

HOW

*DISCOVERING GOD'S  
EXTRAVAGANT LOVE  
IN UNEXPECTED PLACES*

MUCH

MORE

LISA HARPER

Published by Lifeway Press®  
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ISBN: 978-1-0877-0143-1

Item: 005823963

Dewey decimal classification: 231.7

Subject heading: GOD / LOVE / KINDNESS

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Printed in the United States.

Lifeway Resources  
One Lifeway Plaza  
Nashville, TN 37234

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## About the Author



Rarely are the terms “hilarious storyteller” and “theological scholar” used in the same sentence, much less used to describe the same person. But then again, Lisa Harper is anything but stereotypical! She’s been lauded as a gifted communicator whose writing and speaking overflow with colorful pop culture references that connect the dots between the Bible era and modern life. Her style combines sound scriptural exposition with easy to relate to anecdotes and comedic wit.

Best-selling author and pastor Max Lucado calls Lisa one of the “best Bible tour guides around,” and author Priscilla Evans Shirer adds, “Her God-given ability to not merely teach the Word but package it in a way that stirs the heart and calls to action is incomparable. When she speaks, ears perk up!”

Lisa’s vocational resume includes thirty-plus years of vocational church and parachurch ministry leadership, including six years as the director of Focus on the Family’s national women’s ministry, where she created the popular *Renewing the Heart* conferences attended by almost two hundred thousand women. Her academic resume includes a Master of Theological Studies with honors from Covenant Seminary, and she is currently working on her doctorate at Denver Seminary.

Now a sought-after Bible teacher and speaker, she’s been featured on numerous television and radio programs and is a regular on TBN’s globally syndicated *Better Together* show. She’s spoken at hundreds of national and international women’s events, as well as in churches around the world. But she’s also very invested locally and has been leading a weekly neighborhood Bible study for many years.

If you can’t find Lisa studying, teaching, or riding a motorcycle, she’s probably typing on a keyboard somewhere, because she’s had fourteen books published, including the recent devotional, *LIFE: An Obsessively Grateful, Undone by Jesus, Genuinely Happy, and Not Faking It Through the Hard Stuff Kind of 100-Day*

*Devotional*, and has written and filmed five best-selling Bible study video curriculums, including *Job: A Story of Unlikely Joy*.

Yet when asked about her credentials, the most noticeable thing about Lisa is her authenticity. During a recent interview, she said, "I'm so grateful for the opportunities God's given me, but don't forget, He often uses donkeys and rocks!" She went on to describe her greatest accomplishment to date as getting to be Missy's mama. Because in April 2014, after a difficult two-year journey and several adoption losses, she finally got to bring her little girl home from Haiti, and she's been smiling ever since.

## Dedication

This study is dedicated to the leadership team and faculty at Denver Seminary, where my heart and mind have grown in gratitude and amazement over the extravagant, redemptive nature of God's love. I'm particularly thankful for the tutelage of Dr. Craig Blomberg, Dr. Lynn Cohick (now at Northern Seminary), Dr. Jim Howard, Dr. Don Payne, and Dr. Marshall Shelley, all of whom have brilliantly, graciously, and patiently "scotched" me further into the embrace of our Creator Redeemer and encouraged me to dive ever deeper into His Word. Anything I've spoken or written in *How Much More* that sounds wise or spiritually astute was surely paraphrased from one of their books, lectures, or a conversation in which I peppered them with questions!

SESSION ONE

# How Much More

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates. For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

### **EXODUS 20:8-11**

The LORD spoke to Moses: "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: These are my appointed times, the times of the LORD that you will proclaim as sacred assemblies. 'Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh day there is to be a Sabbath of complete rest, a sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD wherever you live.'"

### **LEVITICUS 23:1-3**



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What impacted you the most from the video teaching?

Lisa said that God always has been and always will be working on our behalf. Do you really believe that? If so, why? If not, share a bit about your struggle.

How would you define *imago Dei* to a friend who doesn't know much about God or Christianity? Why is this such an important truth?

How do you see the redemptive heart of God in His "herding" Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden? How have you experienced God's redemptive heart in times He has herded you?

How have you seen God take what some would see as the least and use it mightily for His purposes and glory?

When you look back on your story, how have you experienced the goodness and kindness of God in all your circumstances?

How did this video teaching reveal the redemptive heart and extravagant love of God?

Knock, knock.

Who's there?

Interrupting cow.

Interrupting cow, who?

Moooooooooooo!

That was my daughter, Missy's, favorite joke when she was four years old and first learning English. (I became a mom through the miracle of adoption, and Missy is originally from Haiti.) She'd usually erupt into giggles before she even got to the moo part, which then gave her the cutest kind of *carte blanche* to go back to the beginning and start the joke all over again. Of course, by the third or fourth round of the knock-knock joke, we'd both be so tickled it didn't matter whether she got to the end or not. Simply watching Missy's brown eyes twinkle when she said, "Hey, Mama, knock, knock!" and listening to her lovely Creole accent when she did her best to pronounce "interrupting" was enough to make my heart swell with affection. In light of everything my little girl had to endure and overcome after her first mom died when Missy was a baby, just seeing her alive is enough for me. But whenever my kid excels at something like doing cannonballs into the pool or multiplying fractions, well, you'd better shut the front door, baby, because this mama will absolutely commence happy dancing—preferably holding a huge neon sign that says, "That's my girl!"

I've been a follower of Christ since I was itty-bitty, and now I'm oldy-goldy, which means I've known Jesus for more than half a century. Plus, I grew up in a very conservative family and church culture and have been in vocational ministry for over thirty years. I'm pretty sure I've been exposed to all the Bible stories in some setting or another—Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Christian summer camp, youth group, worship services, seminary, revivals, women's conferences, small group Bible studies, large group Bible studies, and so forth. But it wasn't until I experienced what felt like a seismic shift in my heart several years ago, when I began a doctoral candidacy at Denver Seminary, that I began to actually imagine our holy, trinitarian God belly laughing alongside me, thoroughly delighted that I'm His daughter and pleased as punch that I'm learning new things.

Our fervent prayer is that *How Much More* will help you experience a fresh, enlarged awareness of God's delight in you too. We have audacious hope that this study will help you clearly recognize God's consistent and redemptive grace from cover to cover of the Bible—from the creation in Genesis to the scriptural caboose of Revelation. Because, despite common assumption, there aren't any "bad" chapters in God's story.

Describe a time when you felt bowled over (in the redemptive sense, of course!) by a Spirit-generated juggernaut of comprehension. What "fresh" truth has God's Spirit revealed to you recently?

Read 1 John 1:5. How would you paraphrase this verse in your own words? Is there a secret corner of your heart that figuratively crosses its arms and cocks an eyebrow suspiciously at John's proclamation? If so, why?

John said, "There is absolutely no darkness in Him." Really? Perhaps when you read that declaration you quickly agree, but then you think of some passages in Scripture that sure sound kind of dark, or at least feel that way. Maybe it causes you to wonder about God's character. Maybe a shadow of doubt falls over your belief that God is absolutely for you. To still the wonder and chase the shadow, we're going to tackle some of those passages over the next few weeks. In the end we will verify what John said and confirm the following truth I've discovered:

Our Creator and Redeemer has always been and—until He calls us home to be with Him in glory—will always be in the process of restoring the dignity and value He has built into us, His beloved image bearers!

## **The How of "How Much More"**

I've often teased my counselor, Lynn, about being her job security. She has been such a means of grace that I can't imagine navigating some of the more difficult seasons and relationships in my life without her. She's shared a plethora

of wisdom with me over the years, and, because my heart often lags behind my head, she kindly puts much of it in analogous form so I'm not tempted to overanalyze it and miss the main point. One of my favorite analogies from her reframed my view of change. I was in the middle of trying to reform some really unhealthy behaviors I'd foolishly repeated in several friendships and dating relationships, and my attempts weren't being well received, especially by a few dear long-term friends. When I described the pushback and resistance I was getting, Lynn said that changing ingrained patterns—even unhealthy or sinful ones—was much like changing a dance style in the middle of a song. For instance, “dance partners” (i.e., friends, family members, a spouse, and so forth) get used to our particular “relational choreography,” so changing our steps from a waltz to a foxtrot smack-dab in the middle of a routine they have memorized totally throws them off-balance. It takes a lot of time and effort to learn a new dance style, and some would rather not go through that awkward, toe-crushing season when they already have another routine down pat, even if it's unhealthy.

I couldn't help but think of that analogy when I was in the early stages of praying about and planning for this project. For many of us, understanding *how much more* God loves us and is actively working on our behalf is going to require changing some presumptions we have about Scripture, as well as changing some of the steps we've grown accustomed to when it comes to engaging the biblical text. This new dance might get a little uncomfortable. We might break out into a sweat, and we'll probably get our toes stepped on a time or two, but it will be so very worth it in the end. Through the guidance of God's Spirit and the revelation of His Word, I believe we'll have increased security in His love, increased desire to know and commune with Him through Scripture, and increased passion to share the living hope of Jesus Christ in tangible ways in order to help redeem the world around us.

So here's the new four-step pattern we're going to practice together:

**Stretching Sacred Muscles**

**Learning Redemptive Rhythms**

**Following God's Lead**

**Dancing For Good**

And to help these four steps sink in, we're going to connect them with four spiritual disciplines. If you're an Enneagram One, someone who prefers routine, or are simply used to Bible studies with prescribed daily "homework" sections, please feel free to complete one of these disciplines per day of the week. Since there are four sections instead of five, you'll have one whole weekday left over for review! But if you're more like me and typically don't have the same schedule each week, then complete these sections/spiritual dance steps as you have time. Frankly, some of my best Bible study moments are when the rest of my house is asleep.

Here's how we're going to get into the *how much more* flow:

**STRETCHING SACRED MUSCLES** will help us *peruse* God's Word. The definition of *peruse* is "to examine or consider with attention and in detail."<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:11 says the Bereans "received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Just like those ancient Bereans, we want to dig into God's promises to get a better understanding of who we are as His beloveds and how to lean more fully into an intimate relationship with Him.

**LEARNING REDEMPTIVE RHYTHMS** will help us pause to *ponder* what we've read and examined. Well-seasoned (pun intended) barbecue chefs—or "pit masters"—say that the tastiest, tenderest meat has been allowed to marinate for a long time. So it is with followers of Christ. It takes a while for the truth of God's Word to permeate our hearts and tenderize those places where the difficulties and disappointments of life have built up callouses of skepticism or self-protection. Dutifully studying the Bible, in and of itself, doesn't necessarily equate with delighting in God, much less resting in His delight for us. Taking the time to really marinate in the awesome truths revealed in Scripture is what pays the highest spiritual dividends. As the psalmist wrote, "How happy is the one" whose "delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night" (Ps. 1:1,2).

**FOLLOWING GOD'S LEAD** will help us establish the habit of both *praying* about what we're learning and *praying* God's promises deeper into our hearts. From the beginning of biblical history, it's clear that God wanted an intimate relationship with us, not some superficial transactional relationship where we just ask Him for stuff and He gives it to us based on merit or whim. We don't have to walk around afraid that He's going to whack us over the head when we

misbehave, make a wrong choice, or say a word that's not in the Bible when we're stuck in bad traffic (mind you, I'm simply hypothesizing at this point!). And the foundation of real, intimate relationships is good communication, which is surely why Paul encouraged the Colossians, "Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2).

And finally, **DANCING FOR GOOD** will help us put what we're learning into **PRAXIS**, which may just sound like a fancy term for "practice," yet there's actually a significant difference between the two words. Unlike *practice*, which can describe rote behavior like practicing one's multiplication tables or parallel parking skills, **PRAXIS** refers to an action in which there is inherent meaning that reflects the motive of one's heart. (Watch for words marked like **PRAXIS** throughout the study. You'll find more information on these words in our Weighty Words section at the end of each week.) The bottom line is, God calls us not to simply study His Word to increase our head knowledge but to actually "flesh out" biblical truths in light of the transformation that has taken place in our hearts. As James encouraged Christians, "Be doers of the word and not hearers only" (Jas. 1:22a).

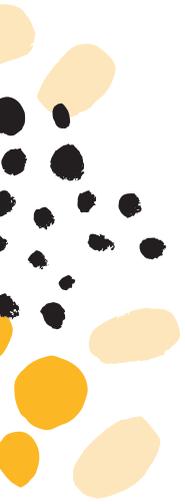
Of course, learning a new spiritual dance style is going to take a little time, y'all. So take a couple of deep breaths, freshen up your coffee (or electrolyte enhanced "smart" water for those of you super healthy gluten-free types who are surely clad in yoga pants), and let's get started!

# Stretching Sacred Muscles

The first images that used to race through my mind when I heard the word *Sabbath* were of prudish bathing suits and push mowers. You see, when I was growing up, my mom was emphatic about keeping the Sabbath holy. (Scripture basically defines Sabbath as a day of abstention from secular work that follows each six-day working week.)<sup>2</sup> And for a Southern-Baptist-to-the-bone woman like my mama, the Sabbath definitely meant Sunday, not the twenty-four-hour time period from sundown on Friday night through sundown on Saturday night observed by those who follow a more Judaic or literal Old Testament tradition. In my mama's world, "holy" meant not only did I have to use my inside voice while clad in a prissy dress and uncomfortable shoes for the better part of the day we spent at church, it also meant I couldn't swim in a two-piece bathing suit when we got home. Nor was Dad allowed to mow the lawn that day, lest the neighbors notice our family "working" on a Sunday! Thankfully, our pool was in the backyard surrounded by a privacy fence, so at least she allowed us to swim on hot Sunday afternoons. But my sister and I had to wear one-piece bathing suits—I guess belly buttons are bad news on the Lord's Day. (I repeated that phrase as a child with hushed reverence and apprehension since I'd rebelled a few times and sneakily wore my verboten bikini on the Sunday afternoons my mom left home to visit relatives. I half-expected to be zapped by divine lightning at any given moment.)

Fortunately, for those of us who've mistakenly associated the Sabbath with strictly enforced rules about external stuff like neck-to-knee splashing attire and the appropriate days of the week to engage in lawn care, we're about to find out how the passages God gave us regarding the Sabbath are much more about love than legalism.

Since stretching always involves movement, please stand up and read the following two Sabbath passages out loud slowly: Exodus 20:8-11 and Leviticus 23:1-3. (If you're not able to walk, please do whatever you can to shift your posture, even if it's only a slight adjustment.) Then read them through a second time with a different tone and cadence. What words did you emphasize in both passages? Why did they strike you as more important than the other words?



How would you synthesize the seven verses you just read into one single statement?

If you were explaining these passages to a child, how would you describe them and apply them?

Based on my dear, well-intentioned mom’s understanding of what Christians couldn’t do on Sundays—no bearing of belly buttons, no loud talking, no loud music, no lawn mowing, no playing freeze tag, no bike riding, no TV watching, no loitering at Burger King with friends—by the time I could read, I had deduced that God was a grumpy disciplinarian, determined to make His kids well-behaved rule followers, even if it meant quashing their joy once a week.

Therefore, it’s been such a sweet relief to discover that God established these rest and renewal parameters for our benefit and not to censor six-year-olds in bikinis! Jesus emphasized this point when He proclaimed, “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27), after some uppity killjoys masquerading as spiritual leaders made a fuss about His disciples harvesting a little grain on the Lord’s Day because they were hungry. Over and over again (as illustrated in the passages below), our Redeemer pushed back against those who tried to twist God’s Word into a tool through which they could condemn, shame, or subjugate others.

Read Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; 9:1-41. What common language do you notice in these New Testament healing-on-the-Sabbath stories?

Jesus demonstrated a proverbial new “dance move” when He stepped on the toes of Pharisees who were offended by the aforementioned healings in light of their advocacy for a strict, literal enforcement of the Sabbath law. What would you describe as the overarching theme of that dance move?

In each of these stories, we hear and sense the indignant attitudes of the religious leaders. Their quest for pious living had caused them to lose focus of the meaning of the Sabbath. They were more concerned with keeping tradition than showing mercy and grace.<sup>3</sup> Living by the letter of the Law blinded them to the needs of the people. They were keeping the people bound while Jesus was setting them free.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:4-6. In this passage, the apostle Paul makes a distinction between the “letter” of the old covenant, which kills, and the “Spirit” of the new covenant (or the gospel), which gives life (v. 6). In light of his delineation, what do you think would be the most life-giving results for you of observing a Sabbath/rest day every week?

# Learning Redemptive Rhythms

One of the first rules I established when Missy's adoption was finalized and I finally got to bring her home was that she had to hold my hand when we were walking anywhere cars could be present. That rule applied to parking lots, city sidewalks, or even along some peaceful path in a suburban neighborhood. I was a stickler about enforcing that policy too. Missy grew up in a very rural Haitian village, so she had limited experience with traffic or the fatal damage automobiles can do when they come into contact with flesh and bone. But since my child is a wonderfully feisty and independent leader, she sometimes balked at the holding-mom's-hand guideline, wanting to run ahead of me. So I called a family meeting between the two of us and employed the use of the word *pancake*. It's one of the few English words Missy understood at the time and a term that had quickly become dear to her because, much like her adoptive mama, my kid's a big fan of carbs!

Once I had her complete attention by getting the pancake mix out of the pantry, stirring the necessary ingredients together and pouring the first soon-to-be-edible circle on a hot griddle, I said, "Missy, do you want a pancake?" She nodded enthusiastically and exclaimed, "Oui, manman blan!" ("Yes, white mama" in Creole).

While she was happily munching her second favorite breakfast food (sausage biscuits are the love of her life and remain firmly in the coveted number one position), I explained that the reason I make her hold my hand in the parking lot at Target, on the way to school, and when we're shopping in downtown Franklin is because she's little, so drivers have a harder time seeing her than they do a bigger, taller person like me.

Then, much to her surprise, I took another pancake off the griddle and plopped it directly on the table in front of her plate. Then I soberly said, "Honey, if a driver doesn't see you and runs you over with his car or truck, you'll be squashed flat just like this pancake." My sweet baby girl looked stunned for a moment, then sadly mumbled through a mouthful of food, "I don't wanna be a pancake, Mama."

I didn't make up some dogma about hand-holding around cars to squeeze all the gleeful running-ahead-of-mama fun out of my daughter's day. I did so because I love her and wanted to protect her life.

How much more does our heavenly Father love His kids? Could it be that He sets biblical parameters in place for our good?

If your answer to the above question is yes, what redemptive fences have you run into recently?

Read Acts 15:10-11,28-29. Does the point Peter and the early church leaders made about God not wanting these new Gentile believers to have to “be saddled with any crushing burden” (v. 28, MSG) fit with your current understanding of God’s character and His requirements? Or is this description more tender than your previous image of who God is? Explain.

I often forget to read the Old Testament laws in light of the socio-historical context in which they were given. Let me tell you, that’ll flat put a clog in your understanding-God’s-grace plumbing! We have to remember that when our heavenly Father initially enforced the guidelines regarding the Sabbath in Exodus 16:27-30, the Israelites—the people group God chose to establish as a theocracy and set His favor on to illustrate His covenantal love for humanity—had just followed Moses out of Egypt after four hundred years in captivity. They were as wobbly as newborn calves when it came to this whole liberation thing, having no experience or understanding of what freedom felt like. For as long as their grandparents and great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents could remember, they’d existed as slaves under the mostly cruel ownership of the Egyptians. A Jewish slave’s sole purpose in Egyptian culture during that era was to do the brutal, backbreaking work—like mixing mud and straw to make bricks and hauling heavy stones in the oppressive Middle Eastern heat—their overseers didn’t want to do. And there was no such thing as vacation days or sick leave. A slave’s workday began early and ended late every single day.

There was no clear light at the end of the tunnel for an Israelite slave during the Egyptian captivity. Their only practical hope was for a master who wasn’t overly abusive.

But God!

He texted Moses through a flaming topiary and set in motion an audacious plan to rescue His people. The plan included plagues that would surely traumatize even the most experienced pest control person and added a supernatural exclamation point of the sea doing splits! I can only imagine how shell-shocked those Hebrews were by the time they set up camp at the base of Mount Sinai shortly after watching the Egyptian army—who was in hot pursuit of them—get swallowed up by the Red Sea. Their entire lives had been spent in captivity and now, suddenly, their chains were gone, manna was raining down like donuts from heaven, and Yaweh was hovering over them like a protective parent.

Perhaps they had been enslaved for so long that they completely forgot what freedom felt like.

Now meditate on these words again in the Living Bible paraphrase:

Remember to observe the Sabbath as a holy day. Six days a week are for your daily duties and your regular work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest before the Lord your God. On that day you are to do no work of any kind, nor shall your son, daughter, or slaves—whether men or women—or your cattle or your house guests. For in six days the Lord made the heaven, earth, and sea, and everything in them, and rested the seventh day; so he blessed the Sabbath day and set it aside for rest.

#### **EXODUS 20:8-11, TLB**

Sounds more like a much-needed reprieve than a punitive rule, doesn't it? As does the reiteration of God's protective parameters in Leviticus:

GOD spoke to Moses: "Tell the People of Israel, These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of GOD which you are to decree as sacred assemblies. Work six days. The seventh day is a Sabbath, a day of total and complete rest, a sacred assembly. Don't do any work. Wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to GOD.

#### **LEVITICUS 23:1-3, MSG**



It was like God was saying: “You matter so much to Me that I’m not willing to allow you to work your fingers to the bone any longer! Therefore, I’ve established a twenty-four-hour, no-labor time period so that you can relax and be refueled by leaning into My presence. I want you to sleep late and have the luxury of sitting at the dining table with your family and lingering over a great meal and laughing at your children’s jokes. You are My beloved, and every single moment of your life exists under the canopy of My grace. But you need to take regular breaks from your busyness to focus on Me and My gifts for you in order to remember that.”

The Bible was never intended to be used as a club. If we make the mistake of reading it as a rule book, we’ll whack the joy and peace out of ourselves and others pretty quickly. If we don’t take the time to marinate in the context and life-giving intent behind the words God spoke, we may inaccurately apply it with soul-sucking consequences. But when we do take the time to meditate on how incredibly redemptive God has been throughout human history, even the seemingly anti-belly button parts of it can begin to bring us joy and contentment!

**Has there been any inherited theology you’ve felt the need to unlearn as an adult? If so, what did you strive to unlearn? Why?**

**Read Matthew 12:1-8. When Jesus was asked a question about the Sabbath, why do you think He deferred to a narrative—a story—from Torah rather than to the legal sections of Torah?**

Jesus wasn’t trying to debate them about the veracity of the Law. He wasn’t challenging the Law itself, just their interpretation of it. The religious leaders had made the Law confining in a you-can’t-wear-your-bikini-or-cut-the-grass kind of way. Jesus brought in the compassion element. This wasn’t about restrictions but freedom.

Read 2 Chronicles 30:17-22. God granted the priests a significant degree of freedom in allowing people who weren't ceremonially clean to worship. Hezekiah had interceded for the people, asking God to pardon those whose hearts were seeking Him even if they hadn't followed the letter of the Law. What degree of freedom do you feel God has given you with regard to how and when you carve out time for rest and renewal (i.e., a practical Sabbath)?



# Following God's Lead

The fresh truth God revealed when I took the time to really meditate on what the Bible says about Sabbath is this—when God crashed out on a celestial couch in Genesis 2:1-3 after creating the universe, it was *before* sin entered the garden through a slithery, lying fruit salesman. Remember, Eve took the rebellious bite in Genesis 3, which means Sabbath wasn't only a necessary accomodation for our pitiable human weakness. Instead, God created and modeled rest as part of His perfect plan for His image bearers. It's an awesome and unblemished gift, not a consolation prize!

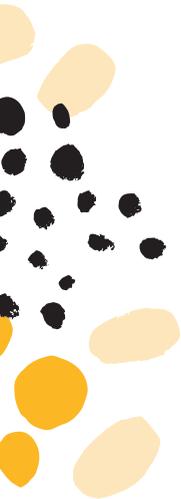
On the scale of one to ten below regarding busyness—with 1 being a couch potato and 10 being racing around like a chicken with your head cut off—circle the number that best represents how you're feeling today.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Does resting in God's presence come naturally to you, or do you have to work at it?

Read Matthew 11:28-30? What is the heaviest burden you're carrying in this season? What do you think needs to happen for that burden to become lighter? Are you willing to exchange your burden for Jesus' "yoke" (v. 29), which is a harness type of device used for placing an animal in service and therefore implies submitting yourself to His plans and purposes? Why or why not?

I'm a natural extrovert and a Three on the Enneagram, which means I'm pretty driven by productivity and accomplishment. It also means that when I'm not attuned with God's Spirit, I tend to associate my worth with my work. And unfortunately, the biblically indefensible lies that sometimes still rattle around



in my hard head—*You are what you do; You're only as good as your last win*—are ingrained in the modern psyche as a whole. All one has to do is flip on the television for a few hours of numbing distraction or scroll through social media while waiting for a barista to finish frothing a \$5 coffee to find more than enough substantive proof that our culture is preoccupied with performance and productivity. Probably because *doing* can be observed from a distance—you don't have to get your hands dirty or heart involved. Doing can be tweeted and FaceTimed and livestreamed. It can be critiqued and panned and bullied. But *being* is much quieter, less noticeable, and difficult to replicate or judge.

So what does that mean for followers of Christ who are seeking to have more meaningful, Jesus-shaped lives? Well, I think it means we need to converse with God before scrolling through comments on social media. It means listening to God's voice before using ours. It means becoming so deeply encouraged by our Redeemer's affirmation through His Word and prayer that we're rendered largely deaf to human applause. It means we live in the light of His love so that our desperate need for validation from others shrivels up and dies like an unwatered houseplant. It means we follow God's consistently redemptive lead instead of the changing whims and addictions of a broken world. It means that, much like those who traipsed after Moses in the wilderness, we finally have the chance to be free and experience the rhythms of purposeful work and regular intervals of rest that our Father lovingly established in order for us to live our best lives.

If that sounds good to you, I invite you to find a relatively quiet place where you can be alone for at least ten minutes. Then, reopen your Bible to Exodus 20:8-11, and slowly read through the passage again, pausing to converse with God about each phrase or word you find interesting. Talk to Him about what stands out to you and how your heart is responding. Ask Him for clarification and wisdom. Talk to Him about when and how your mind is wandering, and ask Him to reveal what's behind your restlessness. If you're comfortable doing so, feel free to use the lines below to journal your prayers and how you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you with regard to rest.

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Reread Leviticus 23:1-3, and write a responsive prayer that corresponds to statements and phrases in the passage. Here's a template you can follow:

**GOD'S HEART:** The LORD spoke to Moses: "Speak to the Israelites and tell them ..." (vv. 1-2a).

**MY HEART:** Thank you for choosing to speak to us, God!

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**GOD'S HEART:** "These are my appointed times, the times of the LORD that you will proclaim as sacred assemblies" (v. 2b).

**MY HEART:** Lord, please teach me to plan my calendar around Your purposes instead of my preferences.

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**GOD'S HEART:** "Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh day there is to be a Sabbath of complete rest, a sacred assembly" (v. 3a).

**MY HEART:** Thank You for loving me enough to make my rest and restoration a sacred priority, Jesus.

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**GOD'S HEART:** "You are not to do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD wherever you live" (v. 3b).

**MY HEART:** Wherever I live and whatever I do, I want Your Spirit to steward my attention and affection, Father.

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# Dancing For Good

I had an encounter not too long ago that has me contemplating salsa lessons (the dance, not the dip). I was teaching at a retreat for a large church where wiggling during the praise and worship time wasn't even remotely encouraged. (The constrained atmosphere there was not unlike that of the fictional town in *Footloose!*) Yet for some reason—let's hope it was the prompting of the Holy Spirit—I felt compelled to expound on the final two hallelujah psalms, Psalms 149 and 150. (The last five psalms in the Psalter are often referred to as “the hallelujah psalms,” and many Old Testament scholars teach that they correspond to the five thematic books within the Book of Psalms itself.) These two psalms contain clear directives exhorting God's people to dance with abandon while praising Him (Ps. 149:3; 150:4).

Suffice it to say, my message was received with a lot of crossed arms and very few amens.

But afterward, a soft-spoken woman approached me and said she was pleasantly surprised that I brought up the topic of dancing in Scripture. She went on to explain how a few days before the retreat, she sensed God whispering, *I want you to learn to dance with Me*, during a time of prayer. She continued sheepishly, “Because I'm black, people tend to assume I have good rhythm, but I've actually never been much of a dancer. I've always been more serious-minded than free-spirited. So when God asked me to dance, I initially felt very self-conscious and awkward.” Then she smiled broadly before confessing, “But when you started talking about dancing this morning in this environment, I clearly heard God whisper again. And this time He told me to stop watching my feet and just look at His face.”

As we wrap up this first session of *How Much More*, let's endeavor to remember that the biblical context of resting—that spiritual dance in which we're learning to gaze at God instead of worrying about our footwork—isn't a punitive decree; it's God's generous endowment for our protection and perseverance. Practically speaking, the rest and renewal we can experience through Sabbath will help us become better ambassadors of the gospel message. Because if we're always uptight and overcommitted, I don't think the world is going to observe our stressed-out vibe and believe us when we proclaim that Jesus gives a peace that passes all understanding, right?

God gives us time to rest for our own good and for His kingdom purposes!

Frankly, it's important to reflect on how the redemptive parameters of Scripture affect us personally and help usher in God's will for the world around us. Because no matter how many verses we've highlighted in our Bibles, if we aren't actively loving our neighbors, then we're kidding ourselves about being Christlike. The bottom line is, our theology must inform our sociology. So let's start by intentionally carving out ongoing respites through which we can practice what we plan to preach!

**Read Psalm 23 and Mark 6:30-32 before rereading Exodus 20:8-11 and Leviticus 23:1-3. What common thematic denominator(s) do you notice in these four passages?**

Has Jesus made you "lie down" (Ps. 23:2) during a season when it wasn't your natural inclination to be still? Looking back on that divinely-forced rest, would you classify it as mean-spirited or merciful? Explain.

Describe your current "green pastures" or "quiet waters" (Ps. 23:2), the place you go to be alone with God and rest. What, if anything, could you do to make that space more inviting and conducive to meeting with your Creator Redeemer?



Because the fall season is right around the corner here in Tennessee, and the weather's beginning to turn cooler, Missy and I have had the pleasure of relaxing outside by the firepit in the evenings. Oftentimes, long moments will pass without any conversation between us while we simply enjoy watching our dogs play in the field below or admire the light show of late-season fireflies sending luminescent love notes to each other underneath the canopy of cedar trees in our backyard. It was during one of those recent quiet moments of contentment that Missy, who's now eleven years old, got up from where she was sitting and came over and crawled into my lap like she used to when she was little. It took a lot more shifting and repositioning because her arms and legs are almost as long as mine, but once she finally got settled comfortably against my chest, she sighed happily and said softly, "I know I'm not a baby anymore, Mom, but I sure do love sitting like this with you."

I think that's how God designed His kids too. When we lean back fully and completely relax in His arms, that's where we find our happy place ... our sweet spot. That is Sabbath.

## Wonderful, Weighty Words

The following theological terms can help you better comprehend and communicate the *how much more* aspect of God's love, or, at the very least, help you impress folks at future dinner parties!

**A FORTIORI:** (derived from Latin) "An argument meaning 'with greater force' used in logic. It's found in traditional Jewish rules of interpretation to indicate what one can infer from a biblical text.<sup>4</sup> It's often used in conjunction with the Latin phrase *a minore ad majus*—'from the lesser to the greater'—which is a principle of biblical interpretation going back to Rabbi Hillel's major rules of interpretation where it means 'from the easy to the difficult.'<sup>5</sup> The *how much more* idea is found in Matthew 7:11: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him." (See also Luke 11:13; Rom. 11:12; and Heb. 9:13-14.)

**IMAGO DEI:** "The Latin term for 'image of God' typically used in reference to Genesis 1:26-27 when God declares: Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness...so God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. In God's work of creation, the crowning act, the pinnacle of that divine work, was the creation of human beings. It was to humans that God assigned and stamped His divine image. That we are created in the image of God gives to us the highest place among earthly beings. That image provides human beings with a unique ability to mirror and reflect the very character of God."<sup>6</sup>

**PRAXIS:** "A term taken directly from the Greek, literally meaning 'deed, action, or activity.' The basis for its contemporary use lies in two ideas: first, theoretical reflection arises out of active commitment, and therefore the criterion for right thinking (orthodoxy) is right action (orthopraxis); second, in turn, the goal of right thinking is the transformation of the world. Praxis denotes the kind of active commitment that leads to theoretical reflection. The use of praxis in this sense seeks to bring about the uniting of, or the overcoming of, such conceptual dualities as theory and practice, belief and action, or commitment and its ethical outworking."<sup>7</sup> For example, giving a gift for the sole reason of getting something back in return isn't actually giving a gift, because by definition a gift is free.

## Extra Credit Sabbath Information for Inquiring Minds:

“The Heb noun šabbāt, ‘sabbath,’ occurs 111 times in the OT. Concentrations of usage are in the Pentateuch with 47 times (Exodus 15 times; Leviticus 25 times; Numbers 4 times; Deuteronomy 3 times), the prophetic literature with 32 times (Ezekiel 15 times; Isaiah 8 times; Jeremiah 7 times; Amos and Hosea 1 time each), and the historical books with 30 times (Nehemiah 14 times; 1–2 Chronicles 10 times; 2 Kings 6 times). It appears one time each in Ps 92:1 and Lam 2:6. The noun šabbātôn, ‘sabbath feast,’ seems to be a derivative of the noun šabbāt (GKC §240) and appears eleven times. It is used by itself in Exod 16:23; 31:15; Lev 23:24, 39 in the sense of “sabbath feast” and in Lev 25:6 for ‘the sabbath of the land,’ i.e., the sabbatical year. The combination šabbāt šabbātôn, ‘sabbath of complete/solemn rest,’ appears for the seventh day (Exod 32:5; Lev 23:3), the annual Day of Atonement (Lev 16:31; 23:32), the annual Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:24) and the sabbatical year (Lev 25:4). ...The NT has 67 usages of the term sábbaton (Synoptics 43 times; John 13 times; the remaining usages appear in Acts and in a few letters). In some usages the plural form (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:27) or the singular (Luke 18:12; Mark 16:9; 1 Cor 16:2) refers to ‘week’; otherwise the meaning is always the seventh day of the week, the sabbath.”<sup>8</sup>