FINDING REFRESHMENT

Not only does our Good Shepherd provide rest, but according to the end of Psalm 23:2, He also provides refreshment.

"He leads me beside still waters," promises this verse, which is important when you consider how sheep feel about still waters. Being the easily disturbed creatures they are, sheep will not drink beside a raging, rushing river. They are too afraid they might fall in, and who wouldn't be worried about the prospect of swimming in a wooly overcoat?

So, in deference to the sheep's desire on this front, the good shepherd will hunt high and low for a silent, still stream. If he can't find one, he will dip the crook of his staff into the rough water and move stones around until he forms a little dam to still the water. He is that committed to his sheep's refreshment. He is that committed to their care.

No matter what we accomplish or acquire in this life, if we neglect or ignore our spiritual life we will never feel truly satisfied. Many people go to great expense to find satisfaction and fulfillment. But joy without Jesus is an impossibly elusive thing. Happiness is only found through faith in Jesus Christ. The Scripture says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).

Do you need a calming, cooling, refreshing drink of water right now? Perhaps the stream of your life is rushing by with such speed and turbulence that you cannot find "still waters" from which to drink.

Seek Him and you will find rest and refreshment beyond explanation.

The God who created us knows exactly what we need. Allow God to speak to you and guide you as you rearrange the stones in your stream and provide a still place for your spirit. He has already provided a regular place of still waters for us in His commandment of Sabbath rest.

God commands us to take one day in seven to come into His house to worship Him, to be strengthened in Him, to be refreshed in His presence-and then go out encouraged and revitalized spiritually and emotionally and, yes, even physically.

Jesus wants our lives to be overflowing. Life was not meant to beat us down and drag us around. Instead, we ought to be living with expectancy and joy because we are drinking daily from the still waters provided for us by our Shepherd. He gives us green pastures to feed us as we rest, as we study, as we store up His Word. He gives us still waters that we might be revitalized and refreshed. But our all-sufficient, ever-present, fully satisfying Shepherd isn't done yet!

TAKE A BREAK

But before you judge them, think about your own life. Maybe you don't race through near-red lights, but are there other warning signals you blow through instead of slowing down and taking a closer look?

Heart palpitations. Irritability. Inconsistency in time spent with God.

What do your warning signs look like? Do you know them when you see them show up? If we ignore enough warning signs, one day we are sure to crash. That is precisely why God forces us to rest. "Come over here," our Good Shepherd says. "Come apart from your work, please, and pause."

Sometimes we comply, and sometimes we don't. Sometimes God has to put us flat on our backs to get us to suspend our busyness and be still. He's done it in my life, and likely he's done it in yours, too.

Jesus once said to His disciples on a very stressful occasion: Come away by yourselves … and rest awhile. (see Mark 6:31).

He knows what we are sometimes slow to figure out: "If we don't come apart to be with the Lord," Christian

author Vance Havner once said, "we will surely come apart."
We all know this is true, so why do most of us find it so hard to stop and rest? Why does our Shepherd have to make us lie down?

I think it's because we have convinced ourselves that we aren't accomplishing anything unless we're busy, unless we're running in several directions at once.

If we stop and rest, someone else might catch up and pass us. But have you ever noticed that it's the pauses in life that refresh us?

Pausing is a necessary practice in so many facets of life. For example, think how terrible your favorite song would sound without any breaks.

You and I appreciate periodic pauses in music because we understand that it's the notes that are held for a beat or two-a fermata-that keep a tune from running together into a jumble of dissonant sound.

We also appreciate breaks in literature as well.

Appropriate pause … necessary breaks … a chance to stop and breathe-whose life wouldn't wind up better with a few more of these things?

A life without rest, an existence in which we never pause to commune with our Shepherd or find out what He expects of us, is not life as God intended it to be.

CHEW THE CUD

The second key to finding true rest is when to "chew the cud."

Sheep are so action-oriented that when they finally are made to lie down, they can't help but find something to do. Usually that "something" is nothing more than chewing the cud, but at least there's movement involved. I've noticed that overly stressed people are a lot like antsy sheep. When they first endeavor to lie down-to slow their pace and seek peace-it takes 100 percent of their willpower to simply sit still. They need some cud to chew.

Two practices I adopted many years ago that help train my focus on God during my periods of peace follow below.

Meditate on God's Word

The first "cud" to chew when you're in a place of peace is to meditate on God's Word. Especially for people like us, who thrive on constant activity and growth, it is critical to power off all devices every once in a while, and take time to hear from God.

You can't follow your Shepherd into green pastures and then, like a restless kindergartner, say, "Ok, Lord, I've been still for a whole minute. Can I get up now and go play?" It doesn't work that way because the resting times in life are the growing times.

"In quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).

God is more interested in our spiritual growth and strength than He is in our frantic activity. He knows that we will be right back to our totally stressed-out existences if we don't take our times of rest with Him seriously. We grow and get stronger when we wait on Him. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27:14).

When you hear a stirring message, do you take time to meditate on the things you've heard? The best time to absorb the real truth that God would have you grasp is immediately after hearing or reading His Word.

God speaks to us through His written Word and the spoken Word. People tell me they watch a podcast a few times, and every time they listen, the Lord gives them a deeper understanding of how to apply His Word to their lives.

As we sit down to rest and focus our hearts on God and His Word, He can speak to us. Remember, God doesn't speak in the thunder or in the lightning. God speaks in the still, small voice of His Spirit as He deals with us through His Word.

We need to be sure that we quiet our lives enough for us to hear His voice. When we learn to rest in the Lord, it simplifies our lives and our perspective.

For ultimate stress relief, we need to follow our all-sufficient, ever-present, fully-satisfying Shepherd into the green pastures and lie down there.

I think you'll blessed as a result.