

Are you tired yet? I am. Not physically tired but emotionally tired. I'm tired of Covid 19. I want it to go away. Just when it seems to get better, it gets worse. I'm tired of not being able to see each other here in this place. I'm tired of Zoom calls. I'm tired of protests and riots. I'm tired of politics. I'm tired of thinking about all the things that make me tired. How about you?

We all get tired, but the question is, how do we recover? How do we revive our sagging spirits? How do we get our mojo back? How can we find rest for our souls and refreshment for our spirits so that we can accomplish the work God has given us to do?

For the next few weeks we are looking for answers to those question by examining the life of Christ. After all, Jesus wrestled “the rulers, and authorities, and the cosmic powers and took on the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” But He never tapped out. He finished the course and completed the work His Father gave Him to do.

What kept Him going? What habits did He practice that renewed His spirit? What environments did He seek that refreshed His soul? Remember, He was fully God so His God-guage always pointed to full. All the fullness of God dwelt within Him. But He was also fully man experiencing the same challenges and temptations we all face.

Last week we learned that solitude was important to Jesus. He was refreshed by one on one time with the Father. This week I want to take you to a little village a mile and a half outside of Jerusalem that was Jesus' favorite place on earth. It was in Bethany that Jesus regularly found rest and refreshment. Why was this place so special to Jesus? Three reasons: Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Bethany is not a place, it's a people. We are going to look at two passages in the NT that describe what went on in Bethany in an effort to gain some insight into the kinds of relationships that refresh our spirits.

1. We are refreshed by true friendships. I'm not talking about Facebook friendships. I'm talking about intimate relationships with people who really do know us. We don't know much about Lazarus but it is clear that he and Jesus were good friends. John 11:1-3, John 11:32-36.

Have you ever thought about what makes a good friend? Character, care, and congeniality.

The church should be a source for quality friendships. Sadly, that is not always the case. I heard about a pastor who preached a sermon on the question of whether we will be able to recognize our friends in Heaven. He got a letter the next week that said, “I would like to ask you to preach on the subject of recognizing friends on earth since I have been coming to your church for six months and don't know anyone yet.”

2. We are refreshed by genuine hospitality. We are all drawn to welcoming environments. Martha is the poster child for this practice. Lk. 10:38-42/John 12:1-2. It is pretty clear from these passages that Martha had the gift of hospitality. She gets a bad rap for her attention to detail but she used that trait to welcome people into her home. I love the NT word for hospitality – philo/xenos. Both of those words have found their way into English. Philos = brotherly love. Xenos = strangers as in Xenophobia.

Jesus did not scold Martha for using her God-given gift to create a welcoming environment. He gently admonished her because people with this gift have a hard time turning it off. There is always something more to do, some need to meet some request to fill. There is a greater priority.

3. We are refreshed by people who share our priorities. (Lk. 10:39). Every time Mary appears in scripture she is at the feet of Jesus. This is the posture of devotion. John 11:32 says, “When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell down at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’”

Mary is always at Jesus’ feet listening to what He has to say. After all, whatever came out of His mouth was “the word of God.” Not everyone wanted to hear what Jesus had to say. Just think of how refreshing it must have been for Him to have someone actually interested in what He had to say. Bethany is a place where people are genuinely interested in the things that interest you.

4. We are refreshed by people who share our adversities. John 11 is not only the climax of Jesus’ 7 “I Am” claims but it is a very tender retelling of the tragic death of Lazarus. But that is not the only adversity Jesus shared with His friends in Bethany. As John 12 opens, Mary’s actions are placed against a black backdrop of hatred and hostility toward Jesus...11:57 The religious leaders were so desperate to get rid of Jesus that even Lazarus was in trouble...12:9-10. They wanted to destroy the evidence of Jesus’ power and authority. In between all of this hostility is an unforgettable act of passionate devotion to Jesus.

As Mary takes her familiar place at Jesus’ feet, she noticed something different about Him this time. She sensed a heaviness that the disciples ignored. Her passionate devotion led to a clear understanding of what was going to happen. She had often sat at His feet and listened when He came to her house. In Mark 8:31-32 Jesus said, “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.” The disciples had their own agenda. But Mary, sitting at His feet, had a sensitivity the disciples didn’t have. She listened not only with her ears but with her heart.

5. We are refreshed by people who allow us to be ourselves. It wasn’t easy being Jesus. I wonder if His classmates said things like, “Hey Mr. Perfect, who died and made you God?” He drew a crowd wherever He went because everyone wanted something from Him. If you are the mother of a couple of toddlers, you know the feeling. So it must have been refreshing just to walk into the house at Bethany and be with friends.

Jana and I just returned from Bethany. We spent time with friends who go back almost 40 years. We planted a church together, we started our families together, we have laughed together and grieved together. We know we are always welcome in their home. We don’t have to pretend or pose in their presence. We can just be ourselves.

Jesus promised us abundant, “more-than-enough” life. When you are leaking life, how do you refuel in flight? What did Jesus do to maintain His enthusiasm for life when fatigue threatened to blow Him off course? He sought out those whose friendship refreshed His spirit.

I've always believed we would need a lot fewer therapists if we had a lot more friends. One well-known counselor agrees.

“After more than twenty-five years as a psychologist...I have reached a few conclusions that have required me to shift the focus of my work...Beneath what our culture calls psychological disorder is a soul crying out for what only community can provide...We must do something other than train professional experts to fix damaged psyches. Damaged psyches aren't the problem. The problem beneath our struggles is a disconnected soul. Larry Crabb

Do you have a Bethany? Do you have some trusted friends? Want a friend? Be a friend. Character, care, congeniality. Tim Kimmel...coffin story...Do you have six people in your life who will still be your friends to the end? If not, then get busy.

1. Make sure your heart is a Bethany, a place where Jesus loves to dwell. Invite Him in because when He walks into your life you will discover the greatest cure of all for weariness. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Mt. 11:28-30

2. Make sure your home a Bethany. Invite someone over and welcome them. Let them be themselves. Take an interest in the things they are interested in. Share a meal together. At the end of the meal, serve communion. You don't have to be a religious professional to serve communion.

May your home always be too small to hold all of your friends.