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Hyacinths to Feed the Soul

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. (Mark 6:30-31)

While serving on a church staff during my college days, I heard Dr. R. S. Cooper preach a sermon in which he quoted the poem:

*If of all thy mortal goods thou are bereft,
And from thy slender store two loaves alone to thee are left,
Sell one, and with the dole buy hyacinths to feed the soul.*

The poem, I learned later, was written by a Persian poet—Saadi was his pen name. Then, a magazine article carried the title, "Hyacinths for the Soul," and I knew its origin:

*If of all thy mortal goods thou are bereft,
And from thy slender store two loaves alone to thee are left,
Sell one, and with the dole buy hyacinths to feed the soul.*

The author, Carol Amen, told about picking up baby-sitting jobs during her off-hours while in Nursing School. One job was for the whole weekend beginning Friday afternoon until Sunday evening. She tried to picture the kind of couple that would be able to do that...just running over with money. To her surprise, their house was tiny and in a spotted neighborhood. The husband had just finished his degree and was working for an architectural firm. Both the husband and wife looked quite tired. One child was two and a half and the other was eleven months old. The wife gave Carol the name and number of the hotel where they would be staying. "That's headquarters," she said. "We'll sleep late, prowl around town, eat when we get hungry, and visit the galleries."

"Won't that be expensive?" Miss Amens said. "Well, yes, but we're both tired and snapping at each other. Haven't you heard about hyacinths for the soul?" Then, she quoted the poem.

*If of all thy mortal goods thou are bereft,
And from thy slender store two loaves alone to thee are left,
Sell one, and with the dole buy hyacinths to feed the soul.*

Sometimes giving practical “Scrooge” gifts like underwear and socks are in order; sometimes its fun to give unexpected gifts like a golf lesson, a massage, or tickets to a concert. Jennifer and I have a thirty-five year-old nephew who discovered about a year ago that he has multiple sclerosis. In addition to the debilitating symptoms, the loss of work income, and the emotional pressure, there’re the added medical expenses. While we don’t usually do Christmas gifts beyond kids and grandkids, this past Christmas we sent him and his wife a check for \$200 and told them to do something fun with it—hyacinths for the soul.

Jesus was a master at managing his time and energy...and feeding the soul. He knew that when his disciples came back together after a time of being sent out to teach and minister to people, they needed some time to rest and reflect—time to feed the soul.

Smart, busy people usually know how to discipline themselves and find short “escapes” to rest, reflect, and feed the soul. Several years ago, I read an article about Alan Greenspan, Former Chairman of the Federal Reserve, and how he managed his hectic, busy schedule. With long days that usually started about 4:00am each morning, he often would escape mid-late morning for a Jacuzzi bath—a mental, emotional, and physical escape.

Jesus reminded us humans that we were not meant to live by bread alone.

The prophet Elijah was victorious over the prophets of Baal, though coming out of it depleted emotionally, physically, and mentally. Escaping into the wilderness from Jezebel, he slept, ate, rested, slept, ate, rested, until he found peace in the silence of God.

After the conversion experience of the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road, he disappeared to Arabia for a period of three years or so. He needed time to sort the pieces out and let his mind and body catch up with his soul.

This kind of experience—a time or place of feeding the soul—brings peace and healing. Changing pace, doing something radically different, can put fresh heart back into us. The pace and events of life often leave us bruised and

battered, torn and tossed. Our attitudes, our ability to think, adjust, and carry on normal responsibilities can be greatly impaired by the everyday routines of life. We need to find ways and places for our souls to be restored.

Kind David, reflecting on his early days as a tender of sheep, wrote the most quoted psalm of all. Tucked into the opening lines of this poem are the words: "He restores my soul."

Harry Emerson Fosdick is known for his great preaching abilities. Three-quarters of a century ago he led a congregation on Park Avenue in New York City to move two blocks off Harlem and into the education environment of Columbia University, Union Seminary, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The Riverside Church is a massive gothic structure with a long tradition of great worship, but also a church that opens its doors to the homeless every night. What most people don't know about Fosdick is that in his earlier life during seminary, he went through an emotional breakdown, dropping out of school. Through rest and reflection he came back to become one of the most influential ministers this country has ever known.

"Hyacinths to feel the soul" are also capable of giving us a new perspective on life. There's another old poem that goes:

*If your nose is close to the grindstone rough,
And you hold it down there long enough,
In time you'll say there's no such thing
As brooks that babble and birds that sing.
These three will all your world compose—
Just you, the stone, and your blame old nose.*

John Ericson was a noted Swedish scientist who cast aside everything except his science. A good friend of his, Ole' Bull, was an accomplished violinist. Ericson had no time for beauty, music, or any other thing besides science. Bull had a concert in town and personally invited his old friend to come to the symphony hall, but Ericson didn't have the time. The next day, Ole' Bull went by his office, turned the pegs under the scroll of his instrument to put it in tune, and began playing his violin. As he did, the tears began rolling down the face of his friend. When Ole' finished playing, John said to him, "Now I know what I've been missing."

Hyacinths to feed the soul can also bring a resilience to bounce back in life. We need that power when we have fallen. We need that power when we've experienced failure. We need that power when we have been frustrated and defeated, when our mood gets us down and we get off track. We need that power when life changes and adjusting and adapting are necessary.

When we pause long enough in life to feed the soul, then our soul bounces back from the difficulties. The whole idea of Sabbath is resting—letting bodies, minds, hearts, and souls come back together. We need to learn to let the quietness and confidence of God possess our souls. That's the whole idea behind "hyacinths to feed the soul."

"Tomorrow and tomorrows are rolling by," Carol Amens said. "Paychecks are spent on mere bread and shoes and rent while spirits go begging." If you find your spirits failing, try some of the hyacinths to feed your soul." AMEN.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.