

THE FIRST 15

Monday, June 24, 2024

Today is Monday, June 24 and we are studying what the Bible says about rest and renewal.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and loving Lord, amid the pressures of another busy day with the many plans, activities, appointments, and demands, I pause to find a place of rest. I close my eyes and seek the calming peace of your abiding presence. I breathe deeply, in and out, allowing myself to relax in a quiet space of serene stillness. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

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. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:1-6 (RSV)

REFLECTION

During the summer months we are slowing down to enjoy a lengthy reflection on a beloved Psalm - Psalm twenty-three. The summer season is an opportunity for us to join together, seek a Sabbath heart and discover the inner peace and soulful rest God desires for us. This week we reflect on the words, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." The writer of the Psalm, David, grew up shepherding his father Jesse's sheep. He is familiar with the life and duties of a shepherd. David sees God as a capable and faithful Shepherd who looks out for the best interests of the flock he loves.

David knew from experience how hard it is to get a sheep to lie down. They won't lie down unless they feel safe. Sheep are completely defenseless. If a wolf or a lion comes, they cannot do anything but run and they are not able to run very fast. For safety purposes, sheep sleep standing up most of the night. They won't lie down if they are hungry. Sheep need to be well fed, otherwise they will be constantly on the move, grazing and looking for more food. In Psalm 23, David promises that God will provide everything we need – a green pasture that offers plenty of nourishment and an overwhelming sense of safety and security. We are invited to lie down and rest.

God's rest often alludes us. We are busy people who lead lives full of responsibilities, demands, to-do lists, interests and distractions. We are driven by a culture of "more" and tend to never feel like we are "enough" or have accomplished "enough." Therefore we tend to not "lie down" on our own. God loves us so much that he wants to help us learn to stop. He wants us to know that we are enough and we have done enough (at least for today). God wants us to trust his provision for us, his beloved sheep. So sometimes he makes us lie down and rest for a while. He knows

what is best for us. He knows we need good sleep at night, a day off from work, an afternoon nap, quiet moments in a busy day and designated periods of rest and renewal.

Ask: What are the green pastures God is inviting me to enjoy in his presence? How might God want me to stop and rest today?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Lord God, thank you for loving me and caring for me so well. You provide what I need and bring me to places of safety and abundance. I trust my entire self to your loving care - body, mind and spirit. I place my life in your hands. Teach me to lie down in your goodness, enjoy the green pastures in my midst, and rest in peace and contentment. You have provided places of blessing that I tend to rush by and overlook during a busy day. Reveal the spaces of restful joy all around me and show me how to relax in your love. Amen.