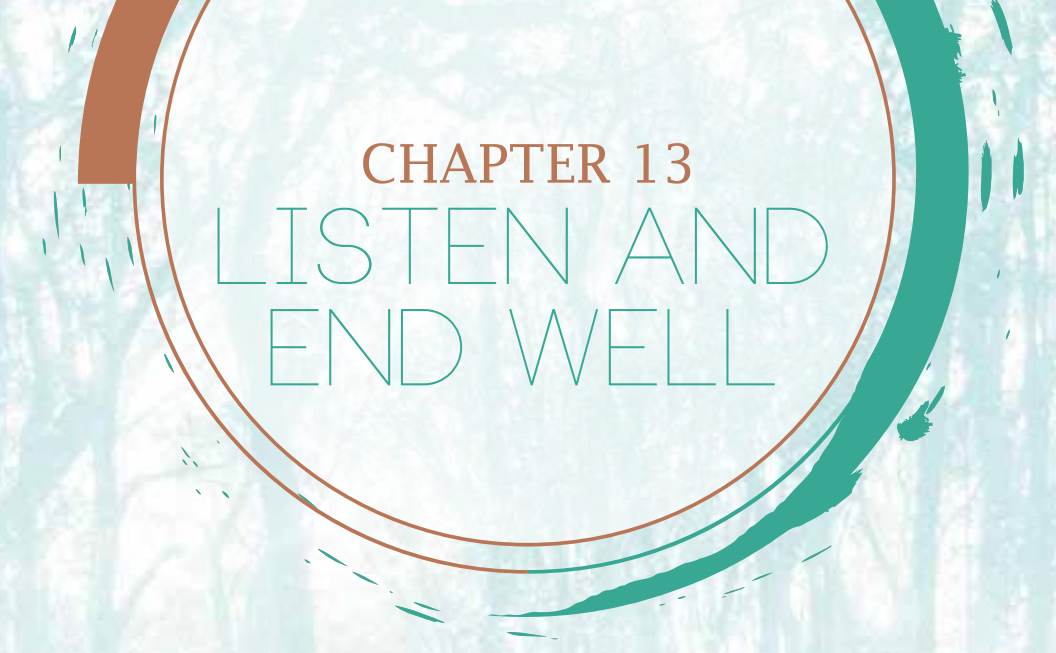
Toward the goal of disciplining my mind, I personally begin times of waiting by meditating upon God's Word. Wherever I am in my Scripture reading, I turn to that verse and use my God-given imagination to picture and process the scene or story *with* Jesus.

For example, at the time of writing this little eBook, I am in Mark 16.6 where the angel says to the women, "Don't be alarmed." *With* Jesus, I picture the women entering the tomb and finding Jesus missing and an angel present. *With* Jesus, I consider His loving provision for the women of a messenger to offer truth they could not yet grasp. After a few minutes of meditation, my mind-motion begins to slow as I savor specific aspects of God's character from Scripture: God is attentive, prepared, and well able to trump my realism with His miracles.

In that settled space, I simply whisper, "I am here to wait upon You, Lord. I love You." Think of spiritual waiting like a parent lovingly soaking up each feature of their baby's face and fingers and toes. They gaze at their child not because they are hoping that the babe will say







## CHAPTER 13

# LISTEN AND END WELL

**AS I WAIT, I LISTEN.** In the stillness, my heart begins to lean toward situations and I sense God inviting me to partner with Him in intercession.

**Listen and Intercede.** My prayer list is with me at all times, but when on a retreat I wait for God to initiate the intercessory direction. God knows my needs, which comforts me as I leave the prayer requests I deem most pressing at the foot of the Cross and follow Him in prayer.

Responding to God's lead, I begin to intercede, calling upon Scripture to pray over issues and areas (which is why a searchable Bible is handy on retreats). I may write my prayers in a journal or sense specific points of action to implement when I return home. This intercessory emphasis can last a few minutes or fill several hours.



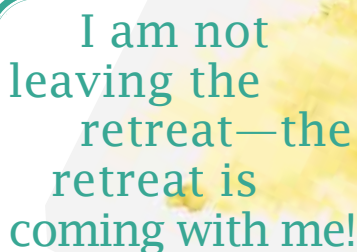
Whatever the time frame, there is something perspective-inducing in asking God to establish my prayer priorities.

**End well.** This journey through worship, repentance, rest, waiting, listening, and intercession normally takes me to the end of my twenty-four hours. Often interspersed in these steps, Jesus and I will paint together (He is much better at it than I am), take walks, read a good book, or write a new song.

The last hour of a prayer retreat is especially precious for me. I savor these closing minutes with quietness and a posture of love toward Jesus. I may take a walk with Him or kneel at a favorite place of prayer. Even as I pack and transition, I work to keep the retreat mindset: I am not leaving the retreat—the retreat is coming with me! The quietness, the trust, the forgiveness, and the re-centered peace do not stay behind as I close a door and drive home.

Like honeysuckle on a windy day, the retreat lingers. Barry always notices increased peace and rest in me when I return. I taste the retreat's fruit in clarity of thought and a tangible decrease in worry. Years ago, my then-four-year-old daughter looked at my retreat-rested face and asked when she could begin taking prayer retreats!

When I first started the discipline of prayer-retreating, I thought of it as a luxury. Now, this Jesus-inspired habit of intentionally investing in extended time for prayer is a guarded given in my journey. Imagine, oh, imagine, how the future could be impacted by a generation of leaders whose public presence was anchored in spiritual rest!

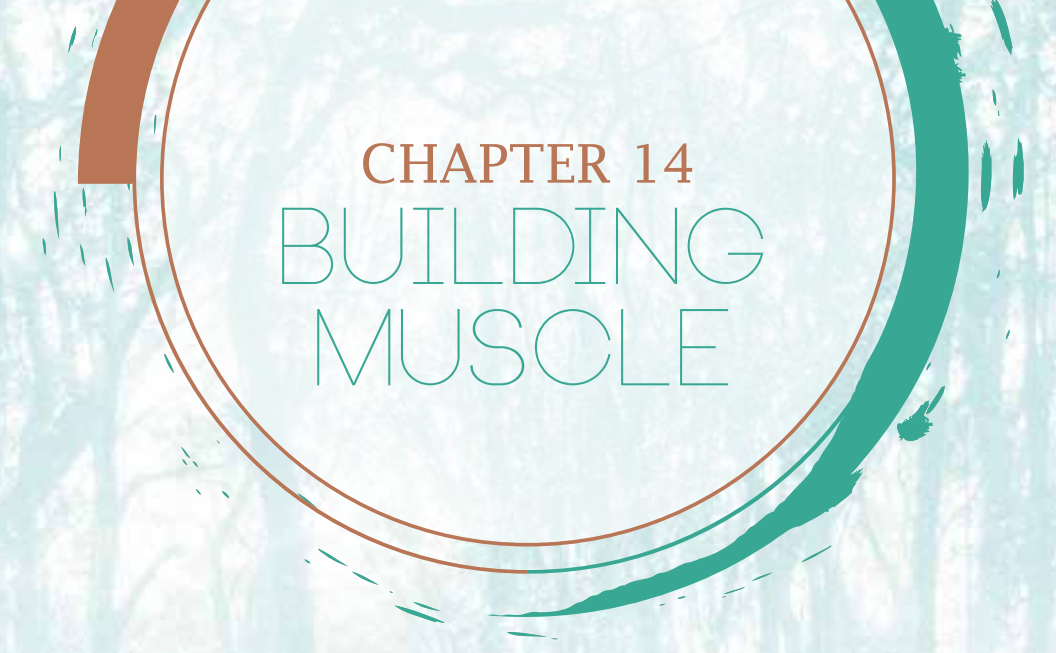


I am not  
leaving the  
retreat—the  
retreat is  
coming with me!





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## CHAPTER 14

# BUILDING MUSCLE

**A FEW TIMES EACH YEAR, I TAKE LONGER RETREATS.** Normally in January, I go on a forty-eight-hour retreat devoted to reviewing and evaluating the previous year's journals and personal inventory,<sup>7</sup> and listening for God's direction for the year ahead. Also, each year I go to a desert prayer center in Arizona for a five-day retreat in which I follow the same rhythm of worship, repentance, rest, listening, and intercession.

Regardless of length, since the purpose of each retreat is to gaze upon and rest in God, I try to be attentive to the circumstances that aid me toward that end. For example, once I found a good retreat location, returning to that same place month after month relieved me of the distraction of becoming accustomed to a new environment. However, exploring new places each retreat may be energizing for you. Whether always embarking on a new adventure or returning each time to

the same sacred ground, the more retreating becomes a regular discipline, the easier it becomes to enter into each retreat.

Known or hidden, we all carry a set of expectations into our retreats and—since expectations are powerful things—wisdom invites us to acknowledge and evaluate them. What expectations are reasonable when we are establishing the discipline of prayer-retreating?

Consider with me a different type of discipline, that of establishing an exercise routine. Joining a gym is a good and relatively easy beginning. Actually replacing pounds with muscle is mentally and physically strenuous. Think back over the last time you or a good friend began a workout effort.

How did you feel—emotionally and physically—after your first workout? After your second workout?

How long did it take for you to be able to see “results”?

What thoughts strengthened you to stay committed to the process?

Or, conversely, what thoughts caused you to give up on the process?

In what ways might developing the discipline of exercise parallel the discipline of prayer-retreating?



Journal your reflections below:

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Your first prayer retreat may be filled with revelation, tears, and triumphs, or silence, awkwardness, and struggling. You may wonder if anything was accomplished or if you were “doing it right.” You may be frustrated that your mind never seemed to slow down or you may be unsure that you could have “heard God” even if He did speak.

It is okay.

Many, if not most, have experienced these exact emotions.

The holy habit of prayer-retreating becomes easier and richer with time. If you find yourself wrestling, please know this: you just gave a no-strings-attached love offering to Jesus.

He is pleased.

REALLY pleased.

So relax.

Let God measure the fruit.

And make plans for your next retreat.





## CHAPTER 15

# GOD'S DELIGHT

IN CLOSING, I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT GOD'S DELIGHT. In short, I believe that His delight is a miraculous constant in our lives and that once embraced, God's delight transforms our perspectives. Below is an excerpt from one of my doctoral class response papers in which the insightful professors asked us to explain *when* we felt God delighted in us.<sup>8</sup>

My Father God always delights in me. There are consistent contexts within which my *sense* of His delight approaches an intensely tangible bliss: deep meditation upon Scripture, holding my children, writing with Him (which is for me an extension of spiritual listening), and resting in my husband's embrace. However, though my senses occasionally confirm



the reality of God's delight, they never create the reality of God's delight. My Father dances over me with joy, smiles over me always, and continually warms me with His love. I am His beloved and because He created me and redeemed me, His delight in me is a constant theological and practical reality for me.

Perhaps one of the most wondrous miracles of life is this consistent delight of God in us. Personally, parenting is one of relationships I can draw upon to begin to understand such love. My delight in my children does not rise and fall based upon their obedience. Certainly my heart aches as I accompany them through some of their less-than-best decisions, but my delight is connecting to their existence and our relationship, not to their behavior.

They are mine through the miracle of adoption. When my lips touch their sweet cheeks, I feel like I am touching heaven. And that delight has been tested. Each of them has experienced a season of inner healing where they struggled with questions of origin and often heaped their pain upon Bear and me to see how sturdy our love was. Though bruised in heart by those seasons, my delight in them remained even. I am a poor shadow of God's divine parenting, so I can only imagine how much more steady and certain His delight is in me as both His creation and His daughter.

*The Lord your God is with you.  
The Lord is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you.  
(Zephaniah 3.17)*



In prayer, ask God to align your self-perception with His constant delight.

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.



## Q+A WITH ALICIA

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**Q:** How on earth is your name pronounced???

**A:** uh-lee-shuh brit show-lee

**Q:** What are a few of your favorite things?

**A:** My kids' cuddles (if bottled, they could further the cause of world peace)

Playing cards by the fireplace with my handsome husband

Thunderstorms

Earthy, organic teas (some twigs and leaves will do in a pinch)

Living where I can see the stars at night

Pianos in empty rooms

Serious hot sauces (I can eat anything if you give me a jalapeño.)

**Q:** How about a few of your favorite quotes?

**A:** Oswald Chambers: "My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace nor even blessing, but Himself, my God."<sup>9</sup>

A.W. Tozer: "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him."<sup>10</sup>

Henri Nouwen: "Did growing older bring me closer to Jesus?"<sup>11</sup>

Brother Lawrence: "Do every little thing for the love of God."<sup>12</sup>

**Q:** How long has prayer retreating been a discipline for you?

**A:** For over twenty years.

**Q:** Does your husband take retreats too?

**A:** Yes. In the beginning of our marriage we made a commitment to guard each other's First Love. Championing each other's retreats helps us keep that commitment.

**Q:** Do you ever have to miss a month of retreating?

**A:** Oh, yes. When that happens, my husband and I champion finding extra time the next month for each other to take an extended retreat.

**Q:** Do you speak?

**A:** Yes. In fact, the speaking preceded the writing. Visit my website ([www.aliciachole.com](http://www.aliciachole.com)) to explore topics, video clips, and more information, or [click here](#) to download a press kit.

**Q:** Do you provide long-distance spiritual direction?

**A:** Yes! Each year, I have the joy of walking with women leaders from around the planet in a Mentoring Encounter. My husband does the same with men. Our non-profit is graced with several excellent spiritual mentors. For more information, visit [www.leadershipii.com](http://www.leadershipii.com).

**Q:** Are you available to lead retreats with this material?

**A:** Yes. Our mentoring ministry conducts Guided Prayer Retreats at our prayer retreat home in Branson, Missouri, and as a speaker I facilitate reflective retreats for leaders a few times each year. For more information visit, please visit [www.leadershipii.com](http://www.leadershipii.com) or [grow@leadershipii.com](mailto:grow@leadershipii.com).

**Q:** In addition to the books you've already mentioned, are there any other books you recommend for prayer retreats?

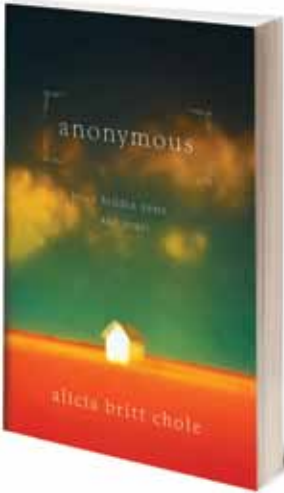
**A:** Yes: Calhoun's *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Buchanan's *The Rest of God*, Willard's *Renovation of the Heart*, and Ashbrook's *Mansions of the Heart*.

**Q:** Can I forward or print copies of Volume 1 to share with friends?

**A:** Sorry, no. But you can invite friends to download the ebook or purchase printed copies at [www.aliciachole.com](http://www.aliciachole.com). If you would like to place a bulk order of RSR: Volume 1 booklets, please phone our office at 417.425.7775.

**Q:** If I liked *Ready, Set, Rest*, which other of your resources might you recommend that I read next?

**A:** Because of the practical nature of the *Ready, Set, Rest* series, my first suggestion would be *The 7th Year* 52-week spiritual formation journey ([www.the7thyear.com](http://www.the7thyear.com)). However, of the books I've had the joy of writing, my favorite is still *Anonymous: Jesus' Hidden Years and Yours*. Here are a few nice words from nice people about *Anonymous*:



*Anonymous sits next to C.S. Lewis on my shelf.*

—Jennifer Rothschild, [author and speaker](#)

*Whether you are a pastor or lay member, seasoned saint or initial convert, you will find yourself being lovingly corrected and encouraged through *Anonymous*. It is a must-read for anyone who takes the path to maturity in Christ seriously.*

—Dr. Claude R. Alexander, Jr.,

Senior Pastor of The Park, Charlotte, NC

and author of [Necessary Christianity](#)

*This book will truly lift your spirits and nurse your heart to health through any season where you feel overlooked, forgotten or you are walking through a silent season. Be encouraged.*

*Anonymous is for you.*

—Darlene Zschech, [singer, songwriter, and author](#)

*Anonymous bristles with the wisdom that instructs us to treasure times of solitude in the desert places and conditions of life, since pain does not define us – it refines us.*

—Dr. Kenneth D. Boa, [scholar and author of \*Conformed to His Image\*](#)

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was a French Abbot who wrote on the love of God. This quote is from “Sermon 18: The Two Operations of the Holy Spirit” in *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which is in the public domain.

<sup>2</sup>My apologies to all the brilliant minds who are rightfully thinking, “From an engineering perspective, canals and reservoirs are both needful and interdependent.” Indeed. You’re correct. And...I tried to take the illustration there but Bernard’s main point was lost in the process. (Work with me.)

<sup>3</sup>Some of the content in Chapters 3–14 was excerpted and adapted from Weeks 46, 47, and 48 of a 52-week spiritual formation journey I wrote called *The7thYear*. [www.the7thyear.com](http://www.the7thyear.com)

<sup>4</sup>Henri Nouwen, as quoted in [\*Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups\*](#) (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993), 96.

<sup>5</sup>Basilea Schlink, [\*Repentance: The Joy-Filled Life\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 53.

<sup>6</sup>Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach, [\*Practicing His Presence\*](#) (Auburn, ME: Christian Books, 1973), 82.

<sup>7</sup>The Personal Inventory is a tool I use to add intentionality to spiritual formation. Guidance for crafting a PI can be found in Weeks 7–9 of *The7thYear* at: [www.the7thyear.com](http://www.the7thyear.com).

<sup>8</sup>The class was taught by Dr. Chuck Connery and Paula Gamble for the [\*D.Min. in Leadership and Spiritual Formation\*](#) at George Fox University.

<sup>9</sup>Oswald Chambers, [\*My Utmost for His Highest\*](#) (Uhlrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Co., 1963), 194.

<sup>10</sup>A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God*, Harpercollins Gift Ed. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 5.

<sup>11</sup>Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 10.

<sup>12</sup>Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Springdale, PA.: Whitaker House, 1982), 81.

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Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31)



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