

SOUL CARE

It seems as though a common response to the question: "How are you?" is "I'm tired" "We are tired." I hear this from people of all ages. Physically tired, mentally tired, relationally tired and emotionally tired. All is not well with our souls. The purpose of this retreat is to help you to sit back, reflect on your life choices, connect with God for His help and spend some time considering the state of your soul. Now please resist the tendency to undertake this task on your own. Please, please, please connect with God so that His Spirit can guide you. Do this in union with Him, with a desire to walk out His plan for your life. He invites you to come; "Come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matt 11:28.

Let's begin there. Read that scripture over a few times, allowing time between readings. Let your mind lightly rest on it. Let it flow through you. Let it seep into your pores and take up residence in you. Slow yourself down. Quiet your mind. Imagine yourself responding to this invitation. Jesus is inviting you to come to him. Do you move towards him? What is your posture? Are you running for joy, energized and excited? Are you hanging your head ashamed and defeated? Are you resistant and willful- "I don't need you, I've got this?" Are you ashamed that you are in this place? Or perhaps you are exhausted and relieved knowing this is exactly what you need?

Jesus is inviting you to be taught by Him. He reassures you that He is humble and gentle. How will you respond to His invitation? Do you believe

that HE is humble and gently and wants YOU to rest? Do YOU truly want to rest? If you are aware of your resistance to rest, ask yourself what am I afraid of? Boredom? Losing ground? A backlog of things to come back to leaving you even more burdened? Missing out on something? Process this through with God until you can come to a place where you are willing to come to Him and take in His teaching of you so that you may find rest for your soul.

Let's agree on a working definition of one's soul. In nursing school I learned that for a person to be truly healthy, they needed for all to be well within the physical, emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual domains. According to John Ortberg in his book *Soul Keeping*, "Your soul is what integrates your will (your intentions), your mind (your thoughts and feelings, your values and conscience), and your body (your face, body language, and actions) into a single life. A soul is healthy- well ordered- when there is harmony between these three entities and God's intent for all creation. When you are connected with God and other people in life, you have a healthy soul." To use a business analogy, I like to think of the soul as the CEO. It is ultimately responsible for the functioning of our total being.

In contrast, an unhealthy soul is one that is not operating in union with God. It is not integrating one's will, mind and body. Sin is the culprit in causing this disintegration and separation from God. It is said that if the Devil can't make you sin, he will make you busy. Either way, he causes damage to your soul. Busyness is a modern day sickness. We are addicted to busyness. It makes us feel productive and of value. It keeps us from

feeling lazy and unfocused. It feeds our sense of purpose and worth. Busyness in and of itself isn't necessarily unhealthy for one's soul, but being hurried is. Whereas busyness can take us towards God as we know we need to rely on him, hurry causes us to be unavailable to God and what we might see as an interruption. When we are hurried we are preoccupied, and unable to be fully present. It is spiritually draining. Compare these distinctions between busy and hurried. Where do you stand? Ask God for his perspective. What is your heart saying to you right now?

Busy	Hurried
A full schedule	Preoccupied
Many activities	Unable to be fully present
An outward condition	An inner condition of the soul
Physically demanding	Spiritually draining
Reminds me I need God	Causes me to be unavailable to God

Dallas Williard tells us that we must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. How do we accomplish that? Let's consider how you are best refreshed, the relationships you engage in, your prayer life, and your choices in scheduling.

REFRESHMENT

Discover what refreshes you and make sure you take the time to be refreshed. What leaves you feeling rested? Energized? Renewed? Ready to re-engage? How do you best connect with God? What is your preferred balance of time alone and time with other people? Did God design you as an introvert who is energized with times of solitude or did he design you as

an extrovert who is energized by being around other people. Are you delighted after some activity such as hiking where you connect with God's beauty, or enjoying music? Do you prefer spending time with horses believing as Winston Churchill wrote "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man. (woman)." Spend a block of time considering this, journaling about this, and strategizing on how to incorporate this into your life. (Journaling space)

PEOPLE

Now let's look at your relational circles so that you can prayerfully consider these relationships. Sometimes God has people in our lives for specific purposes and periods of time. We may have a tendency to hang on to relationships beyond His purpose or abandon them because we were uncomfortable with the sparks we saw when iron sharpened iron. Consider the people you are spending time with.

Who do you feel loved and accepted by?

Who spurs you on?

Who impacts you in a positive way?

Who do you find interesting and stimulating?

How do you decide what relationships are most important to you?

What relationships are life-giving to you?

How do you prioritize your time while being mindful of your finiteness, but still obedient to the Holy Spirit's leading?

Years ago I was introduced to an exercise by the Navigators that helped me to prayerfully consider the relationships I was currently engaged in and make sure my priorities were God directed. They define a circle of influence as the people and places for which you are burdened and motivated to influence for the purposes of God. Begin by answering the following questions:

Who are the people and opportunities in your circle of influence? List them.

Review any promises or specific leading by God regarding people or places.

What insights does this give you as to the prioritization of relationships in your circle of influence?

Who are the people in your life who listen well to you and spur you on?

Where is there good mutuality?

Who do you feel truly safe with?

Is there a certain area or group of people that you feel passionate about helping or to put it another way: burdened to help?

Prioritize the various opportunities or people into 4 categories from that of greater commitment to that of lesser commitment. The categories are as follows:

- Invest: this is an area of primary focus of time, energy and resources. This is where you will focus the majority of your time. This should also include those people who feed into you or are your accountability partners or mentors. See Romans 15:15-20
- Impact: an area of additional investment of time and energy. At different seasons you may not have time for this. People you have previously disciplined may sometimes move to this category after a time in the invest category. See Acts 14:1
- Influence: these people or opportunities call for limited time and energy. You still keep in touch but more frequent touches are not needed. Perhaps just a coffee chat or an encouraging note. Consider Paul's letters.
- Ignore. Sometimes though there may be a need expressed and your heart wants to step in, the more spiritual thing may be to say no. If we are truly marching to our God's orders, we sometimes need to pass by needs knowing that this is not His assignment for us. See 2 Corinthians 2:12

I think it is helpful to now translate your work to the diagram on the following page. It is a good visual to refer to as you lift these people and opportunities more effectively.



invest

impact

influence

Ignore

PRAYER

Henri Nouwen in his book *The Way of the Heart* writes of a spiritual path consisting of three stepping stone: Solitude (learning not to be alone but to be alone with God); Silence (the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive); and prayer (standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart.) When you make the choice to come away on a spiritual retreat, you are seeking to be alone with God and tend to your inner relationship with Him. Henri wrote a prayer based on our theme verse Matthew 11: 28. I have included it here as your prayer too. As you pray it, do so slowly pausing in those places where God's Spirit pauses you and listening well to your mind and your heart. Ask God if He has anything He wants to show you or any way that He wants you to respond to Him. You may want to come back to this prayer again during your time here. If you sense a resistance to praying this prayer, sit with that resistance. Ask where that originates; spiritual warfare? Pride? Fear? What? Here is Henri's prayer:

Dear lord Jesus,

You, the eternal word, through whom all things came into being, you became flesh among us so that you could speak with us, walk with us, pray with us, yes even die with us. You became a human being among other human beings so that nothing human would be alien to you, so that in everything, except sin, you could be like us.

By so doing, you showed us the immense love of the one who sent you, your Heavenly Father. Through your human heart we can catch a glimpse of the divine love with which we are loved and with which you yourself love us, because you and your father are one. It is so hard for me to believe fully in the love that flows from your heart. I am so insecure, so fearful, so doubtful, and so distrustful. While I say with my words that I believe in your full and unconditional love, I continue to look for affection, support, acceptance and praise among my fellow human beings, always expecting from them what only you can give.

I clearly hear your voice saying, "come to me you who labor and are over burdened... For I am gentle and humble in heart," and yet I run off in the other directions as if I did not trust you and feel somehow safer in the company of people whose hearts are divided and often confused.

O Lord, why is it that I am so eager to receive human praise and human support even when experience tells me how limited and conditional is the love that comes from a human heart? So many people have shown me their love and affection; so many have given me words of affirmation and encouragement; so many have been generous and forgiving towards me... But no one could touch that deep, hidden place where my fear and my loneliness dwell.

Only you know that place, Lord. It is hidden even from me, and only in moments of great anguish and pain do I become aware of it. Then I realize how very lonely I am, marked by a loneliness that cannot be removed by any other sinful human being. My deepest loneliness can only awaken the same loneliness in others and create fear and anguish there, instead of love and healing. My own anguish calls forth anguish in others. It reminds them of their own emptiness and isolation. It makes them aware that there is not enough space in them to embrace their fellow human beings. One human loneliness cannot heal the other.

Your Heavenly Father saw the desperation of humanity. He saw the greed, lust, anger, resentment, violence, and destruction with which we, your people, tried to find a way to peace and harmony. Instead of his peace, we found only conflict and war. But your Father's love was so unlimited that He wanted us to know that love and to find in it the

fulfillment of our deepest desires. So, He sent us you, with a human heart big enough to hold all human loneliness and all human anguish. Your heart is not a heart of stone, but a heart of flesh; your heart of flesh is not narrowed by human sin and unfaithfulness, it is as wide and deep as divine love itself. Your heart does not distinguish between rich and poor, friend and enemy, female and male, slave and free, sinner and saint. Your heart is open to receive anyone with total, unrestricted love. For anyone who wants to come to you, there is room. You want to draw all people to yourself and offer them a home where every human desire is met, every human longing comes to rest and every human need is satisfied.

But your heart is gentle and humble. You do not force; you do not pull or push; you do not coerce. You want us to come freely to your heart and trust that we will find there the peace and joy we most desire. You do not put any requirement on us; you do not expect any great act of generosity; you do not hope for heroic gestures or dramatic signs. The only thing you want is trust. You can only give your heart to those who come to it in trust.

It is you who reached out first. You said it so clearly, "you did not choose me; no, I chose you." Your choosing us is your great act of trust. You trusted that in our sinful, broken and vulnerable heart lies the potential to reach out to your heart and say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life and we believe; we have come to know that you are the holy one of God." All that you hope for is a simple, trusting, "yes."

You did everything to show us your love and your Father's love. You became a small, dependent child to show us yourself in your weakness; you became a refugee in Egypt to show us your solidarity with all who are driven from their homes; you grew up in obedience to your parents to show us how close you are as we search for a true identity; you worked for many years as a carpenter to show us how you wanted to be with us in our daily work; you were tempted in the desert to show us how to resist the forces of evil around us; you surrounded yourself with disciples to show us how to share our vision with others and to work together in ministry; you preached the word of God to show us your truth and how to become, ourselves, witnesses to truth; you

healed the sick and raised the dead to show us that your presence gave life to the whole person, body and soul; you were transfigured to show us your divine splendor; you went the long road of suffering and death to show us that you did not want to remain an outsider even in the most painful of all human experiences. You, the eternal word of the Father, kept making choices that brought you closer and closer to us, to reveal to us the boundless love of your heart.

O Lord, all you ask of me is a simple "yes", a simple act of trust, so that your choices for me can bear fruit in my life. I do not want you to pass me by. I do not want to be so busy with my way of living, my plans and projects, my relatives, friends and acquaintances, that I do not even notice that you are with me, closer to me than anyone else. I do not want to be blind to the loving gestures that come from your hands, nor deaf to the caring words that come from your mouth. I want to see you as you walk with me and hear you as you speak to me.

Your heart is so full of the desire to love me, so aflame with fire to warm me. You so much want to give me a home, a sense of belonging, a place to dwell, a shelter where I feel protected and a refuge in which I feel safe. You are at so many squares and corners of my life and say with so much tenderness, "come and see, come and stay with me. When you are thirsty, come to me... You who put your trust in me, come and drink. Come, you who are tired, exhausted, depressed, discouraged, and dispirited. Come, you who feel pain in your body, fatigue in your anxious mind and doubt and anguish in the depth of your heart. Come and know that I have come to give you a new heart and a new spirit, yea, even a new body in which the struggles of your life can be seen as signs of beauty and hope. Come to me and trust me. "In my Father's house there are many places to live. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and, after I have gone and prepared you a place, I will return and take you to myself so that you may be where I am." I hear your words, Jesus. I want to hear them with my whole being so that your words can become flesh in me and form a dwelling place for you. Help me to close the many doors and windows of my heart through which I flee from you or through which I give entry to words and sounds coming not from you, but from a raging, screaming world that wants to pull me away from you.

I am looking at you, Lord. You have said so many loving words. Your heart has spoken so clearly. Now you want to show me even more clearly how much you love me. Knowing that your Father has put everything in your hands, that you have come from God and are returning to God, you remove your outer garments and, taking a towel, you wrap it around your waist, pour water into a basin and begin to wash my feet, and then wipe them with the towel you are wearing.

O Lord, you kneel before me; you hold my naked feet in your hands, and you look up at me and smile. Within me I feel the protest arising, "no, Lord, you shall never wash my feet." It is as if I were resisting the love you offer me. I want to say, "you don't really know me, my dark feelings, my pride, my lust, my greed. I may speak the right words, but my heart is far from you. You must have someone else in mind, not me." But you look at me with utter tenderness, saying, "I want you to be with me. I want you to have a full share in my life. I want you to belong to me as much as I belong to my Father. I want to wash you completely clean so that you can do for others what I have done to you." I have let go of all my fears, distrust, doubts, and anguish, and simply let you wash me clean and make me your friend whom you love with a love that has no bounds.

I am looking at you again, Lord. You stand up and invite me to the table. As we are eating, you take bread, say the blessing, break the bread, and give it to me. "Take and eat," you say, "this is my body given for you." Then you take a cup, and, after giving thanks, you hand it to me, saying, "this is my blood; the blood of the new covenant poured out for you." Knowing that your hour has come to pass from this world to your Father. And having loved me, you now love me to the end. You give me everything you have and are. You pour out for me your very self. All the love that you carry for me in your heart now becomes manifest. You wash my feet and then offer me your own body and blood as food and drink.

O Lord, how can I ever go anywhere else but to you to find the love I so desire! How can I expect from people as sinful as myself a love that can touch me in the most hidden corners of my being? Who can wash me as clean as you do and give me food and drink as you do? Who wants me to be so close, so intimate and so safe as you do? O lord, your love is not an intangible love, a love that remains words and thoughts. No, Lord,

your love is a love that comes from your human heart. It is a heart-felt love that expresses itself through your whole being. You speak... You look... You touch... You give me food. Yes, you make your love a love that reaches all the senses of my body and holds me as a mother holds her child, embraces me as a father embraces his son and touches me as a brother touches his sister and brother. O dear Jesus, your heart is only love. I see you; I hear you; I touch you. With all my being, I know that you love me. I trust in you, Lord, but keep helping me in my many moments of distrust and doubt. They are there and will be there every time I turn my eyes, ears or hands away from you. Please, Lord, keep calling me back to you, by day and by night, in joy and in sadness, during moments of success and moments of failure. Never let me leave you. I know you walk with me. Help me walk with you today, tomorrow and always.

How is your heart feeling right now? Take some time to be with your Lord whether it is in the silence of His presence or whether you journal your feelings. Stay with this prayer going back to parts of it and dialoguing with God about it until you feel finished.

Take a break: stretch, move to a different space in the retreat center, sit in the prayer room and light candles, sit outside on the chaise and listen to the fountain, feed a carrot to a horse, or go out for a walk. Allow time to continue to process this prayer time and allow space for God to bring things to your mind and heart on this topic of prayer.

YOUR SCHEDULE

Consider your schedule. What adjustments do you need to make in order to get times of refreshment? In order to spend time with the people God has for you to focus on? I love to fill my schedule to the brim! I desire margin but struggle to actually schedule in a way that includes margin. I desire to

become a master in scheduling so that I can right pace my life so that can experience God's presence and blessings. I want to be interruptable so that I would abide in Him and walk out the adventure filled life filled with the awe and intimacy with Him that I desire. In doing so I am able to hold onto my schedule more loosely and choose to be led by God.

Let's consider Psalm 139 15-16:

"My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." NIV

"Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God- you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, The days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day."

The Message

Let's sit with either version of this scripture using a technique called Lectio Divina which means holy listening. Read the psalm through the first time either silently or out loud. Listen for the phrase or word that God seems to be highlighting for you. Just quiet your mind and sit with that.

Next read it through a second time and ask God what he wants you to see or know about this scripture. Stay with it until you feel like God is done.

Now go back to the scripture a third time. Read it again and ask God if there is a response that He desires from you. This might be something so simple as Know this...

GRATITUDE AND CLOSING

Jesus tells us in John 10:10 "I came so that you may have life abundantly." Thank him for the abundance you are experiencing. Thank Him for your time here with him and all the ways he showed up as you responded to his invitation and came to him with your burdens. Thank him for all the ways he cared for your soul.

Lastly, sit with that song: *Bless the lord oh my soul.*

May that be your prayer as you close your time here at The Haven.

Bless the Lord, O my soul O my soul

Worship His holy name

Sing like never before O my soul

I worship Your holy name

The sun comes up; it's a new day dawning

It's time to sing Your song again

Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me

Let me be singing when the evening comes

Bless the Lord oh my soul

Oh my soul, worship your holy name

Sing like never before, oh my soul,

I worship your holy name.

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger

Your name is great and Your heart is kind

For all Your goodness, I will keep on singing

10,000 reasons for my heart to find

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, oh my soul

Worship your holy name.

Sing like never before, oh my soul,

I worship your holy name

And on that day when my strength is failing

The end draws near and my time has come

Still my soul will sing Your praise unending

10,000 years and then forever more

Bless the Lord, O my soul

O my soul

Worship His holy name

Sing like never before O my soul

I worship Your holy name. I worship Your holy name