

What You Need in Your Wilderness

I'm on my seventh day of bed rest as I write this.

Did you know that you could seriously injure a rib, perhaps even crack a bone or tear a muscle ... from coughing? Not to scare you. I've had plenty of colds and viruses over nearly 33 years of life, but *this* has never happened. So I think it's a pretty rare thing. But truth be told, it's had its excruciating moments.

So I know you're wondering what one does for seven days in bed, right? I wish I could tell you, but really, I don't even know where the time went. Over the first few days, the mix of pain and pain meds was so nauseating I couldn't read or write. So mostly I think I had a week of just staring at the ceiling, lost in thought and aiming to pray.

But I'm not here to tell you a sad story about a hurt rib.

What I want to tell you is that in all of that "thinking time" I got, there was one thought that was the loudest and clearest and most repetitive. It was not a new thought. In fact, it was a thought that is more or less shrouded in familiarity. One I've heard so, so many times from Scripture and sermons and church small-group conversations.

But as the thought has been stirring in my heart for the last few months, (and as I lay on my bed icing my ribs as though it were my full-time job—because that week, it was), it has shed its familiarity.

It is the thought, or rather the call, to abide in Christ. Not just as a biblical idea, but as an if-I-don't-do-this-I'm-going-to-die-inside necessity.

The days right after my injury, I found myself in bed staring at the ceiling, with tears coming down the sides of my face, not only because of the present physical pain, but also with the pains of the last few years filing through my mind, all running together in those moments of bedriddenness and ice packs and pain pills.

My mind went back to those months, years ago now, when I prayed with tears and guttural cries for the healing of a dear friend's marriage. And then I remembered the day the divorce papers were served.

I remembered sleepless nights, my husband pacing the bedroom floor in prayer, as I lay in bed with another night of pain. I remembered doctor's visits and a year of tedious physical therapy.

I remembered walking the back lawn of the White House at a prayer event in D.C., asking God to reign over my heart, and to reign over my nation. And then I remembered being in the hallway of our hotel later that night, on our way to the ER, being sicker than I'd ever been in my life, so desperate for relief that I was willing to be hooked up to a machine if it would just make me feel better—and suddenly, right there by the hotel elevator, Jesus broke in, and my body and stomach settled.

I remembered looking across the kitchen table as my dad told me he had stage IV cancer. I remembered it not feeling real, not being able to wrap my mind around it, not knowing how to take away my dad's suffering—and feeling desperately helpless.

I remembered the most horrific phone call I'd ever received, three weeks after being with my dad at the kitchen table. I remembered pulling a dress out of my closet with shaking hands, and then driving eight hours to the unimaginable to attend my dad's memorial service.

It rips my soul to even write these things. And I'm not here

to just tell you all my trials. But I know that I'm not the only one who's been through a season of suffering. Some of you have, some of you will. All of us will in time—be it in our own lives, or in our nation or world that feels as though it's in utter chaos.

And we have got to get into a life-habit of abiding, of living in the presence of God. The message that God has shouted to my heart in these last seven days of staring at the ceiling isn't just for me.

It's for all of us.

We have to abide in Christ. No matter the season. With a desperate, resolute, if-we-don't-do-this-we're-going-to-die-inside kind of tenacity.

Because truth is, if we don't abide in His life, we really will die within.

Sometimes, as our feet trod along life's landscape, we hit some dreadfully dry spots. We feel all kinds of hurts—hurt in our bodies, hurt in our hearts, hurt caused by other people. And we feel shriveled and broken, desperate for water. To add to our trouble, we feel like we don't even know how to get to the spring.

And the temptation, for all of us, is to set our eyes on the dryness of today and so forget that we have a stream of Living Water, right inside of us.

And we've got to learn to drink, learn to practice His presence, learn to connect with God—even when our lives feel totally crazy.

If we keep our eyes on the Shepherd, He'll lead us to the waters, just in time.

Our security doesn't come from being out of the valley and on top of the mountain. **Security is being in the Shepherd's hand,**

wherever He is. Our refuge is remaining in His love, abiding in His presence, clinging to His faithfulness.

The very lifeline of our souls is found in abiding in Life's source.

In essence, here's what I'm saying ... *just **keep talking to Him. Don't ever stop talking to Him.***

Keep looking at Him with your heart's eyes. Live *all* of life—the ups and downs, the griefs and joys, the valleys and mountains—with your eyes looking into His.

When the temptation is to check out and to “pray later,” let your voice, even your sighs and weeping, come into His ear.

Because without Him, we die. He is our Bread and Water, and we must make His Name, His Word, food for our souls.

I need something more than good words or good thoughts or good ideas for a blog post or sermon. Lord, help me. I need substance for my soul. Something to keep me alive on the inside, something able to reach beyond my surface and into my core.

Whatever our season, we have to find Him in it. As humans we tend to live under this mindset that “It will be easier to seek God when”

“It will be easier when the grief lifts. It will be easier when the pain subsides. It will be easier when my schedule isn't so crazy.”

But, reader, there will always be a distraction. *Always.* Good things, hard things, bad things ... there will be something that makes it seem like “another time” for wholehearted God-seeking will be better than the present time.

But there is not going to be a better time. Now is our hearts'

hour for whole, nothing withheld, if-I-don't-do-this-I'm-going-to-die-inside tenacious pursuit of the holy.

If you're weary, offer your wearied prayer. If you're aching, sing Him a song from a broken heart. If you're weeping, weep before Him. If your life feels crazy, ask Him to help you engage with His heart right in the midst of the craziness.

Whether you're grieving or celebrating or staring at the ceiling holding an icepack and wondering what in the world is going on, *just abide in, live in and breathe in His presence.*

For only He who creates life, who gives life, who is Life, can keep us alive on the inside.

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