


Winter

An invitation to embrace restorative rhythms.

Five Days of Reflections on Rest



*The tree, she understands that for everything, there is a season.
Therefore, she does not attempt to grow fruit in winter.
Instead, she listens as winter whispers, "lighten your load, rest and prepare."*

Random Reflection

Day 1: Defining Rest

As a natural planner, I find it easy to move quickly from one task to another, finding great satisfaction in making lists and checking things off as completed. For most of my life, I failed to understand the value of naps or pausing throughout the day, seeing time as an opportunity to produce.

Old task-driven Joy would have run through winter armed with resolutions, plans and goals set and ready. Yet time and life experiences have revealed that while there are many positives to my skills as a task completer, my quick movement onto the next thing might, on occasion, rob me of some beauty found in each season.

So a few years ago, I decided rather than rushing ahead with a well-laid-out plan; I wished to accept the invitation of winter to lighten my load, rest, and prepare. I wanted to ease my way into each new year and season.

Instead of viewing all seasons the same, winter has become about learning how to practice a rhythm of rest and establishing the foundation for the life I wish to live.

Rest, however, is not a one size fits all practice. Also, rest may not look the same in every season of life, so to establish this rhythm of rest, I had to first start with a working definition.

While Merriam-Webster defines rest as "a bodily state characterized by minimal functional and metabolic activities," a life rhythm of rest is so much more. So when I speak of rest, it comes defined as a rhythm of life to be practiced in a way that meets our physical, emotional, and spiritual need for renewal in our specific season.

In this winter season, we may need physical rest that provides restoration for our bodies. Or mental rest that invites us into deep listening. We may be burned out relationally and need to grow smaller and deeper into authentic community or find peace as we embrace an emotionally restful season. Some of us might find ourselves in a season of needing spiritual rest or practicing a new to us sabbath rest. Rest and how we practice rest is not, as I've already mentioned, a one-size-fits-all and varies with each season.

Perhaps this season, we can opt to ease our way forward, allowing winter to serve as a time of rest, restoration, and preparation for the new growth that will come with spring.

Pause to Consider:

As you embrace this Winter season, what is your State of Being? Without judgment and with grace, take a moment to consider how you are doing physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

I am Physically _____

Emotionally _____

Spiritually _____.

As you look to establish rhythms of rest, let's define what rest means to you.
What is your working definition of rest?

Now consider, in your current season of life, are you in need of physical rest?

What type of rest do you find yourself longing for?

Are you emotionally fatigued or spiritually fragile?

What might you need to release or allow to remain unfinished for a season to accept the invitation of winter?

What rhythms or practices might you embrace to incorporate the type of rest you need this season?

A Prayer:

May we not be so focused on the tasks before us, the things that need to get done, that we fail to consider what this season of winter has to offer us.

May we accept the invitation of winter to slowly enter its days, listening and watching for what this season has to give.

May we be mindful of the state of our body, mind, and soul, with grace allowing ourselves to linger and consider what rhythms or rest we might need to find restoration.

May we understand that true rest is ultimately found with our friend Jesus and accept his invitation to rest in him.

Is there a Prayer in your Heart?

"Rest can be a mindset shift from the chasing to the accepting."

Linnea Bergstrom, *Come and Rest*

Day Two: Winters Cozy Mindset

For many of us, winter comes with some level of cold. Depending on your location, it might mean a light sweater or jacket or five layers and bundling up, so you don't freeze when you step outside your door. Regardless of temperature, winter invites an aspect of coziness.

Hygge, the Danish word to describe a quality of coziness and comfort creating a feeling of well-being, has become a popular concept outside of Danish culture. This cozy concept is now being embraced in a simplified way to sell decorations or cozy decor.

Koselig is the Norwegians' version of Hygge, and some might consider it Hygge 2.0, embraces #optingoutside and engaging with nature. It is generally a simpler and more casual rhythm to life in winter.

While both Hygge and Koselig are words used to describe cozy, they are more deeply rooted in their cultures beyond aesthetics. There is a social aspect and a deep connection to nature.

Instead of allowing the cold dark days of winter to drive them indoors, "koselig" in Norway finds people hanging outdoor lights, building fires and laying blankets out in outdoor seating areas, where they continue to gather. And, when they move indoors, "koselig" is the feeling created in the home, including inviting people in, lighting candles, having a warm fire, and of course, food is essential and likely homemade.

While both Hygge and Koselig have decor elements and social aspects, these words are more of a mindset. A mindset that begins in our hearts and homes then flows out from there.

We can decorate our homes with blankets and fluffy pillows and call it cozy, yet to truly be considered Hygge or Koselig cozy needs more than decoration. It is about creating spaces both indoors and out that say to others, "you are welcome here." It is about having a welcoming and inclusive posture, always making room at the table; whether in your home or dining out for one more to join you. It's the idea that instead of resisting the cold of winter, we prepare and embrace the opportunities the season brings. And, I'd like to believe it's about noticing and celebrating the ordinary and small beauty that we find in the season of winter.

Yes, we can decorate our homes with candles but unless we regularly light them and sit in the warmth of their glow we aren't really embracing a mindset of coziness, we're just focusing on the decor.

Pause to Consider:

Maybe you are all in on living a cozy mindset in winter, you light the candles, start a fire, make the tea, and bundle up in that fluffy blanket. But have you ever considered how you might embrace that mindset beyond your daily routine?

Have you ever considered your home beyond the decor, what makes your home feel inviting and cozy?

While winter draws us inward, inviting us to rest, it does not stop there, it asks that we consider the relational aspect of rest, and it reminds us that there is also room for celebration and community in this season.

What might the relational aspect of rest look like throughout winter?

How do celebrations and food impact your homes' feeling of cozy?

Winter finds many of us moving indoors and spending less time in nature, and yet time spent outside is not only good for our bodies, but it also helps keep our spirits up during the dark days of winter.

What rhythms or routines do you have or might you establish to keep you #optingoutside in every kind of weather?

A Prayer:

May we not become disheartened by the cold of winter but instead accept it as an invitation to embrace a cozy mindset.

May we see beauty in winter sunrises and sunsets, in the fresh white of snow, but also in the grey and overcast days.

May we look beyond the decor of our homes, asking ourselves what invitation or lack there of our space is providing.

May we consider ways that we might embrace celebration in this season of winter rest, gifting others with an invitation to join us in community.

Is there a Prayer in your Heart?

"I make it a huge priority to incorporate candlelight and sparkle to provide the coziness and touch of delight, wonder and awe that we all long for during the winter season."

Myquillyn Smith, Welcome Home

Day Three: Embracing our Limitations

Most of the year, I manage symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis well enough to ignore the reality that I live with a progressive disease, yet every winter, an MRI forces me to look at the pictures and face a thousand words I do not want to read and remind me that I can not write this part of my story. It seems that managing symptoms does not equate to a lack of progression. I can do a thousand things correctly but not change the course of my disease progression.

It was winter when I first learned of this disease living inside my body. So, winter feels the appropriate season to have scabbed-over wounds reopened, to find the grief that still lingers, and to face a thousand words I would rather not.

While winter invites me to rest, it also encourages me to prepare for spring. And can I be honest? This journey with chronic illness and being forced to read the MRI story teaches me that rest and preparation are of utmost importance.

When faced with an obstacle, my natural instinct is to figure out how to climb it, get around it, or move it. But I find myself holding a question these days. What if living with MS is not an obstacle to overcome but a limitation to embrace?

The reality is that every one of us lives with limitations - limitations of time, energy, financial resources, and physical and emotional capacity. Our limitations exist regardless of age, economic status, or gender. Yet, instead of accepting limitations, most of us spend a lifetime proving to ourselves and others that limitations do not confine us. Over and over, we spend more time, more money, and more emotional energy than we have to give.

What if we embraced our limitations? I can't help but wonder if living well within our constraints would open space to see beauty where it has previously been unseen.

May we see our limitations not as obstacles to overcome but as an invitation to feel our humanity, release that which is not ours to carry, and find rest with our friend Jesus.

Pause to Consider:

In her book, *In Good Time*, Jen Pollock Michel says, “*We run to escape the silence of slowing down and the questions that might linger there, in the noiselessness.*” I can’t help but wonder if we strive to overcome our limitations as a form of avoidance. If we stop running and pause long enough to allow ourselves time to sit with the picture of the life that is, not the image we wish to hold, we might not like what we see.

In your current season of life, what are the limitations you might be running from and instead need to embrace?

Embracing your limitations asks that you consider pruning the excess that keeps you always striving to overcome and living beyond your limitations.

What might you need to release to allow yourself to live well with the limitations of this season rather than always striving to overcome them?

Our limitations do not only require us to ask what we carry that we should not but also consider the cultivation required for healthy growth in spring. Cultivation with our limitations in mind invites us to consider.

What nourishment does my body need?

How might I stimulate my mind?

Is my soul lacking something?

When did I last do something just for fun?

A Prayer:

May we stop running from the reality of our limitations long enough to recognize that we do not need to always live in a state of striving or overcoming.

May we pause long enough in this season of rest to consider our limitations, embracing them as opportunities, rather than obstacles to overcome.

May we, in this season of rest, consider what we might need to release to live well within our limitations.

May we also, with our limitations in mind, take time to cultivate our body, mind, and soul in preparation for new growth come spring.

Is there a Prayer in your Heart?

"What if the good life has nothing to do with what we try to control, but everything to do with God's small invitation to name our limits, feel our humanity, and hide ourselves in him?"

Ashley Hales (A Spacious Life)

Day Four: Embracing Chaos in a Season of Rest

Residing in my home currently, in addition to myself, is my husband, two teenage boys, a rescue dog, and two fish. We all have work or school, sports and hobbies, and activities we are engaged with outside our home. The calendar can quickly fill up and lend itself to days that feel chaotic.

Most of us live with responsibility beyond ourselves and in cultures that celebrate busyness and embrace success as achievement. This often leads us to live with overextended schedules and a life that feels chaotic at best. It is one thing to embrace the idea of winter as a season of rest, and yet can be quite another when we attempt to actually practice rhythms of rest.

As we enter winter, it is likely that we are already living a busy life, and most of us can't simply stop showing up to work, managing our household, or following through with commitments already made. So the question then becomes, how do we find rest amidst the chaos of our everyday life?

Rest does not necessarily mean we are napping or reading a book. It is possible to engage in an activity that your mind finds restful. Take cooking, for example, I love to cook and find time in the kitchen to be therapeutic. While I am on my feet and moving around the kitchen, my smart watch often reminds me I need to move, likely because my heart rate is so low and I am relaxed.

It can be helpful to pause and reflect on our schedules, what current routines and activities are life-giving, and what are life-draining. Then as much as possible, try to hold those life-giving routines as priorities and weave them into our days. My family needs to be regularly fed, and while I cannot always spend a great deal of time on meal prep, I can schedule a few nights a week where I get to enjoy more time trying new recipes or cooking meals that take more time to prepare and cook.

Sadly, not all required tasks or activities can be life-giving, and even some things we enjoy can be draining. While I love gathering in community and being with people as an introvert, I recognize that too much time with people and not enough time alone leaves me feeling emotionally and physically drained. In addition to considering what is life-giving, it is important to also recognize not just what we don't like doing but what drains us physically, mentally, or emotionally. And then, look for ways to weave them into your schedule in a way that works better for you.

Personally, I enjoy clumping hard tasks together, getting them done, and then taking time to read, nap, or engage in something I enjoy. I know others who find that overwhelming and need to simply weave one dreaded task in amongst other things they enjoy and find more restful. There is no one right way, the goal is simply to take the time to recognize what you find life-giving or life-draining and manage those activities or responsibilities in a way that helps you to feel more rested and less chaotic.

Many of us operate on schedules that center around the school year. Even if you don't have school-age children, a lot of activities and events are structured to begin and end on quarters or semesters or run fall through spring. It can be helpful to develop a regular routine of reevaluating our commitments, considering what fits within your current life season or priorities. There may be things we always do because we've always done them. Yet, when we pause to consider our routines we recognize that even if we love doing something it may not fit best into this season. And perhaps some items on our list we can eliminate.

No matter what season we find ourselves in, it's always good to pause and consider our "yes" before we give it. While we must continue to adult and be responsible for what we are already committed to, we do not have to keep adding more to our list of responsibilities, tasks, or activities. It's good to remember that every yes means saying no to something else.

While it isn't possible to eliminate chaos from our lives, it is possible to develop rhythms and routines that help us to better handle the chaos. It is possible to recognize ways we can find rest weaved into the busyness of our days.

Pause to Consider:

We've talked about how rest is not passive, nor does it mean being inactive. Rest can be found woven into the busyness of our days.

What activities or tasks that fall under your responsibilities do you find restful or energizing?

How can you make those things a priority in your schedule?

What activities or tasks that you are handling do you find draining, emotionally, physically or mentally?

Are there any tasks or activities that you can eliminate? Delegate? Or ask for help with?

It is important not just to consider nature's season but also your season of life. Perhaps you have young children, you are preparing to send your kids off to college, or you are close to retirement.

Maybe you are at the beginning of a new career or dealing with aging parents. Wherever life finds you, take time to consider what needs to be a priority in this season.

Then ask, how might I best schedule my days to ensure I am focusing on what matters most.

A Prayer:

May we pause long enough in our days to find opportunities for rest amidst the chaos.

May we embrace who we are as individuals, recognizing we do not all have the same needs for rest, or rest in the same way.

May we find the courage to release what is not ours to carry in this season, so that we may embrace what matters most.

May we breathe in your peace as we face the messiness of life, and breathe out your calm presence to those around us.

Is there a Prayer in your Heart?

"Just because we're cultivating rest doesn't mean life is all calm and collect. What it does mean is that as the mess comes, which it will, we're in a better place mentally to handle the madness."

Shaye Elliott, Seasons At The Farm

Day Five: Developing a Practice of Rest beyond Winter

As I learn how to accept the invitation of winter's rest, with years passing, I am beginning to embrace rhythms of rest beyond winter. The lessons winter teaches me, while imperfectly practiced, find me creating habits of rest that continue one season into the next.

While winter invites us to rest, our bodies and souls do not stop requiring rest simply because winter ends. Rest may look different in different seasons, yet the practice of rest always asks to be woven into our days.

Winter's season of rest teaches me to pause and listen to what my body and soul might need. And as I move forward into new seasons, winter has taught me to take time to consider my "yes," asking what then will require a "no."

Winter reminds me that I can not and do not need to be all things in all seasons. There are times when I need to push forward and overcome, and others when I need to pull back and allow others to take the lead. And as I accept that my worth is not in what I do but rather in who I am and who I am becoming, rest has become acceptable and reasonable in any season because my value is not tied to performance.

Winter has been a season revealing my limitations, but it has also taught me how to accept, even embrace, them as opportunities. The most significant lesson to walk more dependent on my friend Jesus and less on my own strength, accepting his invitation to rest in him in every season.

Winter reveals the gift of approaching the chaos of life from a place of rest. There will always be hectic schedules and chaos no matter what season we are living, and yet, when we approach those days from a place of rest, we are better able to handle what comes with grace and love.

The gift of coziness in winter has reminded me that my home is where I always want to say, "you are welcome here." Therefore, as I reset my home for each season, I ask how I might ensure that invitation speaks loudly to those who live here and those who visit.

While at times, winter harsh felt a harsh teacher, it has been a teacher non the less, teaching life lessons that continue to serve me well in every season.

Pause to Consider:

As winter's end comes closer, take a moment to pause and consider what lessons this season of winter has been teaching you.

How are you incorporating rest into your rhythms this season?

Are there aspects of those rhythms that you wish to carry from one season to the next?

Winter can be a harsh teacher. Often in the barrenness of winter, we are asked to face that which we would rather not see. What has this winter revealed that you would rather not face?

How might you embrace that opportunity as a gift as you prepare for the next season?

What invitation has this winter extended to you? Have you accepted it willingly?

Prayer:

May we embrace a rhythm of rest that we can carry from this season into the next.

May we accept our limitations as an invitation to walk more dependent on our friend Jesus.

May we prepare our homes from one season to the next as a welcoming invitation to others.

May we pause before saying yes, so we do not overwhelm our schedules and, in doing so, underwhelm our souls.

Is there a Prayer in your Heart?

We don't have to run to earn rest, we run fueled by a posture of rest.

Rebeckah Lyons

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion?
Come to me. Get away with me, and you'll recover your
life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me
and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the
unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy
or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me, and you'll
learn to live freely and lightly.*

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)