

Alone With The One Who Knows Your Name

By Brenda Jank

The scenery turned from concrete to cornfields as I reluctantly made my way to a retreat center 30 miles from home. “Is this really going to be worth it?” I questioned the value of taking a day of personal retreat when my calendar boasted little breathing room, and my desk resembled the haystacks I was passing on these lonely country roads.

I was working at a church on the outskirts of Chicago. The senior pastor had recently mandated a series of monthly personal retreats for all staff members. My hungry heart eyed the potential of a few quiet hours, but I was strangely anxious, fearful of my inability to attend to the quiet things of God for that length of time. I let out a fair share of frustrated sighs as I overloaded other days to carve out this day of rest.

My pastor shared these words of encouragement with me on the morning of my departure:

Rest well.

Listen closely.

Produce nothing.

Twelve years later I cannot recall what specifically happened that day — except that I wanted to return. And I did, again and again. Nourished from these face-to-face encounters with the Almighty, I have been able to weather the challenges of a growing ministry, the loss of two children, the birth of a child with Spina Bifida, and the long goodbye to my mom who died of Alzheimer’s.

Over time I’ve noticed two specific gifts that regularly emerge from my private encounters with the Lord: *stillness* and *rest*. Stillness offers me the distinct beauty of hearing God whisper my name, as only He can do it. Rest is something I resist to embrace and defiantly seek to live without.

Stillness

Quiet, alone, and undistracted — these words do not describe the greater part of my waking hours. A world filled with CDs, cell phones, and CNN makes getting away to a quiet place a tall order. Distractions clamor for my attention; busyness seeks to consume my alone time. Yet the Word gently calls to me:

Alone, Moses heard the Lord call his name through a burning bush.

Alone, the young boy Samuel responded to the voice of God.

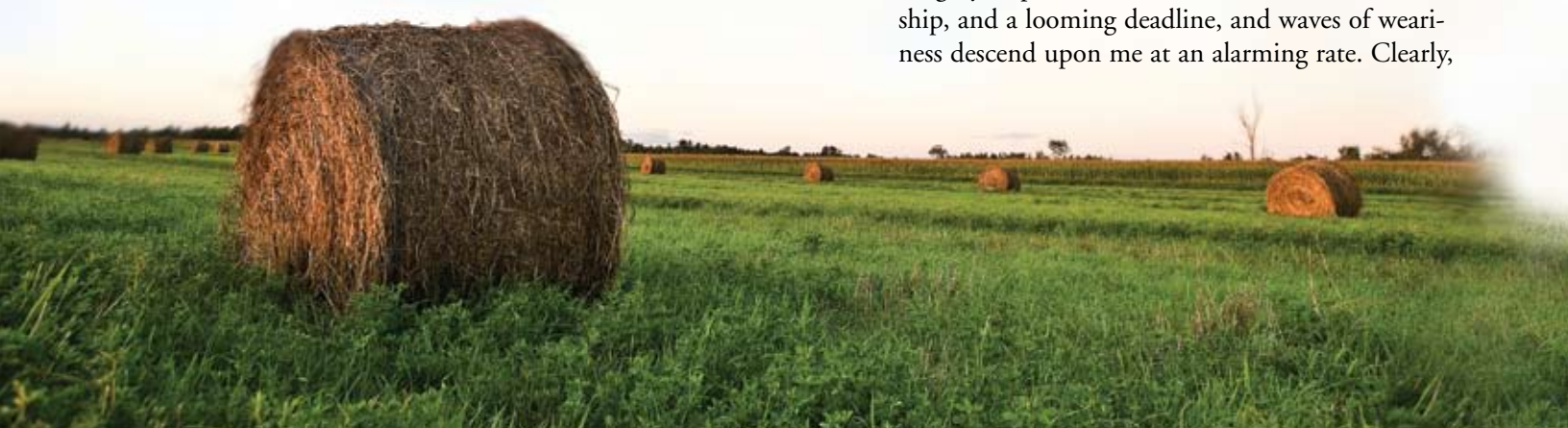
Alone, Mary said yes to the career-changing announcement of all time.

Jesus’ words echo in my ear: *Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest* (Mark 6:31b).

I long to hear my Shepherd’s voice. I want to hear Him call my name. I want to be ready for the mundane *and* miraculous plans He has for my life.

Rest

Everyday life batters my soul. Throw in some weighty responsibilities at work, a frazzled relationship, and a looming deadline, and waves of weariness descend upon me at an alarming rate. Clearly,



today's postmodern mayhem is not a life-style that orients me to the things of God. The missing ingredient to this puzzling way of life is simply and profoundly: rest.

A rested soul alters my attitude. It alters my attitude about *everything* from purpose and pleasure to pressures and problems. Because of this, I attempt to carve out regular, extended get-a-ways to be alone with my heavenly Father. I have discovered that even two to three hours alone on a Sunday afternoon is enough time for me to meet the Lord face-to-face through Word and prayer in a way that centers my soul and redirects my gaze — off me, onto Him. Off the hook, I listen. I rest. I read. I journal. I hike. I go into each hour with no expectations except to receive from God's extravagant warehouse of love. I follow no agenda, yet each time He tenderly and passionately renews my mind and refreshes my soul. Sometimes He offers an explosion of insight; other times His presence is like a gentle breeze — a welcomed gift that refuels, renews, and refreshes.

Just Go

Resist the self-imposed roadblocks. Take the pressure off. There is no special formula for spending time with your heavenly Father in Word and prayer. Personal retreats are not about *you*, nor what *you're going to do to experience* God. Rather, personal retreats are about what the Holy Spirit wants to reveal to you through the context of quiet and rest in His Word.

Pick a day and mark your calendar. Go away to be alone with the One who knows your name.

Brenda Jank is passionate about peanut butter, popcorn, personal retreats, and people, especially her family of seven. She directs the Personal Retreat Ministry at Camp Lutherhaven near Fort Wayne, Indiana, where she and her husband, Tim, have been serving since 1993.



Before You Go

Read the following accounts of three personal retreats.

I Kings 19:1–13

Mark 1:35–39

Luke 4:42–44

How was God at work here? What effects did the personal retreat have on each person? What can you learn from their example? Let your answers inspire your own personal day away.

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