

A serene sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that filters through the clouds and reflects on the water's surface. In the foreground, a wooden dock extends into the water, and a black metal chair sits on the right side of the dock. The background is filled with the silhouettes of trees and foliage, partially obscured by the bright light of the setting sun.

Rhythms of Restoration

PRACTICING GRIEF ON THE PATH OF GRACE

A FIELD GUIDE OF MINI-RETREATS
FOR THE HURTING AND THOSE WHO HELP THEM

LAURA BABER BEACH

Rhythms of Restoration

PRACTICING GRIEF ON THE PATH OF GRACE

**A FIELD GUIDE OF MINI-RETREATS
FOR THE HURTING AND THOSE WHO HELP THEM**

LAURA BABER BEACH

Copyright 2015 by Laura Baber Beach

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Unless otherwise noted Scripture quotations are taken from
THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission.
All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version/Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.—Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, c 1989. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked AMP are taken from the Amplified Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked THE MESSAGE are taken from *The Message* Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Printed in the United States of America

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-62824-168-6
Mobi ISBN: 978-1-62824-169-3
ePub ISBN: 978-1-62824-170-9
uPDF ISBN: 978-1-62824-171-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015937005

Cover design by Nikabrik
Page design by PerfecType, Nashville, Tennessee

SEEDBED PUBLISHING
Franklin, Tennessee
seedbed.com
Sow for a Great Awakening

To those whose suffering has not found its voice.



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| <i>Preface</i> | ix |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | xiii |
| <i>Introduction: Struggling with the Tide of Grief</i> | xv |
| | |
| I. DENIAL | 3 |
| Running from Rest | 5 |
| Finding the Aha Moments | 8 |
| Facing Our Fears | 11 |
| Taking Control | 13 |
| Clearing the Clutter | 16 |
| Softening the Soil of Our Souls | 19 |
| | |
| 2. PAIN AND SHAME | 23 |
| Responding to Shame | 25 |
| The Land of Deep Darkness | 28 |
| When Suffering Is Intense | 31 |
| When Pain Repeats | 33 |
| Holiday Longings | 36 |
| | |
| 3. ANGER | 39 |
| Praying Through Anger | 41 |
| Joy Is Stolen | 44 |
| Frustrating Relationships | 47 |
| The Broken Heart of Betrayal | 49 |
| | |
| 4. LONELINESS AND DESPAIR | 53 |
| Pervasive Loneliness | 55 |
| Isolation of Suffering and Shame | 58 |
| When Others Reject Us | 61 |
| Overwhelmed | 63 |
| Feeling Inadequate | 66 |
| The Jewel in the Wilderness | 69 |
| Denying Hope | 72 |

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Potential for Deliverance | 74 |
| Waiting for the Fire | 76 |
| 5. RESTORATION | 79 |
| When You Feel You've Failed | 81 |
| Showered with Seeds of Generosity | 83 |
| Breakfast with Jesus | 85 |
| Unconditional Love | 88 |
| Starting Anew | 90 |
| Love Over Chaos | 93 |
| Rediscovering Hope | 95 |
| The Power of Hope | 98 |
| Rebuilding | 101 |
| Celebrating the Rain after Drought | 103 |
| Celebrate with God | 105 |
| <i>Appendix A: Settle—Enter into the Quiet</i> | 107 |
| <i>Appendix B: Guided Prayer for a Service of Death and Resurrection</i> | 109 |
| <i>Appendix C: Guided Lord's Prayer</i> | 111 |

PREFACE

On the Sabbath, we left the city and went down along the river where we had heard there was to be a prayer meeting. We took our place with the women who had gathered there and talked with them. One woman, Lydia, was from Thyatira and a dealer in expensive textiles, known to be a God-fearing woman. As she listened with intensity to what was being said, the Master gave her a trusting heart—and she believed!

After she was baptized, along with everyone in her household, she said in a surge of hospitality, “If you’re confident that I’m in this with you and believe in the Master truly, come home with me and be my guests.” We hesitated but she wouldn’t take no for an answer.
—Acts 16:13–15 (THE MESSAGE)

It was on a day of Sabbath rest that Lydia, a successful God-worshipping businesswoman, gathered with others to pray. They met Paul by the life-giving water of a river and Lydia heard the gospel message. This fresh new word of God’s love through Christ transformed her so much that she radically opened her life and home to others. She was tenacious in her hospitality and would not take no for an answer.

People like Lydia were a significant reason that the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire in early Christianity. They opened their lives and resources in a way that was countercultural. They undergirded new ministries of the church with resources, space, time, and talents. Others, seeing how they lived sacrificially, generously, and without class distinctions, were drawn to the faith in vast numbers. Compassion, healing, ministry to the least, and radical hospitality were trademarks of the way these early Christians lived. It changed the world.

The ministry of Equipping Lydia seeks to provide Sabbath experiences of prayer that will help those who love God to hear the gospel message. Through spiritual direction, retreats, and the disciplining

nurture of leaders, we gather at the river to pray and hear the gospel afresh. We are poised like the women of Lydia's day to open our talents, connections, homes, and lives to sharing the love of God through Christ. We seek to replicate the Acts 16 experience of Lydia for Christians who need to meet Christ in a fresh, restorative way.

CONNECTION TO ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

In 1999, I visited Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS). I sat in on a class taught by Dr. Catherine Stonehouse, went to a chapel, and knew ATS was the seminary I needed to attend. I had been trained as a spiritual director and was pursuing ordination as a deacon in the United Methodist Church.

I graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary in 2007 with a master of divinity degree and had done much of my ATS coursework online before arriving on the Kentucky campus in 2006 to complete the final graduation requirements. Almost immediately, people began asking for spiritual direction appointments. I responded to this floodgate of need and began meeting with women on the ATS campus and in Lexington. Each month the number increased. By my second year in Kentucky, I had more than one hundred eighty spiritual direction sessions.

While sitting in an ATS class on Jeremiah taught by Dr. Lawson Stone, I experienced the presence of God and an impartation of wisdom. The name "Equipping Lydia" and the vision for the ministry poured through from my heart to my notepad as Dr. Stone taught. I wrote as fast as I could and then gathered a group of prayer midwives to test these words and discern whether this was a work of the Spirit. These women prayed regularly and the ministry began to take shape.

Asbury students, spouses, and alumni have continued to pour through Equipping Lydia in a steady stream. In 2011, Dr. Marilyn Elliott began a two-year term on the Equipping Lydia board of directors. Focused prayer began to find an office space. During this time, the conversation began regarding the Center for Soul Care in the seminary's office of Community Formation.

In July 2013, Equipping Lydia and ATS signed a memorandum of understanding that allowed Equipping Lydia to do its work of spiritual formation through spiritual direction and retreats leadership within the Center for Soul Care. This relationship has borne much fruit. Equipping Lydia has been able to offer training, spiritual direction,

formation groups, and retreats to the ATS family and larger community. Interestingly, the Equipping Lydia office within the Center for Soul Care is located on the floor just under the classroom where Dr. Stone held the Jeremiah course where the vision for the ministry manifested.

WHY THE EMPHASIS ON GRIEF?

Many who come through Equipping Lydia are those who do not have a spiritual home. They are often gifted in intercession, prophetic discernment, healing gifts, or are artists, anointed by God with creative talents. These gifts have regularly been rejected, excluded, abused, undervalued, or even ridiculed in their faith communities. These dear ones are often isolated and become vulnerable financially, relationally, or spiritually because they are not connected with the body of Christ in a healthy way. Some without spiritual homes are even church leaders who have been rejected or isolated and experienced significant trauma from the churches where they have served. We also have seen many whose spouses or families do not support and sometimes even persecute them for their faith. They feel they must pray or worship in secret.

We consider these vulnerable and exiled individuals to be modern spiritual widows. They have been overlooked and neglected. Some have left organized religion, but long for a safe place to reconnect with the community of faith. Equipping Lydia is a ministry that seeks to offer these dear ones a safe place to be fed and cared for spiritually. We help them find restoration and renewal with Christ and His followers that provide a healing bridge back into community.

LIVING AT THE PRECIPICE

Christians live at a place of precipice. As followers of Christ, we bear the light of Christ within us and we are meant to shine that light in the darkness. We stand on the edge and press into the darkness with the light of Christ's love. As we lean into that dark space, we are exposed to suffering. This is a painful vantage point. It is traumatic for even the strongest among us.

So what do we do with the suffering we see and experience in this place of light-bearing? I choose to grieve as an intentional rhythm in my life. I always know I need to practice this rhythm of grieving when I am critical, frustrated, or cynical (just about daily!). I regularly invite

PREFACE

the Holy Spirit to guide me; I let Jesus Christ take me; and I go to God and tell of all I have seen that is painful or simply not right. I weep and wail. I write. I draw and paint. I take long walks. I garden. I weep and wail some more. In all of these actions, I release the pain to the One who bore it for me, my Savior. Sometimes it is just for a few moments. Sometimes it is extended into the last watches of the night. It is always cathartic and it is where I feel the closest to the love of God.

There are many ways to grieve in prayer. The prayer of lament (Psalm 22) is a magnificent example. This book is a resource for practicing the spiritual rhythm of grieving, specifically designed for those living and working at the precipice between light and dark.

It was created out of the spiritual direction and retreat work of Equipping Lydia, a ministry whose vision is to help Christians experience the deep well of God's love and find renewal. These prayers have been developed as "mini-retreats" to meet that need. They can be used by individuals or groups who need help to stop and release the toxicity of life lived at the precipice. May the comfort of Christ bless you.

L. B. B.

INTRODUCTION: STRUGGLING WITH THE TIDE OF GRIEF

*I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.*

*He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock*

and gave me a firm place to stand.
—Psalm 40:1–2

I visited the famous French abbey at Mont Saint-Michel, perched on a rock off the Normandy coast, in July 2013 and saw a line of pilgrims walking through the sand during an outgoing tide. We were warned that the tide could come in quickly and when it did, the sand would turn from a firm base to quicksand. In earlier times, unwary pilgrims regularly drowned in the oncoming tide. This stimulated several thoughts for me regarding spiritual formation.

Even the strongest of Christians can be caught off guard by grief. When loss occurs, despair can roll in much like an unexpected tide. When that tide comes, emotional pain can feel a lot like the quicksand surrounding Mont Saint-Michel. We can be consumed in the mire of a broken heart as our thoughts linger on loss, disappointment, traumatic memories, fear, or hopelessness. Sleep can be elusive; in the lonely watches of the night our thoughts can take us deeper into the mire. We cannot get ourselves out of the quicksand. The more we struggle, the further toward drowning in our pain we go. We need help. We need to be rescued.

Our Creator is very familiar with the miry clay of life we call quicksand. Chapter 2 of Genesis says that God formed us out of the dirt of the ground and breathed in the breath of life. The prophets explain that God is the potter and we are the clay. The very nature of God is to scoop up mud and turn it into something amazing.

What if the thick earth of grief that feels like quicksand can be molded and shaped by the very hand of God? What if the miry clay of our loss is something God can breathe into?

Stop for a moment and picture your quicksand of grief. What does it look like? Imagine God scooping His hand of love into it. Picture God forming that earth in a loving palm. Envision the very breath of God blowing into that dirt.

A TREASURE TO BE FOUND

Paul explains that there is a treasure in the clay (see 2 Corinthians 4:7). Can it be that in the mud there is something of value? Again, stop for a moment and picture your “clay-ness.” What is the value within your dirt? Is there a treasure you can find?

When the flood of grief and pain comes in and surprises you with its intensity; when you feel as though you are in quicksand and cannot get out on your own, remember the character of our living God. God’s character is to create something out of the dirt, to scoop up mud and shape it into a self-portrait, to shape it into the image of love and then breathe life into it. Can you approach the mud of your life and invite God to play?

If God formed humanity by scooping dirt out of the earth, can’t it be done again? Can’t God reach into the pit, the tomb, the darkness of our grief and pull us out to breathe life into us? From the beginning this was God’s way. It happened at the Genesis of our creation. It happened again at Calvary, and it can happen again today.

If this perspective of transformation is a struggle for you, be gentle with yourself. Cry out to God for help and then wait. Wait for the very nature and character of God to manifest. Wait for God to transform that miry pit into an empty tomb. Wait for God to shape you into the image of love. Wait for God to breathe life into you. Then breathe it back into a world struggling in the quicksand.

This kind of communion with God is intimate, sacred, and can be rare. Becoming still and entering into the quiet is not easy and it is a kind of prayer many avoid. To lament is a courageous act. It can be helpful to acknowledge what we are afraid of and why becoming still is so terrifying.

WHY WE AVOID THE QUIET

We all know it. Life has gotten fast and full. It has become a mantle of pride to be busy. We pack every waking moment with things to do. There is always some kind of technology to attend to. So often, our value is quantified by how much we have to do and how much we are needed. We use busy-ness as a protective shield for our vulnerable souls.

While many of us say that we long for quiet, in reality we often avoid it as if it were the plague. We choose the tyranny of the urgent to command our days. But, as we choose everything other than the quiet, grief begins to feel like an immobile block weighing heavy on the heart. It can send out red flags of resentment, irritation, frustration, sadness, despair, loneliness, exhaustion, or anger if not dealt with. These emotions trickle (okay, sometimes pour) out of us until we stop and attend to them. That is when we become brave enough to move past our immobilizing fear.

Yes, it takes great courage to face the losses of our lives. They become sacred. To let them go requires a deep level of trust. When we get quiet, then there we are, alone with God and our very vulnerable selves. In the quiet, we abide with God. God is gentle but in control. God doesn't try to compete with all the furor of modern life. God, the very source of love, has all the time in the world to wait as we scurry about avoiding quiet and rest. Love simply waits for us to put these protective masks down and quiet ourselves. And so, the agitation and anxiety are often high before we begin to settle into the quiet. That's normal.

Sometimes the people we love the most are the source of our pain. We have spent much energy building walls of protection; facades masking the reality of these tender parts of ourselves, our families, or our communities. Or, sometimes we project the grief onto an archenemy. We blame one person or group as the source of all our pain; erroneously not owning up to our contribution to the situation or that of others.

Honest grief requires thought and reflection to help us move beyond denial. Simply to rest seems contrary to all that we have been taught. Yet something in our deepest, truest selves longs for this place of love and peace. We ache to know what it means to find our value in God's love rather than in how well we perform. When we regularly incorporate stillness and quiet and calm into our lives, the accumulation of anxiety tends not to be as high.

How can it be possible to integrate quiet into the midst of our loud lives today? For those with pressing responsibilities, it is a shift

in thinking and living, but it is possible. Little by little, with grace and tender care, the Spirit of love invites and teaches us to seek healing renewal rhythmically in the moments, days, and seasons of our lives. Weaving quiet into our lives allows us to listen and be heard. This is intimacy, the place where our grief can begin to heal.

We must get the pain out and give it to the One who can bear the weight of it all. We must go with Christ to Gethsemane, pouring out our hearts to God with Christ. This begins the courageous journey of grieving as a spiritual rhythm. As a rhythm, grieving can become a steady and natural experience of cleansing. The more it is practiced, the more it can be trusted as a means of God's grace in our lives.

HOW DO WE QUIET OURSELVES?

It is actually quite simple. Just stop.

It may be simple to stop, but it is not easy. The practice of ceasing is quite revolutionary in our culture, which values productivity as the measure of success. As we stop, we find that we are left alone with God. We come face-to-face with the truth of our theology. We can't do this if we don't believe in a merciful God.

If we believe in a God of grace and unconditional love, it is easier to embrace the quiet. If we believe in a punitive God of conditional love, it is much harder. If entering the quiet is a struggle, it may be helpful to spend time thinking about your theology.

What do you believe about God? Theology has a huge impact on whether we embrace or reject the quiet. When we enter the place of stillness before God, will we be scolded for not being or doing enough? Is God going to be aloof and punish us with silence because we are so woefully inadequate?

Do we believe that we are going to be punished if we have done something not quite up to par? Or is God going to greet us with open arms and welcome us into a safe place? Remember the story of the prodigal son and his father?

I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:18–20 NRSV)

INTRODUCTION

Articulating our belief about God can begin a remarkable union where the grief of loss meets unconditional love. Is this what we imagine will happen when we enter into the stillness of intimacy with God? Or is the voice of God linked to the harsh authority figures of our childhood? Who is actually doing the talking in our heads when we quiet down? Is it our own voice, the voices from our youth, or is it really the voice of the Holy Spirit?

“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” (Ps. 46:10 NRSV)

A GOD OF COMPASSION AND FORGIVENESS

If you believe in a God of compassion and forgiveness, One who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, you are invited to spend time allowing this source of love to heal you. Can you give yourself permission to become quiet to allow the grieving process to occur? Can you choose to carve out time, even little moments in your day, to simply be still and know God?

“The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.” (Ex. 14:14 NRSV)

Start small. Try two minutes of stillness before you get out of your car. Try to be still for thirty seconds before you eat a meal. Begin in little increments and build up from there. To get to a place of quiet will require stepping away from one’s schedule, responsibilities of caregiving, or work. It will require turning off electronic stimulation and disengaging from texts, e-mail, etc. It may require stepping away from music, books, or other forms of entertainment.

GRIEVING AS A SPIRITUAL RHYTHM

It is easy to get stuck in the grief process. What do we do with all the pain that settles between our minds and our hearts?

Grief often gets lodged in a mass of memories and traumas collected throughout the journey of life. We may need to learn how to grieve as a holy habit or as a means of grace. When we cry out to God with what is not right, we are grieving. We need to make a practice of releasing everything that is not love as a spiritual rhythm in our lives.

We were created with an internal sacred space for the eternal (the Source of Love) to reside. Paul explained that we are clay pots with the power of Christ living in us (see 2 Corinthians 4:7). This womblike space is created to be an empty and sensitive place where love can come in and flourish. The war of fear that wages against love tries to assault this inner tender space. As a result, we protect ourselves and create a fortress.

None of this self-protective behavior brings the comfort of abiding, everlasting love, and so we are soon dissatisfied. Trinkets tarnish. Relationships become complicated. We try to keep the pain at bay and find all kinds of numbing agents to avoid feeling life. These addictions have detrimental side effects. We stuff ourselves with more things to fill the void. The toxins from the accumulation make us sick and separate us from those who love us. The space where love is to reside and reign in our lives is too full of false things that looked like love, but in the end, we realize that they were not. Those false things don't love us at all. They imprison us.

THE RHYTHM OF LETTING GO

Much of life's journey involves releasing those things that we have used to fill ourselves. Everything that is not love resists love and seeks to destroy it. We need to release and grieve our losses with such regular attention that the rhythm of letting go becomes a natural occurrence. We take regular baths to clean off the accumulation of dirt on our bodies; why wouldn't we do so for our inner beings (the God-space in our lives) as well?

This is grieving, waves of sorrow that wash the toxicity of suffering out of our emotional, physical, and spiritual selves until those divided selves can become reconciled in the love of God. Acknowledging pain in the light of love is what we do when we mourn. Pure love does not silence loss. No, love honestly recognizes loss and gives it a voice. When loss finds its voice, it begins to heal and find comfort.

When we cry out to God from the depths of pain and desolation, catharsis can begin to occur. Relief can begin to come. The situation may not change immediately but the heaviness of its weight can lift. We find ourselves able to raise our heads or take another step or live another day. Sometimes it is through the kindness of another person, but more often than not, it is an inner lifting of heaviness that rises up

INTRODUCTION

and out. Spiritual, emotional, and often physical toxicity leaves us. It goes to Christ, the Way of life. He receives this suffering, and in return, we receive healing restoration.

Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matt. 26:38–39)

This kind of release involves feeling life full-throttle with Jesus. This is grieving and it requires a profound trust that the love of God will comfort us in our pain.

The key is honesty. It is critical that in this time of prayer we welcome the presence of love and that we are completely honest with God. We must be honest about our humanity and sinfulness. We must be honest about what is unrighteous in the situation.

If we are honest, sometimes we learn that we are the ones who have been unrighteous. We have not turned to love first. We have sought comfort in other people or material things before the love of God. Sometimes others have been unrighteous and we have been innocent victims of oppression. What do we do with the accumulation of this unrighteousness that we carry?

All of this excess internal baggage has to be released. It is too much for us to bear. As it is released to the Source of Love, a miracle occurs. In this honesty, the unrighteousness begins to move out of our physical/emotional beings onto Christ. Christ takes upon Himself our pain. After this happens, there is a lightness of being, often an exhaustion, but it is a fatigue that is restful, not harsh. The heaviness lifts and a peace rests in its place.

Many avoid this kind of intensity of experience, even though it leads to catharsis. There can be a kind of perverted comfort in taking and holding onto pain and suffering. It becomes a familiar friend; one that we love to hate and yet are so accustomed to having in our lives that we do not know how to live without the suffering.

How can grieving be welcomed as a spiritual rhythm? It must be intentional. There must be room within one's life where this can happen and typically this room has to be carved out. It often requires a physical stillness in a safe place. For some, there is a need for a guide to get to the place of prayerful mourning.

INTRODUCTION

Quiet space will not simply happen. Life is too loud. Our schedules are too full. Fasting from the busy-ness and chaos is increasingly necessary to move our lives toward wholeness of being.

To take this step into the quiet may require preparation in advance, not only of yourself, but of others. Who are we kidding? It will take sacrifice. Something has to be cancelled or crossed off the schedule if this is going to happen. It certainly requires intentionality of living. And so, it may mean that you give yourself permission to begin to enter into times of quiet.

You may get resistance from those in your life when you step away from communication and noise. If it impacts others, let them know what you are doing and why. You may also have plenty of internal resistance. Both are normal.

Can you give yourself permission to progress toward healing? You will need to enter into the quiet to make room for the grieving process. It simply cannot occur in a healthy way in the whirlwind of busy life. For those who regularly work with suffering and loss, this can become a spiritual rhythm as a means of experiencing God's grace and restoration.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matt. 5:3-4 NRSV)

Rhythms of Restoration

1

DENIAL

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.—Psalm 51:6 (NRSV)

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

—John 8:31–32

Denial is not facing the truth of a situation. It can manifest in avoidance, manic behavior, apathy, or control. Getting to the honest truth is often a challenge for us. It is easier to stay in denial. Sometimes we don't want to admit that others have acted selfishly. Other times, we are reluctant to face our own weakness. We can either target all of the blame on others or take all of it ourselves. Neither of these is the full truth.

Sometimes we think we have God all figured out. When God does not perform as we expected, we are shocked and enter into a confused period that is terribly painful. Prayer life can be stilted or nonexistent. We become spiritually dry. Worship is no longer an encounter with the sacred but instead feels more like an obligation.

Periods of crisis in our lives can help us become more open to spiritual growth. Perhaps it is because crisis breaks open the illusion that we are in control and have our act together. Crisis forces us to leave the safe

place of comfort and enter the uncomfortable place of honest humility. We are utterly dependent on the grace of God. This truth sets us free. Honestly facing the traumatic experiences of crisis in our lives helps begin the healing process.

Transitioning out of denial is not for the faint of heart. But denial is a prison that keeps us locked in our pain. Jesus invites His disciples toward freedom as we recognize and embrace truth. Would you like to be free?

The mini-retreats in this section are designed to help us through the denial that typically follows a difficult experience or life crisis.

*A Blessing for Your Healing Journey
Through Denial*

May the love of the Spirit invite you.

May you welcome that love to guide you.

May the truth of that love restore you.

May you know the truth and may it set you free.

In the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.



RUNNING FROM REST

When we are perpetually tired, it is hard to find peace in our body, mind, and spirit. The longer we go without rest, the harder it is to enter into it. We can become like little children who, despite crankiness and fatigue, resist taking a nap. Typically meltdowns and tantrums ensue.

Sometimes we resist rest because we are straining in every moment of daily life. We rush to get to the next place. We make lists and goals and struggle to get them all accomplished. This perpetual forging ahead at all costs can actually be us running away from something. Often that thing we run from is grief. There are losses in our lives that we simply do not want to face. This mini-retreat is for the weary among us. Come and enter into a time of rest.

SETTLE: CEASE AND RELEASE

The harder we run, the harder it is to enter into the quiet. It is important to prepare the body, mind, and spirit for this sacred time of grieving as a spiritual rhythm. If help is needed to enter into the quiet, turn to the Settle guide found on page 107.

LISTEN: REST IN THE WORD

Read this passage out loud several times. Try not to rush. Pause between each reading.

And the Lord said, My Presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.
(Exod. 33:14 AMP)

Optional

Reading 1: Simply let the words flow through you, ministering to your body, mind, and spirit.

Reading 2: Which word resonates with you? Focus on that word for a few moments. Let its meaning bring rest to the place where you are most weary.

Reading 3: Rest in the presence of God. What happens within you?

REFLECT: FEAST ON THE WORD

Spend some time reflecting on the passage. Let these words feed you at the places where you are most hungry. What is God revealing to you for your journey today? How would you finish this thought?

God, You are revealing to me . . .

PRAY

Take a deep breath and ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Take a few moments to stop and consider:

- Why you are tired?
- Why are you pushing so hard?
- Are you running from something?
- Is there loss that is hard to face?
- What if you could release it to Jesus? He has already taken it on the cross. Can you try to let it go today?
- What are the losses in your life that are rising in your consciousness right now?
- How would you finish this prayer?

Jesus, I give You the loss of . . .

Name as many losses as come to your mind. Picture yourself handing them over to Christ.

What image comes to your mind as you name and release these losses?

Take a moment and rest in God's love. Soak in that love. Can you let it refill you to help enter into His rest? What is it you are receiving? Finish this prayer:

God, I receive Your . . .

DENIAL

Can you take a few more minutes and simply be still?

God of love, help me receive . . .

I don't want to be like a child fighting a much-needed nap.

Help me to be like a child resting in Your love.

Help me surrender control.

Holy Spirit, lead me into . . .

Amen.

