

Introduction:

Books are what we make them. We can skim a book alone and tell ourselves we've taken in the book. Or we can let ourselves sink into a book, and do so communally, and when we do we come away transformed! And when the content of the book in question is, itself, an invitation into a more whole, human way of engaging, why not take the time to engage deeply in the content and in community? The way we engage will shape the way we grow.

I've led various groups through studies of this material and in the places where people dove into the experiments, took risks, let themselves get uncomfortable and did all that in community, I saw astounding personal healing and transformation—some of the most remarkable growth I've ever seen in my twenty-five years of ministry. I saw several people emerge from depression, some participants felt God's presence for the first time, and various people who were wrestling with their faith came to own it in deeper ways. Not because the book itself is so astounding but because when we open our whole selves up to God, he is able to do remarkable things in us.

For each chapter I provide a reflection, bible passage, and application questions. I encourage you to immerse yourself in the experiment, even when it's uncomfortable or awkward. (It was uncomfortable and awkward to write this book so it only makes sense that it might be uncomfortable and awkward to read it.) I don't know what God has in store for you but I will assure you that I've seen life and healing on the other side of the discomfort.

What a gift you have—a group of friends willing to engage in that risky, adventurous way with you and with God. I can't wait to see what he has in store!

Chapter 1: Rest

Reflection:

What comes to mind when you think about rest? Does the idea of rest appeal to you? Or does it bring up negative thoughts and emotions? Name both positive and negative responses.

Beyond the usual sense of rest related to sleeping in or going on vacation, what might it look like to rest from your own agenda? Can you name your agendas in life (they may be related to work, family, self-preservation, life goals, reputation)? How does it feel to consider resting from those agendas?

Do you believe that there is a larger force at work carrying our lives, giving us what we need each day? What might it cost to submit to God's agenda even if it's different from yours? What might you gain?

Bible Passage: Read Luke 18:9-17

What is the difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector?

What might it look like to become like a child? And why does Jesus say we must be like a child to enter his kingdom?

Application:

What might it look like to set aside our ideas of how God should behave and reveal himself and be open to what God is actually doing in the world and our lives? What is one practical way to step toward that?

What kind of input from God do you trust most? Words and rational thought? Instincts? Emotions? Sensory experiences? What could you do to stretch your capacity to receive input from God with new parts of yourself?

How is God already working in your world and inviting you to pay attention and join Him?

This week, as you sense prompts from God, choose to say yes in new ways, to prompts you usually set aside, even if it's uncomfortable.

Chapter 2: What Gets in the Way of Rest

Reflection:

How did it feel uncomfortable to say yes to God in new ways this week? Where did it lead? Were you able to set aside your expectations of what you wanted God to do or say and receive how he was actually at work?

What concerns came up for you? Are you comfortable trusting your instincts? Senses? Emotions? How have you been taught to learn? Do you think our culture's way of learning is the only way to learn or the best way to learn when it comes to faith?

Bible Passage: Read Luke 24:13-35

The disciples talk with Jesus all day but what allows the disciples to finally recognize him?

Application:

How might you be missing the Jesus who is walking right beside you, just as the disciples did on the road to Emmaus?

How can you live this week knowing that Jesus can show himself in our bodily experiences (like he did when the disciples ate) and in our emotional and instinctual experiences (like when the disciples' hearts were burning)?

Chapter 3: Receive

Reflection:

Did you find yourself open to new input from God this week?

What did it look like to wrestle with your hesitations and learn to welcome God in thoughts, feelings, senses, and instincts?

Share a story of a way you opened yourself to God and where it led you, even if you don't fully understand or it wasn't a mountaintop experience.

Bible Passage:

Engage with Psalm 139, but do so in a different format than usual. Since it is a psalm that references and engages the fullness of human experience, it is great to take it in with our minds, bodies, and hearts. Try writing it out. Or read it aloud with a friend or group. Or use an audio bible reading, a musical version, or try *lectio divina*:

Audio bibles:

https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/?recording=nivuk-suchet https://www.streetlightsbible.com

Words of Psalm 139 set to music: "Darkness and Light" by Brie Stoner https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCfe16nlddQ

Lectio Divina video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mADEe-F2iE

How does the psalm speak to your memory? To your imagination?
To your mind, spirit, body, heart?

Application:

How have you had negative experiences or baggage with church, Scripture, or the concept of the kingdom?

Is there a connection between human abuse of power and this baggage?

How might we need to set aside our agendas to receive what God wants to do in and through the church and Scripture? How might we need to open our hearts to the ways his kingdom is at work? What does God want you to set aside?

What does God want you to welcome in?

Chapter 4: What Doesn't Get in the Way of Receiving

Reflection:

How has independence been a helpful and healthy thing in your life? How can it be a negative thing in relationships and faith? How has dependence been an unhealthy thing in your life? How can it be a positive thing in relationships and faith?

Bible Passage: Read John 15:1-8

Application:

In your daily life, what's the difference between living with dependence on the vine and living independently? How do you see your life drying up like a branch cut from the vine? How do you see the fruitfulness that comes from remaining in the vine?

How can you, in the coming week, choose to remain in the vine in real ways?

Chapter 5: Respond

Reflection:

What feels wrong with the world? The church? Yourself? How do you despair for these things? How do you lament and long?

Bible Passage: Read Romans 8:22-23

How do you sense the labor pains of all creation?

Application:

How do we see it differently to imagine that the pain of the world, the church, and our own stories is birth pain?

What does this birth pain invite you to hope for?

Journal or pray to express your lament of what is broken and your longing for all to be made new. Share with the group.

Chapter 6: What Keeps Us from Responding

Reflection:

As you let yourself long with God, is he giving you new ways of seeing? New kinds of hope? Is it hard to let yourself hope?

Bible Passage: Read Jeremiah 1:4–10, 17–19 What do you see God doing and promising to do?

Application:

How are you feeling called to join God in his joy and mission in the world?

What makes you excited?

What makes you hesitant?

Rewrite the passage from Jeremiah, filling in the ways you sense God calling you and the ways you find yourself responding to him. How would God draw you out of yourself and put your eyes on his promises, as he did with Jeremiah?

Chapter 7: A Theology of Childlikeness

Reflection:

What metaphors have you been taught for explaining the gospel? What metaphors resonate with you?

How do you rely on the good news of the gospel for your daily life?

Bible Passage: Read Hebrews 2:5-18

Application:

Hebrews 2 describes a Jesus who is human in every way. Take note this week of all the ways you feel your humanness. What is wonderful about living in a human body, with human senses, emotions, and relationships? What is painful and limiting about human experience? How can you see and live differently knowing that Jesus also experienced these joys and challenges?

How is Jesus inviting you to also be like him in the way that he never lost connection with the Father? He never allowed any of the distractions and joys or pains and confusions to break that deep intimacy. How is this an invitation into good news and salvation?

Chapter 8: Rest, Receive, Respond

Reflection:

Do you sometimes feel like everything is on your shoulders, like life is all up to you?

Or do you tend to feel that it's all up to God, and tend toward passivity?

How is either extreme missing something?

Bible Passage: Read Matthew 11:28-30

How do you respond to Jesus's invitation to enter into his rest?

How do you respond to Jesus's invitation to take on his yoke?

Can we do both at once?

Application:

How is it good news to have both a place to rest and a way to partner with God?

How will you make choices this week to reflect both your rest in Jesus's yoke and your partnership with him in mission?

What does it mean to choose to live as a proactive adult in childlike dependence?