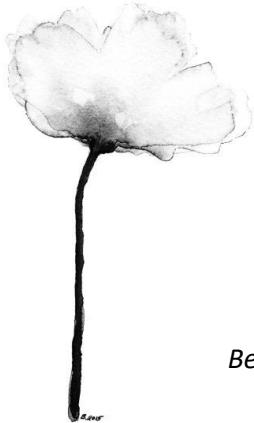


Retreat Five

OUR DAILY BREAD

First Reflection

Take a few moments to transition into retreat. Perhaps return to some of the practices introduced in previous retreats.



*Descend into your inner room.
Allow the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
to welcome you warmly
as you are
in silence.*

Linger in their love.

*Lean against the Father's breast.
Begin to breathe in rhythm with Him and pray:
Abba, I belong to You.*

When you have settled a bit, read the two contrasting passages below reflectively. In fact, ask the Spirit to read them *for* you and *to* you. Notice what stirs within you and linger with that stirring for a few moments.

In the voice of Pharaoh:

"That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and overseers in charge of the people. 'You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota.'" Exodus 5:7-8

In the voice of Jesus:

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?...And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all of his splendor was dressed like one of these...Do not worry about tomorrow. Today has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:26, 28, 29, 34

What did you notice as you listened to these words? What did you notice about the tone? The content? What did you notice within yourself?

Linger here before moving on. When you are ready, read the reflection below.



There is Only Today

Actor Tom Hanks hosted Saturday Night Live on April 11, 2020. It was the first episode in the show's history not recorded before a live studio audience. The cast was sheltering at home, so Hanks stood in his kitchen before a lone camera and said something both funny and sadly true. "There's no such thing as Saturday anymore," he said. "There is only today."

When the familiar constructs of our schedules are washed away—whether by walls of water in the Red Sea or a tsunami of sickness during a pandemic—it's difficult to distinguish one day from the next. There is only today. In this sense, recovering addicts may have been the most prepared for the disorientation inherent in the pandemic.

In the journey towards freedom, there is only today.

People who are actively engaged in breaking the chains of addiction will tell you that there are two days each week that do not matter: yesterday and tomorrow. In the journey towards freedom, there is only today. In fact, there is a 12-Step acronym that we could add to our long list of acronyms in Young Life: ODAAT. One Day at a Time.

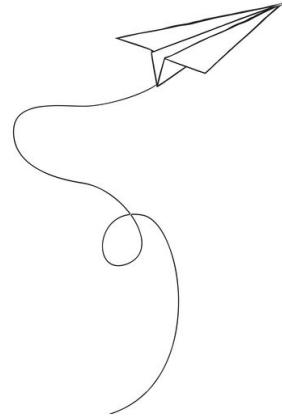
Reflect for a moment. What has it been like for you to have your calendar washed away by the pandemic?

What has been life-giving about it? What has been difficult?

Our Drug of Choice

Whether or not we struggle with substance abuse, many of us in ministry do have a “drug” of choice: adrenaline. It’s a powerful drug that, at the right moment in the right amount, can enable an ordinary person to lift an automobile off of another human being. Likewise, at the wrong moment, a sudden rush of adrenaline can empower us to act aggressively towards others, out of proportion to the threat at hand. We are watching this wrong-moment-rush play out repeatedly today in the streets and on the news.

Adrenaline is a gift from God, intended in ordinary moments and healthy amounts to give us the energy we need to feel good and get things done. In extraordinary moments, when we perceive a real threat to ourselves or others, adrenaline gives us an extraordinary ability to meet the moment and survive.



When a flood of adrenaline is released into our system, our heart-rate increases; our digestive system shuts down; and suddenly our lungs are able to retain more air. We have only seconds before we are no longer able to engage in rational thought. We are in full fight-or-flight mode.

*Have you ever experienced a super-human response empowered by adrenaline?
How did it feel in the moment?
How did you feel afterwards?
Lately, how often have you felt you were in fight-or-flight mode?*

A Disordered Attachment

This remarkable response is a gift meant to meet extraordinary moments, but our bodies were created to live in ordinary moments, most of the time. In fact, too much adrenaline for too long or too often does damage to our bodies. According to God’s original design (Genesis 1-3), our bodies were created to work peacefully, six days a week, as stewards of His creation, stopping in the cool of the day to meander through a garden with our Creator and those we love. That doesn’t sound like the lives most of us are leading today.

Even Jesus lived 90 percent of His life in ordinary and obscure moments, doing solitary and quiet work behind the scenes. He learned a pace and rhythm in those first 30 years that helped define His final three. Jesus was not an adrenaline junky. He did not live in a perpetual fight-or-flight mode.

*Jesus was not
an adrenaline
junky.*

Like any gift from God, we can form a disordered attachment to adrenaline. We can begin relying upon the gift instead of the Giver for strength, comfort and life. We can become addicted.

Those of us in Young Life usually slip into adrenaline addiction unaware. We immerse ourselves in the lives of kids which, on a good day, are filled with a dozen different threats and dangers.

Without our notice, we become accustomed to the increased flow of adrenaline, keeping us at high alert, and when it recedes to normal levels, we think something has gone wrong. We don't like the feeling.

Without realizing it, we may find ways to re-stimulate the release of adrenaline into our system. We may engage in risky behavior; we may create drama or a false sense of urgency where there is none; or we may watch an intense Netflix movie that actually simulates danger and keeps our adrenaline on tap. (Isn't it interesting that watching intense videos or engaging in competitive online games is often part of our definition of "unwinding"?)

What is your practice? What routines do you return to in order to relax and unwind?

14,600 Days of Rehab

During a normal season of ministry, it is easy to become addicted to adrenaline without realizing it. During this season of turmoil and upheaval, all of us are in danger of becoming dependent upon this substance.

It was likely the same for God's people in the desert. The Israelites had become accustomed to living in a world of danger and real threat. Pharaoh had worked them ruthlessly; he had thrown their baby boys into a river; and even after God sent Moses to intercede with Pharaoh, things got worse instead of better. Case in point: They were forced to gather their own straw to make bricks, while filling the same quota. They needed to up their daily dose of adrenaline if they were to keep up the pace, or they would be beaten or starved. It's possible that the Israelites slipped into an addiction to this drug and were in need of rescue and recovery.

We experience adrenaline addiction in our physical bodies. It should come as no surprise, then, that God's counter to this addiction in the Israelites also involved an embodied experience, delivered one day at a time.



God invited His newly-freed people to wake up, wander out of their tents each morning and gather manna off the ground. It wasn't a frantic gathering, like the gathering of scarce straw under the glare of a cruel task master. It was a relaxed gathering under the gaze of a kind and loving God. There was always enough manna for everyone, and it was new every morning! With this simple, daily practice, God was reprogramming their muscle memory, resetting their adrenal glands and re-wiring their very brains! He was carefully integrating a new message throughout their entire systems: You are deeply-loved children with a very good Father who gives you everything you need.

Have you sensed God reprogramming your muscle memory and rewiring your brain through this season? What has that looked and felt like?

Learning to Live Freely

The Israelites repeated this practice for some 14,600 days, so you think this message would have been permanently imprinted upon their hearts, souls, minds and bodies, but by the time the large crowd of Jews sat down on a hillside with Jesus in Matthew, chapter six, it seemed they needed a reminder.

"Look at the birds in the air," Jesus gently invited. "Look at the flowers in the field!" It is easy to imagine that God may have spoken these same words with the first man

and woman as they walked together in the garden. *See that beautiful hummingbird? Look at that extravagant rose! Notice how well I take care of creation. Notice how well I take care of you!*



The Father was repeating Himself through Jesus, and that first sermon on the hillside in Matthew sounded a lot like the daily devotion God delivered in the wilderness for 40 years.

Perhaps the Father is repeating Himself again today through this pandemic. We were created to live ODAAT. There is only today, and if we will slow down, turn off our screens, take a walk and look at the birds and the flowers, we might feel our adrenaline beginning to recede.

The physical act of meandering through creation might remind us that we have a very good Father who loves us. If we practice that exercise often enough, then maybe we'll learn to like the feeling of having an ordinary amount of adrenaline flowing through our veins. Maybe we'll learn to like the feeling of living like meandering sons and daughters instead of harshly-driven slaves.

Return to A Spacious Place for a few moments and engage with the video embedded in the *First Reflection*. In it we will introduce an embodied practice that might help reprogram our muscle memory and remind us whose we are.

Questions for Journaling/Reflection

- Reflect over the past few months. What have been your embodied practices surrounding food? The gathering of it; the storing of it; the preparation of it; the eating of it?
- What other embodied practices became part of your routine?
- Where, in these practices, have you experienced a sense of freedom or joy? Where have you experienced a lack of freedom or joy?
- What is the Lord revealing to you in this reflection? Remember, His voice is kind, compassionate and inviting. It is not the voice of a cruel master.

An Invitation

For the next few days, practice meandering for 10 or 15 minutes each day. Take a walk that is not intended to up your step-count or get you anywhere in particular. Walk out your front door and wander unproductively in God's presence. Consider stopping at some point and practicing the body prayer from the *First Reflection* video.

You might be interested in reading *Backyard Pilgrim, Forty Days at Godspeed*, by Matt Chanlis. It can only be ordered at livegodspeed.org.



Further up and Further in

In these retreats, we are learning to pay attention to the importance of transition: the importance of ending one thing before beginning the next, with a spacious break in-between. This simple practice, if integrated throughout our days, will help us live more humane lives. More humane for us; more humane for others.

With that in mind, once again take time to transition into this section of the retreat. Perhaps take one of those meandering walks we talked about in the first section. Perhaps practice the body prayer for a few moments. Don't forget the Music and More button on the home page. Take a few deep breaths before moving on.



Breaking Hard Bread

In this section, Donna shares a story that we are calling, *Breaking Hard Bread*. Sit back, relax and enjoy the story. It begins with this foreword from the prophet Isaiah:

"Although the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

Isaiah 30:20, 21

Hard Words from a Good Friend

Betty grew up in China and was 69 years old when I met her. I grew up in Arkansas, and was 30 years her junior. Betty's husband was a scientist who invented night vision technology. My husband was an area director who invented Young Life program characters and creative ways to help middle school kids sit still long enough to hear the gospel. At first glance, it seemed Betty and I had little in common. Yet almost two decades ago the Lord introduced us to one another at a friend's birthday party, and we became fast friends.

For many of those years, we met once a week to share our lives and dwell in the presence of Jesus together, always over a delicious meal. Betty became my dear friend and mentor, though Betty would be offended to hear me call her my "mentor". She would reject that verbal form of social distancing. She would always insist we were soul companions, traveling side-by-side. Her humility was almost shocking.

Betty was humble, and she was also bold. She would not hesitate to tell me the hard truth. One day, during a time of severe personal pain in my life, I made my way to Betty's house for some hoped-for comfort.

Instead she offered me the hard words from Isaiah 30. I was surprised that

those hard words brought a sense of healing and hope and the clarity that I needed. Such is the beauty of God's living and active Word. Not just a two-edged sword, but a sharp knife in the hands of a Skilled Surgeon.

Bread and water are essential for our survival, yet adversity and affliction are not meals any of us would ever order off the menu. Our Father loves us enough, however, to give us what we need, even if it is sometimes painful. Like the Good Physician that He is, our Lord knows how to skillfully use pain for our healing; He has sworn His own Hippocratic Oath, "Do no harm". By offering me these words from Isaiah, Betty was inviting me, in the midst of my pain, to trust our Father.

Hidden No More

A few years ago, Betty was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, but we continued to meet weekly whenever possible. We would break the bread of adversity together and sip on the water of affliction over lunch at her favorite restaurant. It was painful to lose my friend, day-by-day, but Betty continued to mentor me with lessons that were never structured or planned. Lessons that were increasingly delivered through communion of the Spirit without the help of words.

Betty was humble, and she was also bold. She would not hesitate to tell me the hard truth.

At the outset of the pandemic, Betty's son called me to tell me that we were losing her for good. She had cancer and would be spending her final days in hospice care at home. For the next three weeks, I set aside all social-distancing rules and made many trips to sit with Betty.

One day toward the end, Betty was sitting in a wheelchair in her living room, head down, not responsive, when her two nieces showed up at the window to say goodbye. What a surreal season we were living through. Two delicate young women standing in a flowerbed, eyes glistening from barely above their protective masks, calling out over and over again through the screen, "Auntie Betty, we love you." The girls pulled their dad up on FaceTime, and he repeated the same mantra, "Betty, it's your brother James. I love you!"

In this holy moment pregnant with adversity and affliction, the words from Isaiah proved true. My Teacher was hidden no more, and it seemed He was standing right behind me.

Death makes everything so clear.

'What else is there to say when someone is dying than I love you?' Jesus asked quietly. 'In fact, what else is there to say at any time on any day?' This moment at the end of Betty's life illuminated for me the sole purpose and goal of our journey with Jesus: to embody and proclaim nothing but pure love. If only I can remember that lesson moving forward. It so easily slips away. Death makes everything so clear.

Actively Dying

Shortly after Betty's nieces left, the hospice nurse showed up, fully suited in a mask, blue scrubs and gloves. He examined Betty, then he gave a thorough explanation of what her sons could expect in the days to come. He said Betty was transitioning—she was “actively dying” now. It would not be long. He told us firmly, Betty belonged in her bed. She would never sit in a chair again. Like the words from Isaiah, these were hard words to hear, but they brought the clarity we needed, and so they were a gift.

In those final days of Betty’s life, I would play instrumental hymns for her from my cell phone. One day, after hours of not opening her eyes or speaking, Betty began softly humming along:

It is well...with my soul.

Through the fog of Alzheimer’s and the pain of cancer, Betty’s soul was rising in hopeful chorus. In that moment, I thought I heard the Teacher once again. He was singing in silent harmony with her: *You are much more than your body. You are much more than your mind. Your life is safely hidden within Me.*

Betty’s life was indeed hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3), and as her mind and body were now sloughing away, that beautiful life was beginning to shimmer from deep within.

The day the nieces showed up to say goodbye, however, Betty could no longer hum along. She was fully standing on the threshold between this world and the next. She was leaving one room, and preparing to enter another. She was ready for this moment. She had practiced the posture of surrender since she first surrendered to Jesus as a 15 year-old girl.

Betty had given me a book years ago by Henri Nouwen, “*With Open Hands*”. She had talked with me about living a life with our hands outstretched and open, sometimes being led where we did not want to follow. Now I was witnessing Betty actively letting go of everything in this world, soon to include her ravaged body. She was in truth “actively dying”. The Teacher silently suggested to me that this was also the posture I was to take as I moved on without Betty. I was to practice actively dying, so that I too would be ready to cross that final threshold with my hands outstretched and open.



The Last Supper

As evening began to fall upon us, I spoke with Betty about the transition she was facing. I comforted her with words from Jesus. I spoke with Jesus about Betty. I committed her spirit into his hands. Then I realized I was really hungry. So I called the Japanese restaurant where Betty and I went to lunch dozens of times over the past few years. I ordered the meal that Betty and I always ordered and shared together. Then I went to pick it up.

I did not realize how dangerous it would be to drive the familiar route from Betty's house to Fuki Sushi without Betty in the car beside me. I did not expect the flood of tears as I recalled the familiar conversation

we would have on that regular drive. In the last years, our conversations were

always the same, going over the same territory, usually several times in one outing. I did not care. The content did not matter. Our relationship was not content-based nor information-dependent. In fact, the less our conversations made sense, the deeper our love seemed to grow for one another. As I drove, I thought I heard the Teacher say, *"You know, that's how it is with you and me, too."*

At the restaurant, I waited my turn to approach the hostess, six feet back with my mask in place. Yellow caution tape sealed off the dining room where Betty and I had sat for many meals over many years. It felt for a moment like the physical building was actually joining me in my mourning.

When I approached the hostess, she asked me from behind her mask, "How are you?" I

said, "I'm OK." As I took the bag of food to leave, however, I turned back to her and said, "My friend and I have come here many times for lunch. She is dying now. This will be our final meal." This beautiful Japanese woman, her eyes turning soft just above her mask, said, "I am so sorry." Then she gave a gentle bow.

I was happy to discover when I got back to Betty's that both of her sons, James and Andrew, were there. They had not been there for most of the afternoon, taking a needed break before returning. Now the three of us got to sit at Betty's table and share Betty's favorite meal. Betty was no longer able to eat, of course, and I had known all along she would not be joining

me for dinner.

The brothers and I sat there for more than

two hours. We told stories about Betty and laughed and cried. We talked about how I had experienced her in ways that they had not, and vice versa. We saw Betty in a new light and celebrated her life over shrimp tempura and sushi. It seemed that the Teacher was listening deeply to us, like He did those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Likewise, as He broke bread with us, He opened our eyes to see.

I had shared meals with Betty and her sons before, but never with just James and Andrew. Our relationships now took on a new sense of depth and intimacy without Betty in the room. That was unexpected. The Teacher reminded me of His strange, parting words to His disciples: *It is for your good that I am going away.* Those words seemed newly relevant and true. There were gifts we could not receive from Betty,

except in her departure. The Teacher assured me, *"On the day of your departure, I will give gifts to your loved ones, too."* Betty crossed the final threshold four days later at 4 a.m.

The Bread of Life

After Betty passed, James, Andrew and I were once again hungry. When the restaurants finally opened, we picked up a hearty breakfast and shared another meal. One week later when we laid Betty in the ground, we returned to her house, sat in her garden and ate again.

"Give us this day our daily bread," the Teacher taught us to pray. Whether that bread is thin wafers of manna, pancakes soaked in butter, or the bread of adversity washed down with a hard swallow of affliction, it is a gift from our Father. This remains a mystery, but one thing is increasingly clear: The bread of adversity is meant to be broken together.

Questions for Reflection and Journaling

- ◊ What has the Lord stirred within you through this story? Of what are you most aware? A thought? A feeling? A longing?
- ◊ Linger and listen to what the Teacher might be offering you through this awareness. Write down what you are hearing from Him. If it helps, write it in the form of a letter from Jesus to you.
- ◊ During this season of adversity and affliction, have you noticed any "teachers" coming out from hiding? Through whom or what has Jesus spoken to you? What did He have to say?
- ◊ If you have lost someone you loved, what gifts did Jesus give you at their departure? In what ways did He meet you and console you? What gifts is He still giving you today through this loved one? Thank Him for His gifts.

You might be interested in reading a recent article from the Wall Street Journal, *Dying Gives Us a Chance to Confront Truth*. It was written by C. Kavin Rowe, a former Young Life Campaigner kid who is now a professor at Duke University Divinity School. You will find the link to this article at *A Spacious Place* at this location in the retreat.

When we share our suffering with one another, our Teacher is hidden no more. Jesus joins us at the table, and we see Him with our own eyes. Like the disciples in Emmaus, we see His wounded hands and feet and the scars on His forehead. We hear the voice of the One who has gone before us, whose body was broken on our behalf.

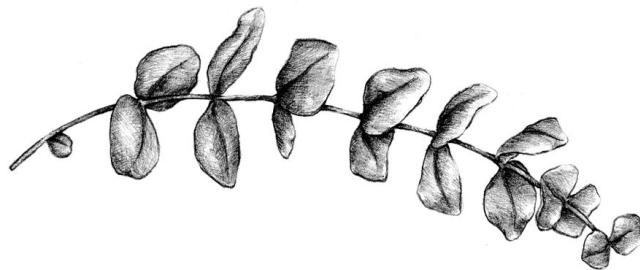
"Take and eat," Jesus said to His disciples, His last night in His unscarred body. *"Do this in remembrance of Me."* But first the Teacher gave thanks for that hard, broken bread.



Further Still

This section of the retreat will be a little different than other sections thus far. We recommend you begin by taking a few moments to visit the Music and More page and dwell in the music offered by Etu Finau. Then return for a time of Lectio Divina.

Take some time now to expand the spaciousness around you and within you before moving forward.



The Word Became Flesh

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” John 1:14

Lectio Divina (divine reading) was introduced via video in the previous retreat. It is an ancient practice designed to help us fully digest the food God gives us through His Word.

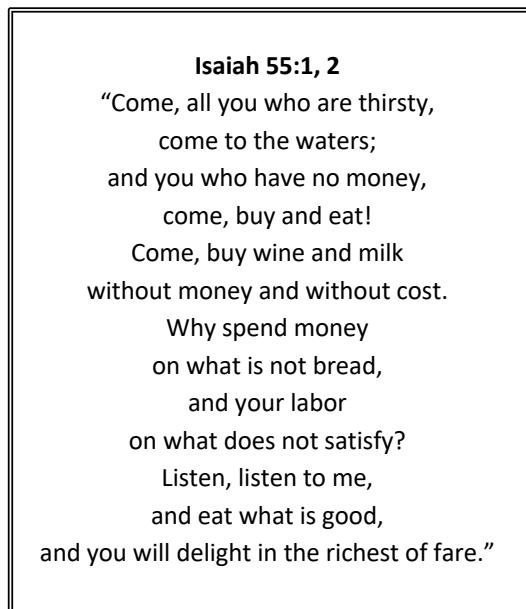
It has been well-said, “You are what you eat.” This simple phrase captures the hope behind the practice of Lectio: incarnation. As we slow down and begin to digest what God offers us—to chew on it, swallow it and allow it to become integrated throughout our system—the Word becomes flesh once again, through us.

Take a moment to move into a listening posture and sit in silence before reflecting upon the passage below. Recall the images offered in the first retreat. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are inviting you to recline at the table with them in your inner room and share a meal. Find yourself at their table.



- In the first reading, imagine that the Spirit comes to you with a tray of delicious food for your soul. Listen from within to the passage. **Notice which word or phrase captures your attention.** What morsel of food looks appetizing to you?

Read slowly, attentively and become all ear to God.



Take time to sit silently in gratitude for your word or phrase, like an honored guest, grateful for what has been served.



- Now read the passage again, slowly. In fact, as before, ask the Spirit to read the passage to you from within. Continue to hold your word or phrase, your morsel of fine food. As you listen this time, begin putting the morsel in your mouth; smelling it; tasting it; experiencing it in your body. As you listen to the passage, make your senses available; your mind's eye; your anointed imagination. **How do you experience this morsel that God has served you?**

Does a picture or image come to mind? Do you become aware of something you are sensing? What feelings stir in you?



- Read the passage a third time, slowly and reflectively. Now you are digesting the food God has given you. You are allowing it to work its way through your system. **As you listen, do you hear an invitation from the Lord?** Notice your longings and desires. What do you want as a result of what God has fed you? Often the invitation from the Lord is wrapped in our longings and desires.

Is the Lord inviting you to do something? To be something? To have something? Put it this way: As a result of digesting God's word, I find myself longing for...

This is how the Word becomes flesh: We digest God's Word, discern His invitation and then act upon His invitation in the days that follow.



- Read the passage one final time and allow the words to come to rest in pleasant places within your soul. Allow your food to settle. Like lingering at the table after a good meal, **savor what God has served you from His Word.**

Take time to journal regarding what the Lord has revealed to you through Lectio Divina. End your retreat by giving thanks. Be mindful to gently transition back into engagement with activity and others.

