

Soul Reset: 4. Soul Restored

John 3:16-17; mark 6:30-32

January 26, 2020

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Maybe you've noticed an especially warm glow in his smile, a brighter gleam in his eye or a more relaxed pace in his step recently. There's a good reason for it. For the first time in 35 years, my husband, Jerry is on sabbatical from teaching at the University of Minnesota. While he is using this time to dig into some creative projects related to music, most importantly he is using this sabbatical as a time to rest and restore his soul. The word sabbatical comes from the Hebrew verb shabbat, meaning "to rest from labor." Sabbaticals are meant to be time used to rest and renew one's spirit. We're calling it his Jerry's SOUL-BATICAL.

In this message series, we've spent time learning what it means to take care of our souls; to restore a restless soul, to relieve a tormented soul and to nurture a soul to health through the restorative powers of spiritual disciplines. Through the messages here in worship, your own reading of the book *Soul Reset*, discussions in your faith groups and in the daily Grow, Pray, Study guides, we've learned about the spiritual practices of: the Prayer of Examen, cultivating gratitude, fasting from busyness and distractions, creating sabbath space and the power of lamenting. These practices create space for time and reflection... for sabbaths... for soul-baticals. Today, we'll look at one more spiritual discipline, as well as what it means to live life with a soul that is renewed and restored because our ultimate goal is to live our best lives now, to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised.

We were made to live in community with one another. It's why we're here. It's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. Researcher, Brene Brown says the thing that unravels connection is shame. Shame is our fear of disconnection. "Is there something about me that I don't want people to know or see for fear that I won't be worthy of connection? I'm not good enough, thin enough, smart enough, beautiful enough, important enough, _____ enough." In order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen; to be vulnerable with others. Vulnerability is the antidote to fear and shame. This spiritual practice is called confession. To confess means to acknowledge that we are not perfect, that sin exists in our lives-that there are things we do and attitudes we take that keep us from being connected.

Those who know me know that I have a Type A personality. Some personality assessments label me a Perfectionist. My #1 strength in StrengthFinders is Responsibility. The challenge for me is to find balance in seeking to be fully responsible without shaming myself when I miss the mark. I strive to be gentler and kinder to myself, especially when I fall short of my own expectations. It is so easy for me to remember the first time I remember feeling ashamed. I was in kindergarten in Memphis, Tennessee, in a school called Joyland. Yes, I see the irony of my school being called Joyland and my memory being shame. I brought home a coloring sheet and I had colored outside of the lines of the apple. At the top of my paper, my teacher

had placed a big, red X and the words, “Not your best work.” So when I mess up, when I sin, when my plans fail, my learned and immediate response has been to shame myself. Confessing that is my first step to feeling forgiven.

Confession is important to our health, healing and releasing shame. The first step to confession is to simply say to God, “God, this is where I am right now.” And then to say it out loud, releasing it into the air, to a trusted person. Perhaps this is a friend, spouse, teacher, pastor, or therapist. This is an important step on this journey to spiritual healing because confession is the only way to get rid of our shame. When we speak out loud what is really going on with us, the good, the bad, and the ugly, then we can begin to see the light and feel the freedom of a restored soul.

One of the Bible verses we learn from an early age is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” We’ve memorized that one verse as a description of what it means to be saved by Jesus. But if we go on and read ahead just one more verse, we discover that following Jesus means so much more than just being saved for heaven someday in the future. The very next verse tells even more about the heart of God— *God didn’t come to condemn us, but to save us.* God didn’t come to shame us into relationship. God didn’t send Jesus to condemn us and make us want to run and hide. Jesus came to free us from shame and fear and sin and darkness, so to experience living a full and abundant life here on earth. And Jesus showed us what that looks like. Many times in scripture we see Jesus “get away.” Luke 5 says, “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places (or the wilderness) and prayed.”

Mark, chapter 6, describes when the disciples had just returned from their first ministry tour. They were probably exhilarated and exhausted. They probably had stories to tell Jesus — thrilling stories of healings, exorcisms, and their effective evangelistic campaigns. Perhaps there were darker stories in the mix as well — stories of failure and rejection. Hard stories they needed to process privately with their Teacher. Whatever the case, Jesus sensed that the disciples need a break. They were tired, overstimulated, underfed, and in need of a soul reset.

"Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile," he said to his disciples as the crowds push in around them. "Come away with me," is how another translation puts it. I hear both tenderness and longing in those words. Jesus wanted to provide a time of rest and recuperation for himself and his friends.

"Come away with me." In this one little sentence, we can see a glimpse of Jesus' *human* condition — a life we can relate to it. His need to withdraw, his desire for prayer and rest. He was taking the time to care for his soul and his disciples' souls. A restored soul isn't going to keep us from the challenges, trials and heartbreaks of this life but it will prepare us get through them. In my years of ministry, I've seen the difference this can make in a person's life when it comes to dealing with the death of a loved one. This is why Messiah Church is a founding partner in the West Suburban Grief Coalition. We believe participation in a support group, whether it's grief group after the loss of a loved

one, Al Anon/Nar Anon when you're worried about someone with a drinking or drug problem, or AA as you walk your own path to sobriety, are ways of "getting away", to be connected in community to get through the trials of life. It's a connection with others who know exactly what you are going through because they have been there themselves.

Renewing our soul is an invitation that begins, continues and ends with seeking God in the chaos of everyday life. It is an invitation to stay connected with our own soul, the very private place where God's Spirit and your spirit dwell together in union, and then to seek to live and respond from that place. It is a place where the quickest way is not always the best way, because the *transformation* that is happening in us is more important than getting to where we think we are going. (It's not the destination, it's the journey. A life-long journey.) And as we stay faithful to the journey into the soul, the center of our being where God dwells, we are freed from our bondage to the expectations of others and our own inner compulsions. We are less and less mesmerized by human voices, less and less manipulated by the expectation of others and more and more given over to God.

Living with a reset soul allows us to experience what it means to be deeply loved by God, where we begin to recognize an inner freedom that is beyond what we ever thought possible. We can handle an enormous amount of success and failure without losing our identity. We can loosen our grip on the earthly things we have been attached to--money, success, our image-- and receive them as gifts without being overly identified with them because they don't define us anymore. We find that we are able to love others deeply, and unconditionally because we have faced ourselves--the dark and the light--and we have found ourselves to be unconditionally loved by God. We are able to love with abandonment and freedom because we have nothing ultimately to lose.

For 40 years, Moses led the Israelites in the wilderness before they finally arrived in the promised land. And as they were about to go in, God took Moses to the top of Mount Nebo and said, "There it is. The Promised Land ... but you're not going in." After 40 years of leading, you're not going in. There were many times that Moses argued and wrestled with God but there is nothing here that indicates Moses challenged God on this one. It's as though everything Moses had gone through his whole life had prepared him for this letting go moment. He no longer needed any role, or task or responsibility to define him. Perhaps his experience of being called by God, or over the years, arguing it out with God and having him answer each and every objection with a promise of his presence, prepared Moses to say yes more easily to the calling that was before him now. Author Ruth Haley Barton in her book, *Strengthening Your Soul* says, "Moses and God were like an old married couple who had loved and fought for so long that they had reached a deep level of understanding. They had been through so much together that now it was enough to sit and rock on the front porch of life, each one just content to know the other is there. That was all it took to make life good." For Moses, the presence of God was his Promised Land.

Could our Promised Land be that place from where we live and respond with a restored soul? A restored soul makes life good now and satisfying now and enable you to just be with God on God's terms now? It's to live so aligned with God that no matter what you face here on earth, you know you already have what your soul most deeply desires—the presence of God, that which can never be taken from you? Heaven on earth. Right here. Right now.

Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed a similar conviction in a speech given in Memphis on the night before he was assassinated. He spoke of receiving a letter from a little girl after he had been nearly fatally stabbed in New York. X-rays had revealed that the knife blade was lodged so close to his aorta that if he had sneezed, he would have died. King received letters of comfort and encouragement from around the world, but the one from this young, white girl touched him deeply.

Dear Dr. King, she wrote, While it should not matter, I would like to mention that I am a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune, and of your suffering. And I read that if you had sneezed, you would have died. And I'm simply writing to say that I'm so happy you didn't sneeze.

King then recounted many reasons why he, too, was glad he had not sneezed. He described a long list of victorious events that he had been able to be a part of because he hadn't sneezed—"I wouldn't have been around here when Negroes in Albany, Georgia, decided to straighten their backs up... or when the black people of Birmingham, Alabama, aroused the conscious of this nation, and brought into being the Civil Rights Bill...or later that year, to try and tell America about a dream I had had."

"I'm so happy I didn't sneeze," he said. But then he went on to say that something new had happened within him, something that put him in a different relationship with God. We've all seen Dr. King's speech tens if not hundreds of times but when I heard about the transformation that took place in Dr. King's soul, I saw this in a new light.

I think he had a soul reset. It's that ah-ha moment when you discover what really matters is the presence of God is with you on the journey. It's being able to say yes to God in the deepest way because you are not clinging to or grasping anything. Having that happen inside of you, having a soul that is recharged and reset, will set you free to live your best life now, to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised, now. Sometimes this means fighting for joy in the middle of the most difficult and heartbreaking situations. This isn't easy, but it is possible, especially when you remember that in God's presence is fullness of joy.

Listen once more to Jesus' invitation from the book of Matthew 11:28-30: **Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.** If you have acquired burdens in your life, you are invited to lay them down today, hit the reset

button on your spiritual life and walk with Jesus. That is the path to wholeness and a reset soul.

Let us pray:

Loving God, thank you for the gift of your son Jesus, for the forgiveness and freedom from our sins and the promise of an abundant, full life. May our souls be reset and restored as we begin to live in a new way, knowing that we are deeply loved by you. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of January 26, 2020

Weekly Prayer: Gracious and loving God, may the truth of this great love story shine through our worship today for we seek to live in the light of Christ, to know what it means to be free from sin and shame, fear and darkness. May our souls be reset and restored as we step into living whole-hearted lives as your beloved children. Amen.

Monday, January 27

This week's soul practice is taking care of your body. We are whole persons, created by God – body, mind, and spirit. God's desire for our wholeness is not only about our hearts but also about our whole selves. This week, we will seek wholeness by taking care of our bodies.

Scripture: Luke 22:39-44

Jesus left and made his way to the Mount of Olives, as was his custom, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived, he said to them, "Pray that you won't give in to temptation." He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed. He said, "Father, if it's your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done." Then a heavenly angel appeared to him and strengthened him. He was in anguish and prayed even more earnestly. His sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.

This is the final night of Jesus' earthly life. He eats the Passover meal with his disciples, a meal that becomes the Last Supper and our model for Holy Communion. He announces the coming betrayal and denial by his disciples. Then, in today's reading, Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives to pray. Jesus went "as usual." Jesus not only took this particular time to be alone and quiet with God, he apparently made it part of his routine. Do you?

Prayer: I come to you, most gracious and merciful God, trusting not in my own abilities but trusting you and seeking your guidance. Help me to be faithful to you and all you desire for me. Amen.

Care of Your Body:

Sleep eight hours. Look at your schedule for the week and make a plan to get eight full hours of sleep each night this week. As you go to sleep each night, ask God to bring you rest. Pay attention to the way your rested body serves you throughout the day.

Tuesday, January 28

This week's soul practice is taking care of your body. We are whole persons, created by God – body, mind, and spirit. God's desire for our wholeness is not only about our hearts but also about our whole selves. This week, we will seek wholeness by taking care of our bodies.

Scripture: Isaiah 30:15, 18

Therefore, the LORD God, the holy one of Israel, says: In return and rest you will be saved; quietness and trust will be your strength—but you refused.

Nonetheless, the LORD is waiting to be merciful to you, and will rise up to show you compassion. The LORD is a God of justice; happy are all who wait for him.

The people would not listen to the words of prophets like Isaiah, but wanted to hear only comfortable words. They placed their trust everywhere but in God. Isaiah was very clear about what God demands. It is “repentance and rest,” “quietness and trust,” but the people chose their own ways which would ultimately lead to their destruction. Verse 18 provides a hopeful message: Isaiah announced that the Lord is also a God of mercy, compassion and justice. Repentance is turning to God. Rest is being still so that you can be available to God. Without repentance and rest, we miss out on what God can do in us.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you that you are always reaching out, always wanting what is best for me. Help me to take the time to listen and learn from you, so that I am able to serve you fully in this world. Amen.

Care of Your Body:

Drink plenty of water. Over the course of the day, be intentional about drinking eight large glasses of water. With each glass, reflect on Jesus as the source of Living Water that sustains you for a life with God.

Wednesday, January 29

This week's soul practice is taking care of your body. We are whole persons, created by God – body, mind, and spirit. God's desire for our wholeness is not only about our hearts but also about our whole selves. This week, we will seek wholeness by taking care of our bodies.

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-10

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. The tempter came to him and said, “Since you are God’s Son, command these stones to become bread.” Jesus replied, “It’s written, *People won’t live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*” After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.*” Jesus replied, “Again it’s written, *Don’t test the Lord your God.*” Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said, “I’ll give you all these if you bow down and worship me.” Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan, because it’s written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*”

Immediately following his baptism (where Jesus experienced the presence of God), Jesus entered the wilderness (desert) for 40 days. He would not accomplish his mission by using his supernatural power for his own needs, by using his power to win a large following by miracles, or by compromising with Satan. He met all three temptations with scripture. Jesus was sent out into the desert by the Holy Spirit, entering God’s training program, fighting off the temptations, and ultimately preparing himself for the battle he would face in the Garden of Gethsemane. How are you allowing God to prepare you?

Prayer: In Jesus, you have shown us, O God, how you provide the strength to come through the challenges of life. Help me to lean on your message of scripture and know that even in my desert experiences, you are with me. Amen.

Care of Your Body:

Go for a long walk if you are able (look for an indoor location if necessary). Let endorphins kick in and feel the strength of your legs to carry you. Feel your back straighten as you take long strides. With every breath, breathe in the grace of God; as you exhale, breathe out your praise to God.

Thursday, January 30

This week's soul practice is taking care of your body. We are whole persons, created by God – body, mind, and spirit. God's desire for our wholeness is not only about our hearts but also about our whole selves. This week, we will seek wholeness by taking care of our bodies.

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-13

“When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

“When you pray, don't pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they'll be heard. Don't be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. Pray like this: Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven. Give us the bread we need for today. Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us. And don't lead us into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

The Greek word that is used here for reward means to give back or pay back. The reward of praying in a specific location is not that we get what we want, but there is a reward! The God who sees you in secret, who sees you making time – the God of the universe will reward you. Paul describes this reward in Philippians 4:6 – *Do not be anxious about anything but with prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* When and where do you have regular conversations with God?

Prayer: Lord, I so want the peace that you offer, a peace that is possible even in the midst of life's greatest storms. I believe you want that for me as well. Help me to set aside the time and the place to meet with you, not so that I can get what I want, but so I can become what you want for me. Amen.

Care of Your Body:

Fast from sugar. Most of us have no idea how much sugar we take in each day. Spend the day taking care of your body by relentlessly avoiding sugar. Say no to the sugary coffee creamer or the honey in your tea. Say no to the cookies or donuts. Say no to the soda that you thought you had to have at 3:00 pm each day. Notice how many ways sugar infiltrates your day without your even knowing it. After today, determine which forms of sugar you could permanently cut from your routine to take better care of your body.

Friday, January 31

This week's soul practice is taking care of your body. We are whole persons, created by God – body, mind, and spirit. God's desire for our wholeness is not only about our hearts but also about our whole selves. This week, we will seek wholeness by taking care of our bodies.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:9-10

So you see that a sabbath rest is left open for God's people. The one who entered God's rest also rested from his works, just as God rested from his own.

Throughout Hebrews, one of the author's repeated concerns is that we might miss or avoid God's purpose for our lives and in so doing fall into apostasy - either by things done or left undone. Those who respond faithfully to God's promise will find the gift of rest making them fully alive to life. Our modern values seem to make us believe that every moment of the day must be productive, that I must have something to show for my time. Yet the biblical wisdom says, "Don't just do something, stand there and rest!"

Prayer: Lord God, in your gift of creation, you promised a day of rest. As Augustine once said, "our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you." Help me to claim a time of rest, to let go of schedules and doing so that you can do in me what only you can do. Amen.

Care of Your Body:

Today, write a letter thanking your body for what it does for you. God made our bodies in such an awesome way and for incredible things. Consider all that your body does for you. Give thanks for it and consider how you might take better care of your body as an act of worship to the God who created you.

Saturday, February 1

This week's soul practice is taking care of your body. We are whole persons, created by God – body, mind, and spirit. God's desire for our wholeness is not only about our hearts but also about our whole selves. This week, we will seek wholeness by taking care of our bodies.

Scripture: Psalm 1

The truly happy person doesn't follow wicked advice, doesn't stand on the road of sinners, and doesn't sit with the disrespectful. Instead of doing those things, these persons love the LORD's Instruction, and they recite God's Instruction day and night! They are like a tree replanted by streams of water, which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don't fade. Whatever they do succeeds. That's not true for the wicked! They are like dust that the wind blows away. And that's why the wicked will have no standing in the court of justice—neither will sinners in the assembly of the righteous. The LORD is intimately acquainted with the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is destroyed.

This psalm paints a vivid and appealing picture of the results of meditation in our lives, explaining that the man or woman who meditates on the Word of God day and night will thrive and flourish like a tree full of life. Because the tree is planted by the water's edge, it prospers. Those who are planted in the life that God offers will flourish. Verse 3 indicates that we could "prosper" when planted and fed on God's Word. Have those around you prospered from the attention you give to your soul?

Prayer: Lord, you are a patient God, waiting for me to receive what you want me to have. Help me to spend time with you – to find time in this day to break from the needs and demands at

hand and to stand still. Help me to hear your still small voice and know that you are with me.
Amen.

Care of Your Body:

Cook your favorite healthy meal and have dinner with your family or a friend. Fuel your body with healthy food and fuel your spirit with intentional time with loved ones, gathered at the table. Pray a blessing over your meal and over your friends.