

## EASTER SUNDAY

Read John 20:11–23

*Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.”

The explosion of hope in those left grieving is not the slow colored maze of clouds greeting the day of a new sun—it is the bright white light of waking from the dark to midday. The tomb is open, we are not lost—we burst with the hope and promise fulfilled in new life. Sudden and uncompromising hope and joy. Christ is alive! The Lord risen! God’s glory is known to us, walking among us, bringing the good news of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. From our darkest moment, God has called us to attention. Look here, God says, the miracle and mystery of faith is revealed in an empty tomb!

Imagine the faces of those whom Christ greeted. “Rabbouni!” said Mary when he spoke her name and she at last recognized him. The darkness of my grief, the weight of my loss, is suddenly transformed and perfectly restored in the flesh. God’s hope for the world, God’s plan for new life in the Risen Christ, is ours. We are filled with warmth and light.

What has come of our time of sitting still? This week, we have been still in our grief; for forty days, we have been still to listen to God. We are now renewed. God is with us: At once we have clarity and behold a mystery. God has demanded attention!

*Lord, it is difficult to sit still on your Resurrection Day.  
I have been listening, Lord, and you have taught me*

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*In the stillness of Lent, I have been renewed and restored. I have heard your voice. I am ready to Rejoice!. Amen.*

# Sitting STILL

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## *A Lenten Meditation Guide for Students-2007*

BY LOIS MCCULLEN PARR,  
WITH WEEKLY REFLECTIONS BY ERIN BROWN

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Thanks to Thom Chu for calling to invite us to re-issue *Sitting Still*. Erin Brown and I originally worked together to prepare *Sitting Still* when I served in campus ministry, during academic year 1998. At that time, my husband Clayton and I were enjoying sons who were six and seven years old. Re-reading this material as the boys are now in their teens has been a gift for me this Epiphany season. Additionally, Thom's call prompted me to search for Erin, whom I'd lost track of since we both left Miami—we have found each other in Chicago: another gift, another Epiphany.

My time in campus ministry was a tremendous teaching and learning opportunity, and working with students like Erin brought joy in that ministry. Since that time, I have relocated to greater Chicago where I attended Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, was ordained elder, and where I have served several United Methodist congregations. I currently serve North Northfield United Methodist Church in Northbrook, Illinois.

I am still learning to sit still.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

family and friends

The Rev. Dr. Alice Cowan, for a reminder to look anew at Eliot's poem  
Thom Chu's encouragement

quotations from "Ash Wednesday", written in 1930 by T.S. Eliot, published (pp. 57–66) in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1934)

All scriptural references taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless noted.

KJV=King James Version

GNB=Good News Bible

TLB=The Living Bible (a paraphrase)

CEV=Contemporary English Version

The Message=Eugene Peterson's Contemporary Language.

## HOLY SATURDAY

### Read John 19:38–42

*Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

When someone you love dies, you operate automatically. You do the things you do everyday, eat your breakfast, go to work or school, do the laundry. You try to make the world seem normal when it feels anything but that. Imagine the grieving family and friends of Jesus, caught in the deep despair of night, the tension of lost hope keeping them from knowing what to care about. They search for answers from God and find only silence. The tomb is before them, the mystery of God's ways beyond them. They cry with the Psalmist, "Where are you, my God?" They seek God's face in the touch of others and yet they walk through their day after watching Jesus die, in agony, with no clarity. They are still because they are frozen in pain.

We sit still today, thinking of them, staring off into space. We do not need to ask for help in sitting still when we are covered in the fog of grief. In this stillness we listen for God, wondering how we will go beyond loss.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for* \_\_\_\_\_

## GOOD FRIDAY

Read Mark 15:40–47

*There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome... Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock.*

The dark chasm of death feels like you have been hit in the stomach. Whether or not you have yet experienced the loss of someone close to you, you know someone who has, or have read stories about the intensity of such loss. My mother died the year after I graduated from college. The stab of her death was swift and strong, unexpected. The darkness that filled my life for a long time following that death gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for those close to Jesus—those who watched him die and who found the pain too great to bear and left the scene, or for those who stayed with the pain, weeping at the foot of the cross.

I believe any response is appropriate, because there is an honesty in grief this deep. All is lost. Imagine for the disciples and those close to Jesus that the loss of a friend, brother, son, was a personal, intimate loss. And yet even more was at the heart of their grief—the lost hope that the promise of God was to be fulfilled. Remember, at the foot of the cross, those who loved Jesus could not know that Easter was to come. All is black and darkness. The soul is still, grieved, lost, without hope.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for* \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 37:7

*Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently...*

## Introduction

Lent—taken from the “lengthening” of days, the days in spring. Designed as a time of fasting, penitence, and prayer preceding Easter, its 40 days (starting with Ash Wednesday, Sundays are excluded) commemorate Jesus Christ’s fast in the desert, following his baptism. Beginning with the tradition of ashes on one’s forehead, symbolizing death and sorrow for sin, Lent began for me a few years ago with the re-reading of T.S. Eliot’s poem “Ash Wednesday.” Eliot’s prayer poem pleads with God to “Teach us to care and not to care/Teach us to sit still.” I decided that year to discipline myself to read the poem every day of Lent. Eliot is hard work, but I was drawn to the poem in a way that demanded attention, and by the following summer I felt sure that a Lenten meditation guide could be grounded in Eliot’s powerful language. I approached Erin to work with me on the project, and our attempts to find a time to write together last year during Lent failed us...because we, too, could not “sit still.” So: this booklet we hoped to write for others became a booklet we wrote for ourselves. As we discussed and prayed about form and message, we moved from Eliot’s poem to the cycles of our campus-centered lives. And we learned, as Erin concluded, that “there is more than one way to ‘sit still.’”

## USE OF THIS GUIDE

Early on, Erin and I knew that the crux of the issue for us—and, in our experience, others on college campuses—was that being still, really still, is a very difficult thing to do. We wanted to urge that you think each day about the stillness required for active listening to God. We have repeated a simple petition prayer at the end of each day, with a blank for you to fill in, because we feel that this is one way to pay attention to God in prayer. Instead of uttering a prayer we have written for you, you are invited to use your own prayer as a focus for listening to God. (Feel free to use the empty line to record your prayer concerns and needs, as well as your joys and thanksgivings, if you would like to use the guide in this way.)

N.B. Knowing that Spring Break falls during Lent on most campuses, this booklet is written with week three designated for that time. If the dates of your break do not coincide with week three, simply move it—exchange it with the week that falls as break for you. (The exception to that suggestion: if Spring Break falls during Holy Week for you, use the booklet as presented here.)

## MAUNDY THURSDAY

### Read Luke 11:1–4

*He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”*

### Read Matthew 26:36–45

*...he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”*

Jesus asked the disciples to retreat with him in prayer at Gethsemane... he knew to withdraw, even though they did not come with him, did not stay awake. But why did he ask them? Even Jesus did not want to be alone with God on this night.

Can we find comfort in that when we fear being alone with God? What are we fearing—certainly nothing as great as Jesus did, knowing what was to come. “Take this cup away from me,” our Lord asked God. What are we most afraid to utter to God in our alone time? That we are in pain? That we are lost? That we are afraid? That we do not know what to say? That we are overwhelmed? That even when we are trying to listen, we do not hear God’s voice?

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*



## ASH WEDNESDAY

Read Psalm 37:3–7

*Let the LORD lead you and trust the LORD to help. (CEV)*

I own a Zen meditation book called “That Which You Are Seeking Is Causing You to Seek,” and I have quoted its title often to name what I observe in the problems college students describe to me. The thrust of the book is this: stop working so hard at seeking—just sit down and pay attention. Hold still.

It is a lesson I have learned over and over again (and am still learning): when I am still, listening to the sounds around me and taking in the world with all my senses, I find a peace that eludes me when I frantically try to find it. This is simple advice, but so hard to practice. In this season of Lent when we see the world move from winter to spring, when we feel the renewal of life around us, we can readily find God. Just walk outside and listen to the birds. Hold still long enough to take in the details of God’s creative energy. Take a deep breath. Stop trying so hard.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## TUESDAY

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak...*

I love what T.S. Eliot does with language. Read aloud this excerpt from the *Ash Wednesday* poem:

*And the light shone in darkness and  
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word.*

*Where shall the word be found, where will the word  
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence...  
The right time and the right place are not here  
No place of grace for those who avoid the face  
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise  
and deny the voice.*

The phrase that sticks with me most in this passage is “there is not enough silence.” How can we find God—the Word made flesh in the face of Christ—in this “unstilled” world? Look around you in the days and activities of your life: Can the Word (Christ) take hold? Is there no room for him? Is there an empty spot in your heart? In your soul? On your planner?! Is the rush of meetings, events, and commitments so exhausting that you have given no time to resting in the Lord? If there is not enough silence, how can you be emptied in order that you may be filled?

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## MONDAY

### Read John 14:15–17

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”*

When you make a place for yourself to be alone with God, you may have found a place where you can easily feel focused. But there are ways to be alone with God in a crowded room, to be still and hear God’s voice, to be at peace. I remember the lyric from an old Monkees’ song, “I can’t hear you in this noisy railway station, all alone.” When we feel alone, when we are in the quiet of our sadness, no crowd can bring us out of our loneliness.

But can we give ourselves that sense of being alone when we are not feeling lost? How can we focus our attention on God, cutting out the noise around us, the din of constant activity, of pressures, of deadlines, of a campus filled with faces of other people 18 to 22 who look just like us? There are several things to try. Close your eyes; imagine yourself to be somewhere else. Lift your eyes; imagine God sitting beside you. Make this library spot a sacred one because you have entered prayer time.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## THURSDAY

### Read Hebrews 12:1–2

*Do you see what this means - all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we’d better get on with it. Strip down...and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. (The Message)*

The difference between sitting still and being still may have to do with listening. Listen for your own heartbeat. Listen for your own breathing. Eliot’s prayer poem asks, “Lord, teach us to sit still.” Teach us, Lord, to listen. To be still. To let your Spirit fill us. If we sit still, but we cannot feel still, what is going on? We sit sifting the sands of our calendar for the day, ticking off the mental list of things to do, places to go, people to see, papers to write, chapters to read...What shall I do first? What can I take off the list? How can I possibly get it all done? I am already full, Lord; where is the room for you?

Try an emptying. First, try to separate the items on the list from thinking of God. Imagine the list going into a box to be opened after prayer time. In your mind’s eye, see each nagging thought going into a box, falling to the bottom. In your imagination, watch each thought move from you to the box. When your list is done, turn back to your emptied self. Listen to your breathing, to the beat of your heart, to the hum of peace in your head. The box is saved. There is room now to let God in.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## FRIDAY

Read Luke 9:23–25

*Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”*

The value in any discipline is the consistent practice of it. If we commit to a daily devotional time with God, we only feel the reward of the time if we are good on the commitment. We worry that the fifteen minutes it may take to read a devotion is fifteen minutes we could use to study, to change clothes, to work out longer, to make a phone call, to....

If we need to schedule the fifteen minutes along with everything else we schedule, then let’s do that. Take out your planner. Look at the day—where is your fifteen-minute break? Between classes? Before dinner? Do you want to begin or end your day with God? (You could even choose both!) It is a mystery of faith, but if I make the time in my day to accommodate prayer time, my day is no shorter for me, and the solace of meditation gives me strength to handle the day. I find that it works best to set a time of day and practice that same time every day—experiment with the time until you find that your practice is most consistent.

Likewise, good meditation practice for you may require finding a space to be at peace. Are there places where you find it easier to be with God? Go there. It is worth the time. When I was in college I spent much of my spring semester in a tree; it was a great climbing tree—low branches, wide places to sit comfortably, even to write. It was a haven for me then, and I can return in my mind to the sense of comfort and connection with God that tree gave me. Maybe you have a place—indoors or out—where that connection occurs. If not, maybe you can use this Lenten season to find such a place. Maybe it is the small corner of a room. Maybe it is a sacred quiet area on campus. Maybe it is the chapel at a local church. Maybe it is a resting bench along a campus path or near a stream. Maybe, like me, you have found a climbing tree. Walk around: seek the place by seeking the Lord there. You will know when you have found it.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## HOLY WEEK

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At times I find peace in the middle of the loud world. I am surprised by it uptown when it is raining, at a concert brilliant with sound, in a room crowded with people and layered with cigarette smoke. God’s peace is unafraid to follow me anywhere. Often stillness comes to me through action, rather than sitting. Often it reaches me in the form of a shout—not at all soothing, a peace full of energy and movement.

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## PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

Read John 12:9–18

*The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting “Hosanna!”*

The followers of Jesus had no sense of how this week would end; they gloried in the presence of God among them—this was the Messiah, and they were entering the Holy City as a part of the Messiah’s group. You know what this feels like—you are on the committee that made this event happen! You swell with pride when the speaker is introduced—why, you helped arrange for this speaker to be here! You are part of something wonderful in this community...oh, but what happens if there is a demonstration at your event? If the news media arrive to cover this campus controversy? If your committee suddenly comes under attack for bringing such a divisive speaker to campus? Can we sense in some small way how the rise of glory rapidly—in less than a week—turned to chaos? How the team of followers quickly hid in the shadows, afraid to be recognized? Be mindful in the glory of Palm Sunday, in the shouts of exuberance that come with celebrating God’s presence among us, that someone may hear your shout and disapprove. Can you hold fast to the courage of your conviction that God is among us?

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## SATURDAY

### Read Mark 1:9–13

*And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

Jesus knew the power of solitude. He spent forty days in the desert after his baptism (and before his first sermon), forty days to mark the old story of wandering in the wilderness. We probably cannot imagine going into solitude for forty days, and we probably can't imagine the desert.

But we can try, I think, for forty days in Lent, to take time for solitude each day, to renew our strength, to refresh ourselves, to freshen our perspective. We can use the forty days to establish the habit of prayer and meditation time. We, like Jesus, will be tempted—for us, the temptation is to keep on doing things, to go from this appointment to that class or meeting, to keep moving at all times. We can actively fight the temptation by promising to do one thing less. Let us see the act of doing devotions not as something more, but as one thing less, in order to make time to create solitude with God.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

### Read Colossians 4:2–6

*Use your words as you live and work among outsiders. Don't miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out. (The Message)*

I recently heard the story of a young woman sitting in her dorm room, enjoying the quiet, planning nothing, going nowhere—simply sitting. Someone up the hall bursts in shouting, “Let’s do something!” and the woman is torn. Doing nothing is suddenly not okay. There must be someplace to go, to be seen, to make a voice heard; there must be something to *do*.

How is it that it was decided that “doing nothing” is no-thing? And yet, if we let ourselves “do nothing”—even if only for a few minutes—it is astonishing how energized we are when we move to “do something” again. What does that tell us about the “nothing” we did? When I was in college, I had a friend named Kent who sat under a tree in front of the library. I learned a great lesson one day, after sitting and talking with Kent for about half an hour. “Well,” I said, “I must get going to the library, I’ve wasted enough time I guess.” Kent looked at me simply and said, “I don’t think it’s a waste of time to sit talking with friends. I sit here nearly every day—sometimes to talk with a friend and sometimes to look at this tree and sometimes to look off into space. But it’s never a waste of time.” Time spent in solitude or with friends—spent, not wasted. Time resting or being still, not “doing nothing.” What happens if we change our language slightly to accommodate this view? An hour always has sixty minutes, but how we regard it can make the difference.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEEK 1

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Even when I do allow myself a couple of hours in which to relax—hours with no other purpose than simply to be—my mind cannot give up its racing without a struggle for at least an hour. No matter how hard I try to let go of my lists and worries, they take their time in fading away, and too often I never succeed in pushing them out of mind.

One night, after having tried for nearly two hours to relax and reflect, I called my mom in despair. She listened to my anxieties and grumbles. She sympathized, and then made me laugh against my will. We prayed together over the phone—a simple, earnest prayer that faltered and broke into laughter at times. Peace came to me when I was no longer trying to force the clutter of my guilts and fears from my mind. God showed up in the middle of my mess. Why do we think that our minds must be clear and holy before God can enter? God comes by surprise, and is there before we have time to flutter around and restore order. That is the incomparable grace of God's stillness. It does not require quiet or calm. It does not require us to perform any essential "rites" beforehand. It comes completely as a gift, and is ours before we know to look for it.

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## FRIDAY

Read John 14:27–28

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

We have heard that we are in a culture of hurry up and wait, and, indeed, I find myself waiting around campus much of the time. There is a line at the ATM, at the food store, in the cafeteria, for the bathroom, at the registrar's; there is a traffic jam at the main corner...and on and on. We tap our fingers, our toes; we seethe with frustration because this waiting takes a bite out of our day.

What if we were to consider this waiting time a gift from God—a gift we do not give ourselves, that of holding still? What if we use this time in prayer, in devotion—okay, you do not have your Bible while you sit at the stoplight, but what can you do to turn your heart to God? Say a prayer for those stopped at this light, one at a time. If you are in line, say a prayer for those ahead of you—maybe you know them, have seen them, or maybe these are complete strangers, someone on your campus you have never seen before. Take your time and have a good look at this person: does the countenance reflect worry and strain, or health and happiness? Say a prayer for that one: offer him or her up to the Lord as a person to be blessed especially on this day.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## THURSDAY

### Luke 18:1–8

*Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.*

If we say that evil has a pull on us, that we cannot control the impulse to do too much, what responsibility are we taking for avoiding spiritual development? Is it something outside of the self or something in us that we cannot control? Or is it precisely the opposite—that we want to (and try to) control ourselves all the time, when what we most need is to let God in, to let go of control? Can we turn ourselves over to God for a few moments to genuinely ask for “Thy will” to be done? How do we gain power by giving it to God? When we let God in, there is no room for evil to find a home.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## MONDAY

### Read Psalm 139:1–12

*Where could I go to escape from your Spirit or from your sight? If I were to climb up to the highest heavens, you would be there. If I were to dig down to the world of the dead you would also be there. . . Or suppose I said, “I’ll hide in the dark until night comes to cover me over.” But you see in the dark because daylight and dark are all the same to you. (CEV)*

It is tempting to want to have all the clutter gone before we can come to God in prayer—we may be afraid that God is absent when we are fumbling and disordered. But I wonder what would happen if we could begin to see God among the messes we make, if we could find some sacred meaning in the clutter that makes up our day-to-day time? If we lift our eyes from the computer screen, if we take a moment to touch the person next to us at dinner (or allow them to touch us), haven’t we very simply made room for God in the midst of the madness? If we sit reading and the cat nudges its way across our papers, we can stop and pet the cat, this creature of God. If we sit on the bus and someone asks if the seat next to us is taken, we can stop to look the person in the eyes—really seeing that person—and offer the seat. As we move the 3x5 cards to the corner of the desk, read the next chapter, write the first sentence of the paper. . . , we can pause, utter a prayer amidst the work, and ask God’s blessing on it. The clutter will still be there, but we may be changed.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## TUESDAY

### Read Psalm 46

*“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

Our colleague Laura is fluent in French and when we talked with her last year about this meditation guide, she gave us a translation of Psalm 46:10 that ended up guiding our direction in many ways: in French the word is “Arretez!” Laura told us that does not really translate as “be still” in the quiet way we generally use this passage; it translates as “Halt!” or “Stop!” Certainly in the context of the entire psalm, that meaning is clear: it is a call to cease fighting, to end war. Yet what an epiphany this translation provided!

Yes, we can quietly and meditatively “be still”—and I recommend it; there is much good in that calm approach—but the crux of my new way of thinking about this single verse is that God may not always be gentle when calling us to attention: Halt! Stop! God demands your attention!

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEDNESDAY

### Read John 6:1–21

*When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

### Read Isaiah 56:1–8

*Blessed is [the one] who refuses to work during my Sabbath days of rest, but honors them. (TLB)*

When I am so hard on myself for not being able to slow down to make time for God, I am reminded of the United Methodist bishop who serves my conference—Judy Craig—who a year ago was nearing surgery and the first of her chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer. The bishop admitted to the Annual Conference gathering of some 4,000 people that, much as she appreciated the retired bishop assisting her (so that she could rest), she could not sit still in her room. Knowing the conference continued on under the care and control of the other bishop, she told us that she paced her room, unable to rest. “What are they doing now?” she says she wondered, physically removed from the action.

I think of her, a bishop, who by example has been a mentor in the faith, and am somewhat comforted to know that she is—as I am—facing the human condition: the inability to let go. We want to seize control even when we are not in the room.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## TUESDAY

### Read Psalm 23

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.*

When life in the fast lane keeps us rushing from one event or commitment to the next, our bodies keep up with our datebooks. Our hearts beat faster; our blood moves to accommodate our pace. One of the benefits I find in stopping and resting is that I slow my heart down. It is alarming to me that I find it so difficult to do this simple thing. With the slowing of my heart, the evenness of breath, I am suddenly able to clear my head, to slow down the racing of my thoughts, to restore some order to my sense of the day slipping by. I drink deeply of God's grace, stopping the thoughts about what is next on my calendar to ask God's blessing on my work and my play, to ask God's guidance in what I do, to ask for God's loving hand to warm those in need, and to give thanks to God for all that I have. This does not take long. But amazingly, in those moments of quiet time in reflection and prayer, I am restored. When I turn to move into the rest of my day, somehow—and here is the mystery of faith—it is easier. Not so mysterious, is it?

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEDNESDAY

### Read Matthew 11:28–30

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.”*

When I fail to make time for God in my daily life, when I do not stop to pray or spend time with the Word, it catches up with me. It recently happened like this: I am in church, a hymn begins; suddenly, I am hearing for the first time because the message is so urgent: “It’s me, it’s me, Oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” This old song that I first learned with my grandma at her childhood campground is a tune I know by heart. I stood singing the words when—without warning—I got a rush of the Lord’s presence in a strange and new way. I sang these words in earnest, realizing that I had turned my back on God and I was crying out “It’s me, it’s ME.”

Standing in need. I go to church every Sunday; I have sung this song for over thirty years. This time, it was different. God got my attention with a familiar tune, in a familiar place, and I sang with a genuine plea: “not my brother, not my sister, but it’s me, Oh Lord.”

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## THURSDAY

### Read Luke 4:1–15

*Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.*

God laughs (and helps us laugh) just like Erin’s mom, and what a relief it is! Last summer I sat aboard a sailboat in no wind. I was thinking then about Eliot’s poem, about sitting still, thinking that God is the best teacher. When we are eager for movement, anxious to sail, ready for action, God knows how to force us to sit still.

I sat on this boat, feeling and hearing the lap of the water against the hull, rocking gently. It was soothing and comforting. But the boat’s owner and captain wanted to sail, wanted to show me what this boat could do. He fiddled with the tack, moved the sail, headed a different direction, some other sailing maneuver. Eventually he gave in: “There is no wind.” At last he sat down. As we rocked, sometimes silent, sometimes talking, he stopped thinking about the wind/no wind situation. I watched a man who does not relax, relax. God is at work here, I thought.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## MONDAY

### Read Matthew 6:5–15

*“And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here’s what I want you to do: find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.” (The Message)*

### Read Psalm 139:1–12

*Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.*

Some argue that we cannot enter prayer unless we first prepare ourselves for prayer time through meditation. For me, prayer is so constant—uttered as I walk my children to school for the day; before I place a call to my father or a friend; before a meeting at my office. I have learned to practice prayer in this daily, automatic way, finding satisfaction in these sentence prayers called out to God.

But I can also attest to the deeper, more intense prayer that follows deeper meditation, when I still myself, prepare my heart to listen, and wait for God. I have learned that I cannot add to my life without letting something go, and this principle holds in prayer time: if I want to invite God in, I need to let some things go out. A time of sitting still and meditating clears my head; I can focus on the stillness, opening my heart to be ready for the deeper, more life-giving prayer in which I am humbled before God, in which I relinquish control and give God the power.

P.S. These are two very different ways of practicing prayer, but I find that a balance of both is essential to my spiritual health.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEEK 5

===== ERIN'S MUSINGS =====

So often I find myself searching for a quiet place. I look for a couch in the library well-removed from whispering voices. I await an hour in the dorm when the music has finally been turned down and the last pizza has been ordered. I hunt for stolen moments of aloneness and quiet. But I do not always find them. In fact, often I give up in irritation, and end the day feeling exhausted and not quite complete.

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## FRIDAY

### Read Job 3:20–4:6

*“For my sighing comes like my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water. Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes.”*

If we fail to do our soul work, to take care of ourselves in a holistic way, we soon find that we stall out. Maybe you are feeling sick and need to take a day off and stay in bed, maybe you rush so much that you fall down and sprain an ankle and are forced to slow down. Maybe you get the blues.

My own experience with depression has been a slow and steady revelation for me, as I have come to see the depression as gift from God. When things are out of whack for me, I now know to stop and pay attention. I have not been giving myself enough rest, or I have been stretched too far, or I have suppressed resentment toward something I am being asked to do. I have learned to make myself slow down. Eliot writes in his poem, “teach us to care and not to care,” and I have come to understand this for myself when I stop and pay attention.

Listening to our bodies is key. I once heard a holistic health practitioner say that in our culture we operate without listening to our bodies—for example, she said, we feel tired and our response is “I’d better have another cup of coffee!” So we keep going; we do not listen to the body saying *I said I’m tired*. Try one day to respond differently. You feel tired. Your urge is to jump up and go work out, do something, have some coffee or a Mountain Dew. Don’t do it. Set your alarm and take a twenty-minute nap instead. Wake up, wash your face, and head on to the next thing in your day.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

### Read Ecclesiastes 9:7–18

*Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.*

I conduct a choir that rehearses weekly, and each week—at least once—I talk about breath support. Invariably there is a moment in a song when I am holding up my hands to sustain the energy and sound of a phrase, and there is what we call a “brownout” just where I hope to carry over the line. You can guess what a brownout is even if you have never heard this phrase before—unlike a blackout, when folks are frozen in complete darkness, a brownout is a lessening of the energy for a momentary slow-down or weakness. I think that the chances of brownout are greater for us if we do not gather up the necessary energy and support that we need to sustain our particular life schedule. If we refuse to rest, to store up energy, we brownout in the middle of a class, during lunch, sitting on the bus. We are aware that the energy is not gone from us, but diminished. Like the choir, we need to stagger our breathing—our rests—so that we can avoid brownout. Look ahead, prepare for the journey, take the time to breath deeply before heading out.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## N.B. FOR SPRING BREAK WEEK

Most college students take a week away...and, if you are going on a mission trip, it may be natural for you to pack your Bible or share devotions with a friend. If you are going home to be with your family, it may come easy to take time each day for prayer and devotions. And if you are headed for Florida or elsewhere that offers a respite from winter, you will be joining lots of other college students whose sense of rest is also a sense of warmth and play...and the Bible may not be packed alongside your swimsuit. Whatever your plan, try to keep faithful to your Lenten meditation. Try sitting still with the Lord.

## SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

### Read Psalm 16

*Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” ... Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.*

Bedtime in our home is a code word for power struggle. The parent believes he or she knows best— “It is time for the body to rest, we have to get up early, school tomorrow, test tomorrow, your body cannot keep going”—but there is something in a five-year-old that resists this logic and fights to stay awake. I watch my child dance and giggle and jump, unable to respond to my calls to come sit by me or lie down on the bed or let’s be still and hear a story. At long last I get him to join me for stories. As he sits or lies next to me, I feel his hand, his foot, some part of him, tapping a rhythm. He actively refuses to hold still, knowing, however unconsciously, that if he does, sleep will come to him and he will miss the story, miss a comment from his brother, be carried out of the wonder of wakefulness. If the story is exciting or silly, he keeps moving or pops to attention to keep at it. If the lights are out and I am making up a story in the dark, his movements slow down, he begins to rest. The quieter my voice, the quieter his motion. At last he lets go, quits moving; he is asleep. I think of God in this time between wakefulness and sleeping and wonder how much of the world I need to close out to hear the whisper of God’s bedtime voice. If I cannot focus on prayer, perhaps I need to turn out the lights and give my senses a new experience of listening.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## FRIDAY

Read Acts 14:8–17

*“...yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.”*

My friend Donna gave me a book of prayers by Richard Foster that included a short prayer for coffee time. In his notes, Foster invites the reader to follow his practice of using the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee as prayer time. I often think of this prayer, as it is so easy in our rushing life to take a cup of coffee and grab a book, magazine, article, notes from class, even the “remote”—and drink our cups, doing something else all the while. We judge it wasteful to sit and enjoy the cup or snack of something; somehow we think we must keep on doing something instead of really taking a break.

Just for today, try taking a snack or drink break—and stop doing something else. Just for today, sit and focus: you are nourishing your body (snack) or you are quenching a thirst (drink). Savor it. Take the time to give thanks for what enters your body; acknowledge God as the Source of all, the Provider. Invite God to use you as you fill yourself with God’s blessing.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEEK 2

===== ERIN’S MUSINGS =====

I have been reflecting a great deal since leaving campus on the possible reasons for my weariness of spirit. At the time, as I was moving through my work and studies with a terrible sort of indifferent exhaustion, I believed myself to be merely in a time of unusual stress (which is not unheard-of in the lives of college students, after all). I thought that I was staying up too late, working too many hours, drinking too much coffee, or not getting enough time for myself. I am sure that each of those factors contributed to my weariness, but I know, and always knew, that my feelings were not those typical of the average university student fed up with the daily grind. It was more than the simple ho-hums of too many exams and too little sleep. I had lost touch with something precious and life-giving.

Somewhere in the chaos and hassle of my daily routine, I unconsciously decided that my friendship with God was not quite as important as my other commitments. I still loved God, of course. When I went to church I would pray with my hands clasped and my head bowed. I would discuss God fervently with friends, arguing theology and -isms. But I no longer found myself in silent conversation with God before I fell asleep, and I did not lift a thought to God while walking from class to class. All of the outward rituals remained neatly visible and in place, but my nakedly honest, tender friendship with God was no longer a regular part of my day.

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## MONDAY

### Read Isaiah 55

*Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love...*

School vacations are no accident—the administration knows from experience that with no let-up, students just cannot keep the intensity of college study without a break. A week off generally means as many as nine or ten days away from the books and classes and meetings and activities that make up college life, and I do not know a student who does not welcome that break. It is a good time to play, to relax, to put your mind away from studies. It is also an ideal time to keep a discipline of prayer and devotional Bible study—for most folks, the datebook just is not relevant during this week.

Try to determine what time of day works while you are on break (it is probably not the same as the time during school), and stick to it. If you think you need a vacation from everything, listen to yourself say that out loud: you're going to take a week off from God?

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## THURSDAY

### Read Psalm 65

*You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.*

I have not yet read the book entitled *God Is In the Details*, but the title alone has become a focus for my devotions. I look up to the water in my shower and pull myself out of thinking about what I have to do today and think instead about water. This is a gift of God. The way my shower time goes now is different from any other day. I am feeling the water, God's water, falling on my head and over me. I drink it up and the fullness of Creation—instead of the tasks ahead—now fills my mind. I think about the water as God's Presence falling on me. I am reminded of my baptism. I am a child of God.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEDNESDAY

### Isaiah 41:1–4

*Quiet down, far-flung ocean islands. Listen! Sit down and rest, everyone. Recover your strength. Gather around me. Say what's on your heart. Together let's decide what's right. (The Message)*

As a parent of young children, I fight to get them to “sit still” at least once a week in church and usually more often. There is a limitless energy in kids; you have seen it. Part of their fight with me is power: they do not want to give in to me, to let me “win” the battle. I see in them a fear of holding still, that letting me have the power relinquishes their control of the situation.

A simple lesson for us to learn, isn't it, about our own hesitation to hold still, to let God “win” the battle of power over us? What happens when we relinquish control? Let us take a few minutes to stop the wiggling we're doing as adults, the wiggling away from spiritual time, wiggling away from prayer. Let us say to ourselves: this is important time for me to let go and give God the control. It requires that we listen, that we stop moving, that we let God have our attention, even if only for a short time. With my children, I try many approaches—among the worst, I yell that they are not cooperative, that their behavior is inappropriate. I wonder now, does God think we are not cooperative? that our behavior is inappropriate? I have learned that a more successful approach—the one for which God as Parent is our example—is to quietly, gently, talk with my children about the time ahead and what is to be gained from sitting still. Let's see what will happen if we listen during this time. Let's see what we will discover if we are quiet and paying attention.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## TUESDAY

### Read Luke 11:9–13

*“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

I love fiction, and one of my favorite things about vacation is reading as many books as I can cram in during a week away from the daily grind. One of the reasons I love fiction is that I escape to the world of the author, to a world I do not know in the flesh but that I do know in the pictures of my imagination, and I befriend the characters of the story. In fact, I usually judge whether I think it is a good book if it comes to an end and I am sad that I have to say goodbye to these people I now know.

Generally we do not re-read fiction, but we re-read the Bible all the time, saying hello again to characters we have met before. One of my favorite things about the Bible, in this same way, is that the players in the stories (especially the Old Testament) take shape in my imagination if I let them. I love to close my eyes and picture what so-and-so of my fictional tale looks like, and I love to try this with biblical tales: What did Shiphrah and Puah look like? What expressions were on their faces when they lied to Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15–21)? Take a little time when you are on break to sit still with an old Bible story (even a familiar one)—use your imagination and let the characters come to life.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEDNESDAY

### Read Job 37:1–18

*Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.  
(KJV)*

The Psalmist writes that God finds us anywhere. Even if we turn our backs on God—because we think we are too busy, because we are playing too hard or working too hard—God is in our midst. If you have ever been to an ocean, you know the constant roll and roar of the sea. For me, there is no better place to witness at once the certainty and the mystery of God’s presence. The tide goes in and out every day; you can expect it. The next wave returns and I am turned to an awareness of God’s creative force. I look out to the horizon, the end of this vast sea beyond my vision, and I know in a moment that I am a very small part of the creation of our enormous God. I cannot hear my own heart here, because the tumbled crash of the breakers is louder than my own sense of self, my breathing. Compared with this ocean, I am still. I am at once humbled and grateful for God’s watching over me, a speck of life on this shore, standing in the tide. The water washes over my feet, and I give thanks.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## TUESDAY

### Read Psalm 131

*I am content and at peace as a child lies quietly in its mother’s arms, so my heart is quiet within me. (GNB)*

I recited this Psalm over and over when nursing my infant children in the night. I tell students all the time that being a parent—especially the first time I had a disobedient child—has given me a larger imagination for God. My reading of the Old Testament changed after this experience. My idea of God as Parent became more tangible for me, more intensely understood. If I can picture the God who nurtures and sustains me the way a parent does a child—no matter how far away the child is—I have a new vision of what it means to be loved by God. The capacity to enlarge our view of God is itself a gift.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## MONDAY

### Read Hebrews 12:5–15

*God is educating you, that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. (The Message)*

Are we limiting God if we think we are boring to God? Each day, my elementary-aged children report to me the excitement of a new day at school—am I bored? Hey, I may already know about subtraction, but when my son discovers it, I stand in amazement at this old story problem. His discovery ignites me, enlarges me, gives me vicarious pleasure, helps me to see things in a new way.

I have to imagine God as this kind of parent. I imagine One who knows all, sees the fullness of the earth, and life past, present, and future; One who is great beyond measurement. How can such a being have an interest in our trivial understanding, our insignificant desire, our minute victory, our inconvenient pain? Ah, yes, God is a parent. God hears our tiny cries, our stinky requests, our yelps of triumph, and shares them with us—anew. Yes, a parent: proud and engaged in the steps the child takes.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## THURSDAY

### Read Genesis 2:1–3

*And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

Sabbath time is becoming a buzzword even in secular circles—efficiency experts recognize the value of rest. The tradition that we celebrate and practice a Sabbath, a day of rest, begins with the Creation story and our heavenly Parent stepping back, “seeing that it was good,” and resting. Surely our excuses are inadequate if we choose not to follow such a model. During a break time, we can step back, “see that it was good,” and rest.

Consider the ways in which your life has been blessed by the creative God. What has been provided for you during the first half of this semester? Meditate about those things that have been “good.” Stepping back from all that you have experienced also gives you the perspective that something which seemed “not so good” at the time may, in fact, have worked out for the good—give thanks for your new perspective! And rest in the comfortable knowledge of goodness.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## FRIDAY

Read Isaiah 40:25–31

*The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

In a brochure for a spiritual retreat, I read the phrase “retreating to advance,” and it has stuck with me. If we pull ourselves into retreat, into the solitude of our own time and space, into being alone with God, we can strengthen and sustain ourselves to advance to greater possibilities following the retreat. It might be as simple as vacation time, a long weekend, a walk in the woods, or it may be the memory of a spiritual retreat where we focused on God for a time away.

Whatever your image of retreat, broaden it today as you consider the effect of a short retreat in order to advance. Look at your calendar for the weeks ahead—is there a time one day when you can schedule a retreat away from your usual activities? Can you find a woods to walk where you can breathe in the renewal of the earth as spring buds to life around you? Is there a church or chapel where you can go to spend some time surrounded by the icons that speak to us of God’s message? Is there the home of a faculty or staff member or a church friend that could be sacred space for you, away from your dorm or apartment? Do not be afraid to ask for the use of such a space—try to give yourself a “retreat” from your usual schedule. Do not take a backpack with homework or paperwork. Take a good book or magazine to read. Or take your Bible. Or take nothing. Allow yourself at least half a day away. If you need no other prayer, keep the phrase “retreating to advance” in mind, and ask God to bless your retreat so that you can return home renewed and ready to “advance.”

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEEK 4

===== ERIN’S MUSINGS =====

God asks me, “What’s up?” But what can I tell God? Does God really care what sort of grade I get on my dreaded biology exam? Does it matter to God when I sleep through the buzzing of my alarm and arrive late to work—again? I actually feel concerned sometimes that I might bore God. I don’t have anything important or dramatic to say, and so I do not talk to God unless the words are there for me to recite. My life seems to be composed of so many menial and unimportant tasks and events. God sees them all anyway, and there is certainly no thrill to be had in repeating them.

I forget that God hears me and is with me even at the most drab moments in my day. God’s sight allows God to witness the sublime seconds in my life, which I overlook. I tell myself that when something urgent or exciting happens, I will stop everything and rush to God with the news. I forget God. I forget that God is my Parent.

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## SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

Sirach 50:22–24

*And now bless the God of all, who everywhere works great wonders, who fosters our growth from birth, and deals with us according to his mercy. May he give us gladness of heart, and may there be peace in our days...*

I occasionally work with Kappa Phi on our campus, and this fall I heard something I cannot forget. One woman shared—at first embarrassed, and then forthrightly and honestly to make her point— “I sometimes come here and realize when it’s time to read scripture that I’ve forgotten my Bible. I always have my datebook. Imagine! I take my planner with me and I forget my Bible.”

Doesn’t this speak to many of us in this environment where the planner has become the symbol for our “ordered” and busy lives? We write everything in this planner—meetings, workout schedules, classes, due dates, phone numbers, tasks to do. Planners in hand, we go along blithely, leaving the Bible home on the shelf. What would happen if we took as much time each day with the Word as we do with our planners? What if we find one Bible in which we are willing to write our planner notes, our phone numbers, our lists of things to do? Let’s make our Bibles our planners.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

Read Isaiah 30:15–18

*For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: in returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.*

When we take a break (when we give ourselves permission to be at rest) we breathe easily, welcoming the peace that comes with the planned, “earned” vacation. What happens to us in this week away? We are revitalized, renewed; we are ready to get back to our schedule with new energy and vigor, with fresh insight and a clearer mind. We head back to the familiar places, the dorm room or the apartment or the house, the center of activity for us. We have a kind of rest and calm that comes with having taken the time away. How can we hold onto this peace as the new day dawns? How can we keep this sense of being centered and at rest when the whirlwind begins?

I am reminded of the Hebrew tradition of Sabbath which ends in Havdallah, the marking of the close of Sabbath time. At Havdallah, there is a spice box or a sprig of fresh spice passed for those gathered to take a whiff of the spice, to lodge in the memory (and smell-memory is so great) a sense of remembrance—with the hope that those celebrating will hold onto the Sabbath time by treasuring this “spice” in their minds, holding onto the spice of Sabbath until the next week when they gather again. I keep a sprig of sage in my office from a Havdallah I experienced two years ago. It is now dry and crusty, but even looking at it gives me the memory of that special celebration to mark the end of the time of rest.

Can you find a symbol of your break time, your vacation (if you had one)? If yours was the mission trip, do you have an extra nail from that Habitat House? If yours was a trip home, do you have some keepsake that you can carry back to school to help reclaim that special place of calm again? If yours was the beach, can you bring home a baggie of sand, a shell, something that will take you back to the sense of well-being that comes with relaxation and rest? Find the visual or sensory reminder that works for you. Use it through the remainder of Lent to help you return to this sense of rest, to help you remember your Sabbath time.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEEK 3

===== ERIN'S MUSINGS =====

Sometimes at school I actually forget who God really is, and what it means to be in relationship with God. I pull at God impatiently, dragging God down to the level of my own humanity. Slowly I begin to think of God in the same way I would of those acquaintances I pass everyday on academic quad. I am walking in one direction and they in the other. I glimpse them from a short distance and prepare a smile or a quick greeting. Our eyes meet briefly as we pass each other by. They ask me “what’s up?” but they never stop to hear my answer, and I never pause to give it.

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## FRIDAY

### Read Mark 6:30–32

*The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.*

The more questions I discover on my journey, the closer I feel to God and the deeper I experience my faith from moment to moment. The holy mystery of the unspoken gesture, the movement of events which meet my needs when I least expect it, the sources of good and full connection in relationship with others...these are signs of the divine presence for me. Stop and watch a tree come to bloom. See a bird deliver a worm to a nest. Feel the hand on your shoulder, someone watching over you, becoming the hands and feet of God.

Centuries ago, St. Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are restless, until they rest in you, O Lord,” a phrase that sticks with me. If we are unable to convince ourselves that we need and benefit from rest, we move about in our rush to get things done without a sense of peace, falling into bed at night exhausted. We fall asleep in the middle of a goodnight prayer to God because we have already hit the pillow. We are, I think, “restless until at rest,” but the rest we require we have limited to nighttime sleep. If we remove that limit and schedule regular rest (and not necessarily sleep) into our days, we will find that the restlessness of spirit can indeed be quieted.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## THURSDAY

### Read Matthew 4:18–22

*As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

So many college students come to me with a sense of weariness, of always being behind, of always rushing, and they usually tell me that something just seems out of kilter—“I can’t find God,” or “I don’t know how to pray,” or “the old images of a God who looks like a white man with a beard just don’t work for me anymore.” I love these discussions. I love working with students to find new ways of imagining and relating to a God who created us, who created the amazing world around us. The God for whom the seasons turn as quietly and smoothly as the first soft green bud has created a people who—as suddenly as the first bloom we recognize—one day look up, staring in amazement! “It’s 65 degrees,” we say; “I think I’ll put on shorts!”

What kind of Being reaches over all this world, seeing to the details that we so take for granted? Take a moment to think about God as this infinite being, and as close to us as this person to whom we’re talking. We try to imagine it, wanting to put a face on God because we need an image that connects God to our daily and human lives. Of course, God’s own self gave us a human face in Jesus. In Christ, we have some measure of understanding that God walking among us is this kind of being, this kind of example—our teacher, our friend. We can choose to follow this example of prayer and solitude, study of the Word and telling of stories. We can hope to make God come to life for others, sharing the experience we have of the Holy.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## MONDAY

### Read Micah 6:3–8

*“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”*

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

When we are in relationship with God, we understand that that relationship is a two-way one. Think of the friends we meet daily, that we write to back home or at another school. How do we nurture those relationships? We call, we write, we e-mail, we think about one another and connect when we can, valuing the connection and taking responsibility for keeping it up. Why do we think it will be any different with God?

If we fail to nurture our relationship with God, who loses? We do, of course. God misses us, is saddened by our step away. And—like so many friendships that withstand the test of time and location—we can pick up right where we left off: God is there waiting for us. God was reaching out to us even when we failed to reach back.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## TUESDAY

### Read Luke 10:38–42

*But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”*

I have a relationship with one brother who does not initiate calls or write to me, with whom making contact is rare but important. I have come to realize I have no expectation that he will call me, yet my need to keep a hold on the relationship is something I do for *me*. When he says that he loves me, I believe him. And it is this simple word from him that gives me the sense that we are still connected and that I am of value to him.

I think of this when I read about Mary and Martha: What do we expect of one another? How do our relationships with one another reflect our relationship with God? How does the writer of the Gospel show us that Christ values Mary’s “better part” while we, like Martha, wonder why she is not sharing responsibility for getting the dinner ready? How do we, like Martha, scurry about, unaware of the needs of our brothers and sisters? How do we, like Mary, choose to nurture our relationship with the Lord?

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*

## WEDNESDAY

### Read Jeremiah 6:9–16a

*Thus says the LORD: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.*

When I was in high school I heard a preacher whose name I have forgotten but whose benediction I have not: “May the spirit of the Lord be adequately disturbing.” This message has traveled with me because I find that if I do not feel disturbed by the Lord, I must not be letting the Lord into my life. What does this disturbance mean? That I am uneasy when I miss my prayer time, that I am uncomfortable when I witness injustice and do not speak out against it, that I am riding along with all going well and forgetting to give thanks, that I am stumbling along in pain and afraid to ask God for help, certain that God has given up on me. Like the apostle Paul, I try to live with Jesus Christ as model, but I fail time and again. It is in this failure that God is more and more present for me—disturbing me, challenging me to try again.

*Lord, teach me to sit still.*

*I am listening, Lord, for \_\_\_\_\_*