

RHYTHMS
of
RENEWAL

Rebekah and I have been friends for a long time. We've celebrated plenty of good times, and she has seen me through some hard times. One thing has remained consistent: she's never told me what to do; she's reminded me of *who I am*. She's helped me refocus. This is what Rebekah has done once again in this book. She's brought a boat load of transparency and authenticity to these pages with the hope that you'll stop letting what's distracting you keep you from your much greater purposes. You're going to connect with what she has to say.

BOB GOFF, author of *Love Does* and *Everybody Always*

Time spent caring for your emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual health is never wasted. It is a necessary and God-honoring practice—one we would do well to stop and consider. I'm thankful for friends like Rebekah who remind us that in order to pursue God's highest and best, we must first seek his ways of renewal, where weary souls find wisdom, renewal, and peace.

LYSA TERKEURST, #1 *New York Times* bestselling
author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

In *Rhythms of Renewal*, my close friend and mentor Rebekah Lyons leads readers on an inspiring, insightful, practical journey to life-giving peace and purpose. *Rhythms of Renewal* is timely and much needed for my generation. It's a joy to recommend this book to everyone!

SADIE ROBERTSON, author, speaker,
and founder of Live Original

A great number of us suffer from some aspect of anxiety or stress. These issues can rob our joy, disturb our relationships, and paralyze our dreams. Rebekah Lyons has created an approach to dealing well with these. If

you or someone you know struggles with anxiety and stress, you will find answers and hope that make sense and work. Highly recommended.

JOHN TOWNSEND, Ph.D., *New York Times* bestselling author of *Boundaries* and *People Fuel*, and founder of the Townsend Institute for Leadership and Counseling

I love how faith and a life of emotional wellness are so connected. Rebekah Lyons brings us the best of both in *Rhythms of Renewal* and offers practical, daily rhythms on how to live free.

CANDACE CAMERON BURE, actress and author

We humans have short memories. In our haste, we forget that we have been created as rhythmic beings, reflecting our deep connection to the entire creation. We need to be reminded, and Rebekah Lyons has done just that. With *Rhythms of Renewal*, she draws our attention with kindness and clarity to those actions whose engagement will create the space and embodied encounters that Jesus so longs to use for his generative purposes in our lives. Read this book and learn to flourish in the cadence of our God.

CURT THOMPSON, MD, psychiatrist, speaker, and author of *The Soul of Shame* and *Anatomy of the Soul*

Looking back on a personal season wherein I failed to give myself the permission to rest in order to thrive, I cannot exclaim loudly enough the value in the dynamic design of REST and the rhythms that my trusted friend Rebekah shares with us in this book, providing a sanctuary space to restore and revitalize the passions and gifts that God has given us to use for his glory.

ELISABETH HASSELBECK, author of *Point of View: A Fresh Look at Work, Faith, and Freedom*

As a high schooler, I see the impact anxiety, depression, and stress are having on my friends and community. I love how Rebekah Lyons draws from her own battles and then encourages us to fight daily for rhythms of joy and rest. This is a must-read for all, especially high school girls!

ALENA PITTS

Rebekah Lyons has given us a great gift. Rarely does a book combine a compelling vision, theological insights, and a vision of practical faith so well. This book touches a deep longing we all have for a more beautiful and sustainable life, one lived to the depth and height of what God actually offers. You will find rest for your soul and strength for your heart in here.

JON TYSON, Church of the City New
York, author of *The Burden is Light*

Many of us race through life without dealing with the stress and anxiety restlessness causes. In *Rhythms of Renewal*, Rebekah explores the practices that renew and refresh our souls. Read and reclaim the life God has for you!

LISA BEVERE, *New York Times* bestselling author
and cofounder of Messenger International

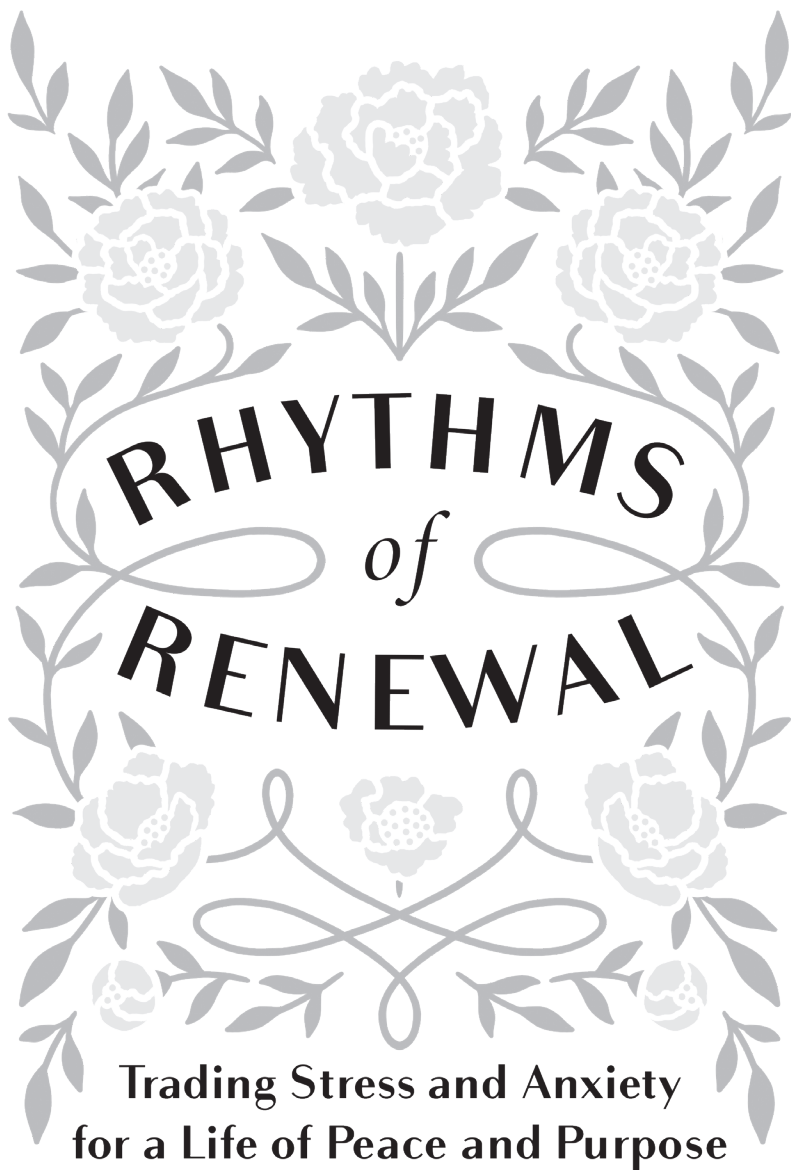
I remember being in a small gathering of leaders the first time I heard Rebekah talk about the rhythms of renewal. She hadn't written a book yet; it was simply what God was teaching her. I was taking notes as fast as I could, and I was deeply impacted by what she shared that day. The message of rhythm was one that was all at once inspiring, convicting, challenging, and accessible. *Rhythms of Renewal* is a message that we must hear and embrace more than ever before.

BANNING LIEBSCHER, pastor, founder
of Jesus Culture, and author of *Rooted: The
Hidden Places Where God Develops You*

ALSO BY REBEKAH LYONS

Freefall to Fly

You Are Free



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FOR GABE, MY HUSBAND OF
TWENTY-TWO YEARS.

YOU HELPED ME LIVE INTO THESE RHYTHMS
AND CHAMPIONED THESE WORDS FROM
THE BEGINNING. ALL MY LOVE.

*Show me the right path, O LORD;
point out the road for me to follow.
Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.*

PSALM 25:4-5

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WHEN THE DOORS WON'T OPEN



INTRODUCTION

WHEN THE DOORS WON'T OPEN

On a brisk Saturday afternoon in October, the panic returned. I was nestled high above California's northern coast, near the sleepy town of Carmel, attending a gathering of mostly young couples, old friends, and a few new acquaintances. We'd met for a much-needed retreat, time away to refocus our hearts and minds for the season ahead. That afternoon, the group made a collective decision. We'd disband for a little free time, tour the quaint village of Carmel-by-the Sea, and enjoy a latte, pastry, or gelato. We could take it easy. Relax.

We were staying at no ordinary home. This was architect Charles S. Greene's one-hundred-year-old magnum opus. He called it Seaward, meaning "toward the sea," a name which captures the scene well. A library lined with antique classics and a Palladian window overlooked the rocky beach. I needed a moment in front of that window, a pause before rejoining the group for the midday caffeine and sugar boost. I told my husband, Gabe, to go on ahead with our friends, and I'd catch up thirty minutes later, after some reflection in that beautiful setting.

Not five minutes after my friends left, I headed to the bathroom. Like every other part of the structure, even the tiny toilet area seemed hand-carved out of stone. It was a tight space. Confined.

But I didn't think twice about it as I entered and latched the door behind me.

Glancing at my phone, I watched as it lost power too fast, shutting off yet again at 45 percent. *Crazy old iPhone*. I'd been reluctant to upgrade because of the expense, but I could no longer ignore that it was losing over 50 percent of the battery power in only an hour. I made a mental note to upgrade when the trip was over, stood, flushed, and turned the century-old lock and door handle. The latch didn't give. I turned again and again and again, then, using both hands, turned with everything I had. Nothing. I toggled the handle back and forth. I waited for the click of the internal mechanism releasing, but it never came.

A one-hundred-year-old home on the cliffs of the Pacific. Locked in a two-foot-by-four-foot space. Cement walls ten inches thick all around. Heavy, wooden, one-hundred-year-old door. Alone for the next few hours. Cell phone dead.

The walls began to close in, squeezing the breath from me. Within fifteen seconds, my body was convulsing. I was trapped. No one to call. No place to turn. Except in tiny circles.

Rational or not, I couldn't wrap my mind around the idea of sitting in that two-by-four-foot cement stall until someone returned hours later to my knocking and crying. And that's when the questions came.

Why was this so terrifying?

Wasn't I supposed to be better?

Hadn't I recovered from these panic attacks years ago?

I guess relapse has a way of finding each of us.

All my life I'd been resilient, working my way around obstacles. No finances to finish college? I worked two jobs to cover tuition and rent. Not enough money for a car? I hustled to earn credit to qualify for a lease. No slush fund to pay for a wedding? I emptied two years of savings into a tight budget, starting with a \$300 wedding dress. No matter what doors slammed in life, I rebounded with ways to shove them open. There was no obstacle that couldn't be overcome with grit and a dash of elbow grease.

A ONE-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD HOME ON THE CLIFFS OF
THE PACIFIC. LOCKED IN A TWO-FOOT-BY-FOUR-FOOT
SPACE. CEMENT WALLS TEN INCHES THICK ALL AROUND.
HEAVY, WOODEN, ONE-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD DOOR.
ALONE FOR THE NEXT FEW HOURS. CELL PHONE DEAD.

But here was one door I couldn't open. No amount of working or achievement or self-talk could break me out of this bathroom prison high above the sea. I was left with myself, my frailty, my inability to escape, and it terrified me. And the truth was, I wasn't terrified of the heavy wooden door or the unyielding antique lock. I was terrified of being trapped, terrified of being alone and witnessing my body's outrage. I was terrified of *me*.

What could I do under this duress? Even though I wasn't in harm's way, it mattered not, because the greatest perpetrator of harm was tucked inside my mind. I worked the loops of panic and terror over and over, searching for any way of escape.

Then I looked up.

At the top of the wall, I noticed a small arched window, approximately twenty inches tall and eighteen inches wide. I toggled the antique latch, and to my surprise, it opened. I squealed in overwhelming disbelief, and tears erupted. *Could it be?* If I hoisted myself up on the tank of the toilet, I could jimmy my body through the window head-first. Would my hips fit? It didn't matter. Rescue was in sight, and I was going for it.

Once my body was out to my waist, I inhaled deeply, filling my lungs with cold, salty air. I heard the seagulls squawking, the ocean waves pounding, nature doing what it does while my life seemed to be spiraling out of control. I kept pushing, kept shoving my hips and legs until I toppled onto the rocks overlooking the waves crashing below. I thought my thigh muscles would never stop convulsing. Crouching there in a fetal position, I wept. Everything I had faced six years prior—the panic attacks, the unbearable anxiety, the meltdowns—came flooding back, along with all the shame and weakness.

I'd struggled with panic attacks daily in the year after our family moved to Manhattan, mostly when I found myself in confined spaces like planes, trains, or shoulder-to-shoulder crowds. Elevators were the worst. At Bloomingdale's, I stood at the first-floor bank of elevators for twenty minutes and watched, waiting for the perfect conditions to hop on—at least two other people on the elevator but no more than five. Once those conditions were finally met, I walked in, and as the doors clamped shut, my heart froze. I stood, holding my breath, fists clenched, until the doors opened at the ninth floor. No matter how many times I made that trip, the panic was always the same.

On the night of September 20, 2011, I cried out to God for relief, and he flooded me with peace. In the years following, I traveled and spoke about freedom from panic, and I'd even written *You Are Free*, a book about finding freedom from anxiety. Why had it returned now, seven years later?

I asked God, "Am I a fraud?" How was it that I could speak to so many people about being healed of panic disorder, write a book about it, pray for others to find healing, and find myself facing a panic attack more severe than any attack I'd experienced in Bloomingdale's? I stared blankly across the ocean, let the wind whip against my tear-stained cheeks, the questions ringing in my ears. I knew God saw me with compassion and tenderness, but he wasn't responding to my questions. Not yet.

As my heartbeat slowed to its resting rate, I rallied and went to meet up with my friends. I could hear the rest of the group laughing down the block. They were swept up in conversation, so I slipped in with a nod. I listened with a pasted-on smile, a thousand miles away from whatever they were saying. The rest of the day was a blur. I kept slipping away to look out across the Pacific, mysterious and vast, as if God would use his handiwork to give me an answer to all these new questions.

That night, before going to sleep, I tried to explain to Gabe what had happened, but no words seemed to give the right amount of weight to the trauma of that afternoon. As he rolled over in bed, and his steady breathing slowed, I stared at the ceiling in the dark. Tears flowed from the corners of my eyes, pooling in my ears. I asked again with a whisper, *How can it be? Seven years of teaching, healing, and freedom?* Had the truth been stolen in a single incident? Why were shame and loneliness setting in?

In his mercy, God gently whispered a response: *You can focus on the fact that fear came knocking, or you can focus on the fact that I always make a way of escape.*

There it was, the love of God, and it sounded like the Scripture I'd committed to memory years ago: "I will always make a way of escape . . . that you will be able to bear it."¹

YOU CAN FOCUS ON THE FACT THAT FEAR CAME
KNOCKING, OR YOU CAN FOCUS ON THE FACT
THAT I ALWAYS MAKE A WAY OF ESCAPE.

DO YOU NEED RESCUE?

Have you found yourself trapped in fear? Feelings of unworthiness? Rejection? Loneliness? Depression? Isolation? Restlessness or boredom? If so, know this: God makes a way of escape. Not only that, but he promises a life of abundance—a rich life—not just escape from negative cycles.

Rescue is ready and waiting for us, but so often, we are unable to see a way of escape. Instead of looking up, we keep our heads down, circling the stall, wondering why our circumstances don't change. We get lost in our loops, repeat the same habits over and over, expecting different results. Insane? I'd say so.

What do you do when stress or anxiety or fatigue or discouragement hits, when it throbs in your ribs or steals your breath? When your words race and you try a desperate attempt to yawn and fill your lungs? What do you do when this is the norm of your everyday life?

What do you do when relapse hits? When silence settles, distraction fades, and you face panic, depression, or burnout again? What do you do when you descend into anxiety after being panic-free for years, after walking in a place of freedom or abundance?

These are the questions many of us are asking today. According to the American Institute of Stress (AIS), 77 percent of the population experiences physical symptoms associated with stress on a regular basis, 33 percent report living with extreme stress, and 48 percent say stress has a negative impact on their personal and professional lives.² The AIS estimates the aggregate cost to employers of stress-related healthcare expenses and missed work is \$300 billion annually.³ What's more, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 18 percent of American adults currently suffer from an anxiety disorder, and some estimate close to 35 percent of the population experience anxiety disorders.⁴ The NAMI also indicates nearly 7 percent of the population struggles with depression.⁵

As a society, we are in the throes of a collective panic attack. We pursue anxiety-inducing careers, security, and keeping up. We're afraid we're not doing enough. We worry about health, or politics, or other things we can't control. That's when discouragement settles in. Mental and emotional fatigue takes over. Fear and anxiety overcome. Finally, despair prevails.

As long as there is darkness in this world, we'll be tempted to disengage or give in to anxiety and fear. But over and over, Scripture tells us not to fear. As Jesus said, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."⁶

The command not to fear is given over three hundred times (some say 365 times, once for every day of the year). In fact, it's a phrase used more than any other command in the Bible,⁷ because God knew that as long as fear lives in our hearts, we'd live crippled lives. We would shortchange the plans and purposes destined for us from the womb.

If there's one thing I've learned in seven years on this road, a lesson that's been confirmed by person after person I've spoken with, it's this: with a little intention and a lot of perseverance, stress and anxiety can be transformed into peace and purpose. Boredom and depression can become excitement and engagement.

What kind of intention?

That's what this book is all about.

RHYTHMS THAT BRING RENEWAL

Through study and experience, I've come to understand four rhythms that help us replace stress and anxiety with life-giving peace and purpose. They help us nurture and sustain lasting emotional health. These rhythms aren't complicated—Rest, Restore, Connect, and Create—and they're words I first wrote under the heading “Rhythms of Renewal” the summer I found my own freedom. However, these rhythms do take practice. Practical acts like fasting from media (Rest), exercising (Restore), sharing a laugh (Connect), or recovering an old talent (Create) can help us break the anxiety-inducing cycles of the world around us and bring balance to our otherwise hectic lives. They can help us cultivate the spiritual and mental space needed to allow God to bring us through complacency and fear and into freedom.

When you consider it, these four rhythms make some sense. The first two—Rest and Restore—are “input rhythms,” rhythms that allow the peace of Jesus to fill us. The latter two rhythms—Connect and Create—are “output rhythms,” rhythms that pull us out of our own heads and help us engage with the world around us. It’s the input of Christ’s peace that allowed me to pour out that peace, and when I abide in that input-and-output flow, I don’t struggle so much with anxiety. In fact, I find healing and wholeness. (A word of caution: the practices contained in this book aren’t meant to replace professional treatment for those who need it. That said, they can be used in conjunction with therapy to bring renewal and peace.)

My hope is that that ten years from now, you’ll look back on your own season of stress or defeat and see how God brought you back to center through the rhythms of renewal outlined in this book. My prayer is that you’ll see how these spiritual rhythms enabled you to live a life of peace, passion, and purpose.



REST

I've never been great at Rest. I'm as overworked, overstimulated, and overextended as the next person. There are demands on my life, and it can be hard to slow down. This nonstop pace leads to more stress and more anxiety. If I've discovered anything over the years, it's this: my anxiety spins back up when I'm not resting.

We are restless when we rest less.

We weren't created for this nonstop pace. We were designed in God's image, and even God himself rested. As recorded in Genesis, after creating the world, God set aside the seventh day to rest. In Genesis 2 the Bible states, "on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."¹

Rest precedes blessing. We don't have to run to *earn* rest; we run *fueled by* a posture of rest.

God also calls the day he rested *holy*. He saw rest as sacred, and later decreed his people to observe the Sabbath and have reverence for

a defined, consistent pattern of rest. He promised peace to those who rest: “I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid.”² This followed the promise, “If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit.”³ And finally, he says in verse nine, “I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful.”⁴

WE DON'T HAVE TO RUN TO EARN REST; WE
RUN *FUELED* BY A POSTURE OF REST.

God meant for all our work to culminate in holy, blessed rest—rest meant to help us reconnect with him. He intended for us to live fruitful lives, to have hearts full of peace.

We live in a society that is over-stressed, over-anxious, and burned out. What's the remedy? Rest. God-blessed rest. In this section, I will introduce rhythmic practices that can help us find the rest we need, rest that will protect and rejuvenate us. You might find that some of these ways of rest come more easily than others. In fact, you might already be soaking in Scripture and reflection (both forms of rest). Likewise, you might find that some practices—like engaging in a technology detox or taking a Sabbath day—seem nearly impossible. But as you read, take note of the various ways you can practice the rhythm of rest. Ask yourself which practices you might need most, and set aside time for them. And remember, if you're not a natural rest-er, this might take a little time. That's okay. Be patient with yourself.

Are you ready to bring rest to your restlessness? Let's learn how.

TAKE INVENTORY



REFLECT & JOURNAL

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1

TAKE INVENTORY

REFLECT & JOURNAL

The unexamined life is not worth living.

—SOCRATES

Parker Palmer's book *Let Your Life Speak* arrested my heart a few years back. It begins with a poem by William Stafford, "Ask Me", that begs this question: "Some time when the river is ice ask me mistakes I have made. Ask me whether what I have done is my life.¹ It was the first book that challenged me to take inventory of my days, to consider my thoughts, actions, and daily routine. I began to ask myself, *Is the life I lead the life that longs to live in me?*

When I first asked myself this question, my life was consumed with Target returns and Chick-fil-A playdates. It had been a decade swallowed by Pull-Ups and pacifiers and poop. Though these motherhood moments weren't the whole of my life's longing, they

were largely the makeup of my days. I'd never considered the life that longed to live in me.

Fast-forward eighteen years. I'm not only organizing playdates, I'm navigating first dates. We've moved from Pull-Ups to outfitting our kids in sports jerseys and athletic gear for summer camp. Raising four children, three of whom are now teenagers, comes with a boatload of bustle. But no matter the season—whether new motherhood or raising teens—pausing to take inventory has saved my life. When I find myself too busy for it, I'm lost. When I make time for it, I gain critical perspective.

WHAT IS TAKING INVENTORY?

What does it mean to take inventory? I'm not talking about cleaning out cabinets, counting pairs of shoes, or hunting down missing Christmas decorations. (We'll get to that later.) I'm describing the important practice of evaluating my life and redefining priorities to ensure I'm living it well.

Several years ago, I realized something significant was missing in my life. I sensed my purpose was to extend beyond homemaking, that my work was meant to be both inside and outside our home. There was only one problem: our existing schedule had no margin for me to imagine what my role outside the home might be. There were subtle glimpses of a writing gift, and I caught them each time I snuck downstairs in the middle of the night to download the burdens of my heart on my laptop. Writing was the only way I knew to process what God might be doing in my life. What did that mean?

Together, my husband, Gabe, and I decided to sort it all out. We started by creating space to take inventory, carved out time from our

busy schedules to dream. We began writing down all the moments when I felt most alive. We talked about my love for reading, writing, and communication, and started connecting the dots. Then we noted the moments where I felt at my worst, those moments when I couldn't get a break from the endless responsibilities of raising children. I felt there wasn't enough time to express the gifts God had given me. As we took inventory of those moments, God's vision for my life came into focus.

What if my gift and knack for the written and spoken word could be used for something bigger than myself? Maybe I could take a year to explore this more and live into a different reality. We started dreaming about how God might use the tensions I was facing as I tried to live the life that longed to live in me.

Looking back, I can see how taking a break, resting from responsibility long enough to take inventory, was crucial to imagining God's plan for my life. With Gabe's help and support, I learned how to establish rhythms for writing and teaching, fulfilling work I couldn't imagine before we began to take inventory. I'm grateful to see the fruit of those rhythms not just for myself, but also for others. Women inspire me every day as they press into their greater purposes from a place of emotional, spiritual, and mental health. Most importantly, God's kindness blows me away. He invites scores of people to gain a deeper understanding of the freedom they can experience in Christ as they live out their callings and use their gifts.

HOW TO TAKE INVENTORY

Much of our anxiety and depression stems from uncertainty about the future. We toss and turn, obsess and review, in the hope that

we can find the magic pill, the answer to our uncertainty. But if you take away anything from this book, you'll find there is no one thing that solves everything. It's a combination of habits, patterns, and rhythms that keeps the angst at bay. You'll never discover these principles if you don't pause to take inventory, and although resting from the day's work long enough to do so may seem counterproductive, it might be the most beneficial thing you do.

So how do you take inventory? Consider starting small.

Every day I ask myself questions such as, *Where is God leading me? What new people has he placed in my path? What new commitment is he asking me to make?* I try to act on the obvious and immediate, and to note any big revelations I may need to come back to when I have extended time.

WHERE IS GOD LEADING ME?
WHAT NEW PEOPLE HAS HE PLACED IN MY PATH?
WHAT NEW COMMITMENT IS HE ASKING ME TO MAKE?

I also set aside a few hours quarterly and take a deeper dive. I start by acknowledging all the pushes and pulls on my life. Using a rubric that helps keep it simple, I ask four simple questions I learned from our mentor, Pete Richardson, and make a simple list to get my head in the right direction.

The first question, **What's Right?** keeps me aware of and grateful for the gifts in my life. Grounding ourselves in recognition of the good sets a positive tone for the rest of the inventory.

Asking **What's Wrong?** allows me to see where things have veered off course. By answering this question, I assess and name the challenges I'm facing. I take time to name those things that feel off or out of order. In naming what's wrong, I take the first step in solving my problems.

The third question, **What's Confused?** helps me isolate the rabbit trails I seem to chase to no end. Am I teaching our children respect and responsibility? Am I making friendships a priority? Is our time together as a family quality time? I could spend an endless amount of mental energy considering these questions over the course of my day, but when I carve out time to process it on the page, the answers become clear. Writing it down, I find the anxiety associated with these questions dissipates.

The last question, **What's Missing?** requires a hard look at areas of life I may be too close to, areas I can't evaluate alone. To answer this question, I need help and insight from Gabe and a few trusted friends. This community question helps me identify blind spots or talk through my desires to ensure they are rooted in the story God has called me to live.

Reflecting for a few moments every day and doing a deeper dive every few months keeps us aware of the anxiety-producing things in our lives and allows us to correct course. If you find the process as beneficial as I have, you may find a deeper, multiple-day annual Personal Inventory Retreat offers even more clarity, because it creates additional space for new dreams to emerge. You'll be surprised how suppressed passions surface, how solutions to your problems emerge when you take time away.

THEME YOUR INVENTORY

Sometimes I choose a theme for my examinations. Last year, for example, I chose the theme “Re-establish.” I felt an urgency to re-examine and better integrate the responsibilities of motherhood and career. For fifteen years, I’d known only the former, but in the last five years, I’d been pushing into the latter. I felt like things were out of balance, like it was one or the other, and I didn’t want to reside on the extremes of the pendulum anymore. The extremes left me frazzled or grabbing for control. I needed to re-establish who I was both as a mother *and* as a career woman. So I challenged myself to embrace the imperfections of carrying both. With this theme in mind, I took inventory again. I realized that I didn’t need to answer every email on the same day. Nor did I need to wash every dirty dish the same day. But I would always leave room for an extra bedtime story.

It’s never too late to re-establish what you want your life to be about.

If we do our inventories right, it will be a holy process. A day is coming when each of us will give an account of how we stewarded our time, our years, and the beloved people entrusted to our care.² When we rest long enough to take inventory, when we ask God to cultivate our heart, talents, and passions according to the purpose he planned before our days began,³ we’ll find new horizons opening up, horizons beyond all we could ask or imagine.⁴

IT’S NEVER TOO LATE TO RE-ESTABLISH WHAT
YOU WANT YOUR LIFE TO BE ABOUT.

TECH DETOX



SILENCE THE NOISE

CHAPTER 2

TECH DETOX

SILENCE THE NOISE

We are continually being nudged by our devices toward a set of choices. The question is whether those choices are leading us to the life we actually want.

—ANDY CROUCH

It's been eight years since I started using Instagram. May 7, 2011, to be exact. We'd moved to the Upper East Side of New York City the previous summer, and though many of my friends were becoming more active on social networking platforms, I was not a savvy social-media user. I hadn't embraced Facebook or Twitter, but the idea of keeping a real-time photo journal to share with friends and family? This was something I could get behind. After one weekend of using the photo-sharing app, I was hooked.

New York was eye candy to me in those days. My first post was of

the hot dog cart on our street corner (61st Street and 3rd Avenue) on my morning walk to Central Park, the same cart that would rattle over the same pothole each and every day at five a.m. When I look at the photo today, I can still hear that cart, as clear as I could from my bed on the fourth floor of our apartment building.

Day after day, I captured pictures of the park: our walk home from school, nights out riding city streets on the Vespa with Gabe. I captured silly moments with the kids in our big-city playground, documented our season of awe and wonder with a child's perspective. I wanted to keep an account for my own memory bank, a record of this life-transforming season.

For three years I kept sharing moments; there was never a shortage of sights to capture through the lens. I added captions, thoughtful anecdotes that surfaced each day from the pages of my journal. What began as memory-making became something more as I began to search for the perfect angle, lighting, and story. As the number of my followers grew, so did the compulsion to share. I became more strategic, gave people what I thought they wanted, fearing they'd leave if I didn't. Anything less seemed self-indulgent, at least that's what I told myself. In that season, without me realizing it, social media became the master. I became the slave.

Instead of taking time to process the moments of my life, instead of reflecting in solitude over weeks, months, even, I processed everything in real time in the company of strangers. Whenever I felt anxiety setting in, I'd grab my phone, the distraction of choice. I filled my mind with everyone else's noise, no matter how much it might cost.

Gabe noticed before I did. "You don't need to capture *everything*; just enjoy the moment!" he said. Kennedy, my daughter, saw it too,

and would ask, “Can you stop looking at your phone?” While it was fun to document special experiences, my family didn’t sign up for our lives to be on display for public entertainment.

It would take seven years for the reality of this to set in. In the spring of 2018, I felt God whispering that I should fast from social media. I dismissed and defended my actions. *It’s no big deal, God. It doesn’t mean that much to me.*

I woke up a few weeks later feeling an urge, a conviction even, to press pause for a season. I couldn’t wait another day. So I shared online that I needed to take a hiatus from social media, a break for me, for my family. I wanted to consider the consequences of living an over-shared life. It wasn’t a hand slap, but an invitation. An invitation to what? I wasn’t sure, but I’d soon find out.

THE EFFECTS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA FAST

When I jumped off social media, things changed. First, I started dreaming again. On the back porch, journal in hand, new ideas and thoughts flooded my mind. I wasn’t copying, comparing, or envying the lives of others. Something shifted deep in my spirit. Unconcerned about what others might think, I logged reflections, took note of new dreams that began to emerge.

Second, I was sleeping better than ever. My full night’s sleep routine kicked back in almost immediately. After years of early morning wake-ups and feelings of insomnia, my mind and body were catching up on much-needed rest. I stopped scrolling through my social media apps before bed, so my body and brain were better prepared for sleep. If I woke for a moment in the middle of the night, I refrained from checking my phone, knowing it might keep me awake.

Third, I pursued learning again. Every choice to peruse social media was a choice *not* to do something productive with my time, and in that extra time garnered by fasting from it, I read more books, listened to more podcasts and talks. In the first two months of my Instagram fast, I digested more centering content than I'd listened to in the previous *year*. My mind felt renewed as my passion for learning returned. Years of consuming the media, opinions, and experiences of others had created a deficit. Now, without all those inputs, my brain was hungry for growth.

A month into this experiment, this rest from social media, I was driving home at sunset through the rolling hills of Franklin, Tennessee, where we had moved from New York. I passed around a bend in the road and gasped at the sky, ablaze with pinks and reds. My eyes welled up at the beauty. Normally, I would have pulled over to the side of the road and angle for the perfect shot to share on Instagram. Even before I reached for my phone, I realized I didn't have it with me—and I didn't care. I drove on, reflecting on this change of heart, mind, and soul for a few more minutes. That's when God reminded me of the truth I needed to hear: *You are worthy to receive something beautiful, and you don't have to share it.*

YOU ARE WORTHY TO RECEIVE SOMETHING
BEAUTIFUL, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHARE IT.

That's when I pulled over to the side of that country road. I stared across the amber sky and started to ponder, *Why do I feel so compelled to share everything? Whose validation am I seeking?* Somewhere along the way, I'd decided that anything I did just for me felt indulgent, and I didn't believe I was worthy of indulgence. What began as a

break from the constant churn of social media became a fundamental lesson in worthiness. I came to see that my worth is not found in approval “out there.” It is found in the loving gifts God offers in the “right now,” in the intimate invitation of a sunset.

Far too many of us race through life full-throttle from photo to photo, achievement to achievement. We jump from distraction to distraction, image to image, issue to issue, never stopping to ask *why*. No wonder we are anxious and stressed!

Resting from technology, from social media or the internet or our smart phones, slows us down, makes space for us to examine our blind spots, and gives us greater capacity to be present to the moment right in front of us. At least, it did for me.

REENTRY IS POSSIBLE

I reentered social media a couple months later, cautious about beginning again. Soon after, I shared with a friend how grateful I was for a slower pace, longer attention span, and my diminishing need for public approval. I shared how I could read an entire book again without being sidetracked and engage in a long conversation without reaching for my phone. I told her how I see the flicker in my Kennedy’s eyes when she’s excited to share something from her day, and I give her my whole attention. How I catch our son Cade’s goofy smirk when he’s up to no good; how I’m present enough to laugh. By resting from social media, I’d recovered the lost art of *paying attention*, and somehow, that brought me a sense of peace and tranquility.

IF YOU LOSE YOUR VOICE, BE QUIET
A WHILE. IT'LL COME BACK.

Through this refreshing season of dreaming, sleeping, and learning, I'd also found my true voice again. I wanted to encourage people online from an overflow, not post out of pressure to keep up, like the old days. Something clicked as I reflected, saying to myself, *If you lose your voice, be quiet a while. It'll come back.*

My friend listened, and when I was finished sharing, she was smiling. She wanted that too, she said. Don't you?

If you find yourself anxiously comparing, constantly distracted, eternally envious of what others share on social media or the internet, consider the words of Paul to the church in Galatians: "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."¹ What better way to practice this teaching than by taking a tech detox.

Maybe you should fast from Instagram, or Twitter, or Facebook. Maybe you should leave your smart phone in a box by the front door when you walk in after a long day. Consider limiting the number of texts you send in a day. Try it out and give yourself the rest your mind, soul, and body need—for your sake and for the sake of those around you.

➤ REFLECTION QUESTIONS ➤

1. HOW MUCH SOCIAL MEDIA DO YOU CONSUME IN A WEEK? DO YOU HAVE A SCREEN TIME TRACKER THAT RECORDS YOUR TIME? (THERE ARE A FEW GOOD ONES OUT THERE, INCLUDING THE TRACKERS BUILT INTO YOUR PHONE.)

2. TAKE A BREAK FROM ALL SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TWO WEEKS. AT THE END OF THAT TWO WEEKS, ASK YOURSELF: WHAT DO I MISS ABOUT IT? WHAT DON'T I MISS? WRITE OUT YOUR ANSWERS.

3. WHAT POSITIVES DO YOU ASSIGN TO THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN YOUR LIFE? WHAT NEGATIVES?

GET QUIET



CREATE SPACE AND LISTEN

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 3

GET QUIET

CREATE SPACE AND LISTEN

Without great solitude, no serious work is possible.

—PABLO PICASSO

Growing up, I always considered myself an extrovert. I never declined an invitation or opportunity to hang with friends. If homework or studying for a test threatened to get in the way, I'd pull an all-nighter. College life suited me. There were late night hangs in the dorm, morning workouts with friends, and I made sure my friends and I had plans after each Saturday football game. I was enthusiastic about life, and *the more the merrier* was my modus operandi.

After graduation, things began to change. When I became a mom of toddlers, I craved alone time. Closing the door to the bathroom felt sacred. When those toddlers grew up and became teens, I'd

linger in the car in the garage for a few moments after they went inside. This shift in me showed up in other ways as well. Instead of exercising in a noisy, crowded gym, I began to prefer morning workouts involving yoga and nature hikes. To make room for a longer pause of quiet at home, I set aside two days a week for running errands and meeting friends for lunch or coffee. On the mornings I wasn't running around, I spent large swaths of time at home, sitting in the quiet.

I've flown a lot over the last five years, and on one flight, it hit me: The reason I enjoyed flying was that it offered me quiet and a chance to recharge. During a flight I could catch up on podcasts and talks; I could journal, read, and prep for what I would be speaking about later that night. When I arrived at the event, I was energized and ready to engage at full capacity for a long evening until everyone went home. I loved both the intense connection with people for long periods of time and the retreat to a silent hotel room.

What did that mean? Was I becoming an introvert?

Discovering just how much I loved less noisy spaces, I picked up Susan Cain's book *Quiet*, in which she writes, "Introverts . . . may have strong social skills and enjoy parties and business meetings, but after a while wish they were home in their pajamas. They prefer to devote their social energies to close friends, colleagues, and family."¹ She was describing at least a part of me to a tee.

One day I was sharing with a friend how I don't seem to fit into the introvert *or* extrovert box. Sure, I love a good party, but I also enjoy long mornings alone or one-on-one conversations. I told her about some research I'd stumbled across, how two-thirds of us don't identify as introverts or extroverts.² My friend asked me if I'd heard

of the term *ambivert*. I had not. She explained that an ambivert is “a person whose personality has a balance of extrovert and introvert features,” and suggested that this definition better described me. Despite the oddness of the word, it aptly describes me. Give me extroversion without the hours of small-talk. Give me introversion without the cloistered cave.

WE ALL NEED QUIET

Whether we call ourselves extroverts, introverts, or ambiverts, all of us need quiet—times when we pause, reflect, and assess. In fact, this was a truth Jesus lived. He modeled quiet throughout his ministry. For instance, just after he was baptized, the Spirit of God led him into the wilderness for forty days of quiet, and at the end of that season, he beat back the temptation of Satan and pushed into his public ministry. After many of his miracle-making moments, Jesus retreated into the mountains for solitude and prayer. On the night before the crucifixion, Jesus spent time in quiet reflection and prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Quiet was a part of his consistent routine—so how much more must *we* need it in our own lives? We would do well to understand that we are able to be our best selves when we are centered in a place of quiet rest.

But if you think getting quiet is easy, think again. You’ll have to fight the entire culture for it. The noise and distractions are endless in this digital age. Even if you clear out the distractions and create space for quiet, you’ll have to get comfortable with yourself—with being alone with your thoughts, failures, hopes, dreams, wounds, and longings. For some of us, quiet can be the scariest place to go. But when we go there, when we establish routines of quiet and protect them, incredible things happen for our emotional and mental health.

First, in the quiet we gain perspective. When the noise of our lives overwhelms us, we often misconstrue or lose track of reality. By creating space away from our busy realities, we can see more clearly what is happening and gain new energy to approach the challenges that have nested too close to home.

Second, the quiet helps us become more emotionally resilient and empathetic to others. A recent *Forbes* article noted, “Studies show the ability to tolerate alone time has been linked to increased happiness, better life satisfaction, and improved stress management.”³ Quiet helps us maintain a sense of calm, re-center, and become more fully who we were designed to be.

Being quiet doesn’t only benefit us. It helps us relate to others, too.

QUIET: THE WAY TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

I incorporated intentional practices of quiet into my life, and as I did, I noticed improvements in the ways I interacted with the world. Quietness infused the way I related to others, enabled me to be a bearer of peace, love, and wisdom in in the midst of chaos. In fact, the more I pushed into the quiet, the more I was able to connect with the people in my life and become a better friend.

QUIETNESS INFUSED THE WAY I RELATED TO OTHERS,
ENABLED ME TO BE A BEARER OF PEACE, LOVE,
AND WISDOM IN IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS.

How?

The quiet taught me to **listen** again. As I did, I asked genuine questions of my friends. I stopped to connect with their hearts and hear their ache, and I learned how to extend empathy, pray for them, and be a better support. Quiet listening also taught me to **discern**. I began to hear what was *not* being said. I started to read between the lines, notice facial expressions, observe when the eyes shifted away if questions became too personal. Quiet discernment helped me see when someone was hurting, striving, or pushing too hard, and it led me to ask whether there was a need I could meet. Finally, quiet listening taught me to **understand**. It taught me how to keep from filling every empty space with words, taught me how to sit in quiet empathy for my spouse, friend, and children.⁴ Quiet listening kept me from assuming and overreacting in defense, things which only hurt those closest to us.

A few weeks ago, my son Pierce and I went for a walk to catch up on how things were going for him. He was a couple months into his sophomore year, and his days were consumed with the constant demands of school sports, songwriting lessons, term papers and exams. Although he was grateful for it all, I heard his voice crack mid-sentence as he expressed that he was feeling pressured to measure up. Pierce usually manages stress with ease and maintains a light-hearted demeanor no matter the circumstance. I knew this was a unique moment not to solve or fix, but to lean in. So I paused and said, “Tell me more.”

A conversation ensued in which he told me things I wouldn’t have heard if other people were around or if we were hustling to and fro. My only responses were things like, “I’m so sorry you are facing this,” Or, “I know how things can build up.” I offered no answers. No solutions. By giving my son space and silence, I allowed him to receive what he really needed: to be loved, heard, and understood.

WHEN WE CARVE OUT SPACE FOR THE QUIET, TO RETREAT
TO A SILENT PLACE TO PRAY, JOURNAL, OR READ, WE
REST FROM THE NOISY DISTRACTIONS OF OUR LIVES.

When we carve out space for the quiet, to retreat to a silent place to pray, journal, or read, we rest from the noisy distractions of our lives. This rest pulls us out of the anxiety and stress of the world, if only for a moment. When we create spaces of quiet with others, it allows us to take a break from offering solutions or unwanted advice and allows us to show empathy, love, and understanding.

Quiet—it provides a refuge for ourselves and others from this noisy world.

➤ REFLECTION QUESTIONS ↩

1. CARVE OUT 15 MINUTES FOR QUIET REFLECTION. TAKE NOTE OF WHERE YOUR THOUGHTS GO WHEN YOU ARE ALL ALONE, WITHOUT ANY DISTRACTIONS.

2. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAT IN SILENCE? LIST WAYS YOU MIGHT INCORPORATE QUIET INTO YOUR WEEKLY RHYTHMS.

3. WHERE CAN YOU CARVE OUT THIRTY MINUTES TO AN HOUR OF QUIET IN YOUR DAILY RHYTHM, TIME TO REFLECT (AND BREATHE) WITHOUT ANY DISTRACTIONS?

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