

Jesus
Love
&
Tacos

EXTRA
SAUCE

Carrie Stephens

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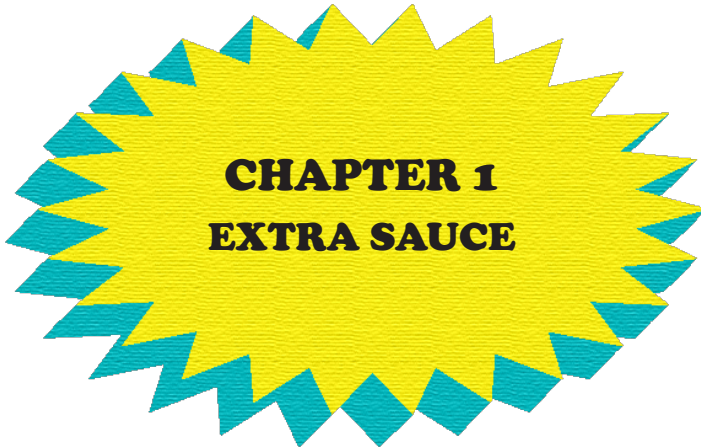
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A Note about This Resource

My deepest hope for anything I write is that it will help people to think, feel, and act in new, divinely inspired ways. This extra content is my attempt to help foster new thoughts about God through prayer, journaling, and interacting with the world. It's my attempt to help readers name their feelings about God and life in general as they speak with God, consider their own souls, and enter into their relationships with a more intentional emotional presence. And it's also my attempt to help answer the age-old question we always have as we read a book about spiritual life in community: What do I do now? As you pray, ponder, and purposefully reach out to offer God's love to others, I hope you find yourself caught up in the dance of God, full of his great love and joy that you are his very own.

Here's to Jesus, love, the best tacos ever, and you. Thank you for reading my words. I pray they help clear the path forward toward God for you.



CHAPTER 1
EXTRA SAUCE

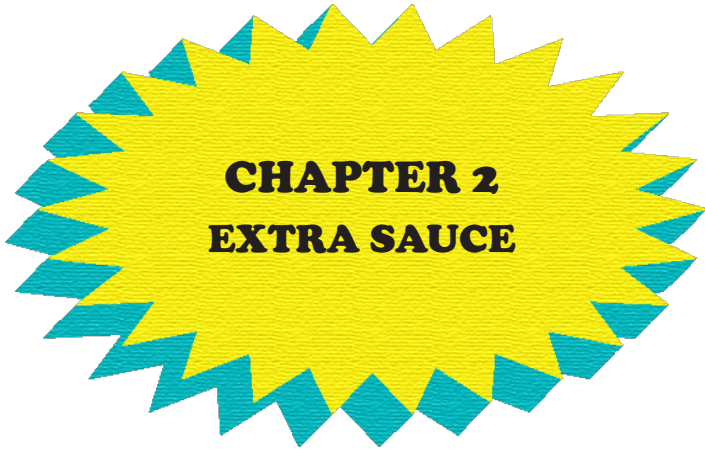
“For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the first fruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”

(Romans 8:19–23 csb)

Pray: Lord, help me understand the fullness of what it means to exist in you. Forgive me for how I have attempted to control my circumstances or claimed I could create a life without you as Lord. I reach out my hand today for a more profound revelation of your Lordship. Lead me deeper into who you are as Lord of all, Jesus. In your holy name I pray, amen.

Ponder: When you look at your day ahead, what does it mean to live and move and have your being in Jesus amid all your responsibilities and plans? How can you be more aware of Jesus as Lord of all you think, say, and do today?

Purpose: As you interact with inanimate things today, focus your thoughts on the gift they are in the world. Thank God for the clothes you wear, the bus you use to commute, and the devices and tools you use to accomplish what must be done today. Consider and celebrate the attributes and characteristics of those things that make them useful, enjoyable, or necessary. When you are out in the world, take notice of nature, and allow your heart to experience the wonder of its creation. Contemplate how all you see was spoken into existence where there was once only a void and nothingness. Thank God for the trees, sky, and clouds that lift our eyes from our heavy thoughts and concerns. When you see other people, notice and reflect on God's creative genius in humanity's diverse expression, and consider how each person you see is made in God's image. Marvel at how differently we all reflect his endlessly diverse and glorious nature. Thank Jesus for the people around you, and ask him to reveal himself to them through your life.



CHAPTER 2
EXTRA SAUCE

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a difficult time.”

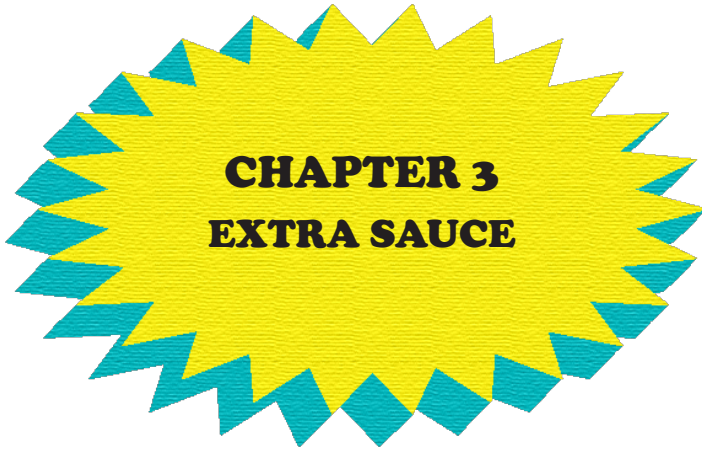
(Prov. 17:17 csb)

Pray: Jesus, thank you for being my friend and laying down your life for me. Thank you for leading me into your truth, so I can know how wide and deep the Father's love for me is. Lord, I repent for all the ways I have failed to obey you and refused to love others as you have loved me. I want to be a fisher of people. Show me how to reach out to my friends with offers of sacrificial love so I can join you in your endless, eternal desire to add people to your family. Help me be a faithful friend to the people you have put in my life and open my life up to the new friends and neighbors you long to give me. God, I ask you to grow my friendships to mirror your friendship with me more closely. Help me forgive the friends who haven't loved me as I've needed to be loved and be grateful for all the ways people have done their best to love me well. Give me eyes to see the needs of others and the courage to raise their needs above my own so I can love them sacrificially and lay down my life for them as you've done for me. In Jesus's name, amen.

Ponder: Has God given you friends you would like to keep for life? If he has, think strategically about how to love your friends and help those friendships grow. Make a list of intentional ways to grow and develop your friendships spiritually and practically in your current season. If you're starting fresh in a new community in some way, reconsider the kind of friendships you long to cultivate. What specifically can you pray for and do to try to find those kinds of friends?

Purpose: Make a list of the people you love, and spend some time today praying for each one by name. Text them or call them and tell them you'll be praying for them, and ask if there is anything you can specifically pray for, then follow this prayer guide as you pray:

- Thank God for bringing these people into your life and allowing you to connect with them. Ask him to help you love them as he loves them.
- Thank God for making them and the blessings they have brought you—be specific! Is your friend a good listener or helpful?



CHAPTER 3
EXTRA SAUCE

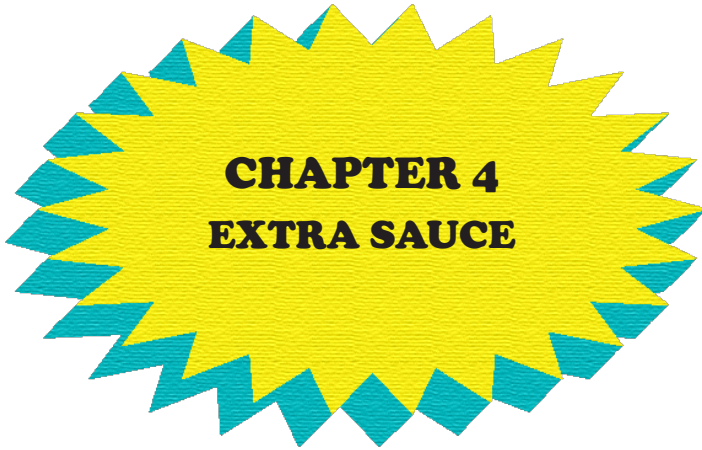
“Don’t let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.”

(John 14:1-3 csb)

Pray: Lord, I thank you for preparing a place for me in your Father's house. When I find comfortable places to rest here in this life, help me savor and appreciate them as a foretaste of my eternal home in you. When I find myself in uncomfortable and foreign places here on earth, refresh my heart with the hope of a more wonderful homecoming after this life ends. Let my life be a continual example of your divine hospitality, God. Anoint my words with your welcome. Make my embraces like that of the prodigal son's father: full of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Holy Spirit, help me offer my home and life as places of solace and rest for the weary and the needy. I ask all this in Jesus's name, amen.

Ponder: Where do you feel most at home? What is it about a place that helps you find rest and solace? How can you create a more welcoming physical environment for your soul and for others to join you? What kinds of words and behaviors help others find rest in your presence? How can you carry the presence of God's hospitable love out into the places you go and to the people you meet in your day?

Purpose: Spend some time today sitting in silence in whatever place you call home. Sit and listen to the sounds of your home without music playing or the television on. Move from room to room, from one chair to the sofa, then to the bed or the porch. Listen to the sounds of your home. Feel the blankets you sit on, notice the chair's height, and smell the jasmine blooming along the fence. Leave your phone turned off while you do all this, press out the distraction of the other people in your home (if you have small children, do the best you can!), your to-do list, and the notifications from your devices. Ask God to reveal the meaning of home more deeply as you intentionally experience your earthly home, and then ask him to help your heart love your home and the home he is for you.



CHAPTER 4
EXTRA SAUCE

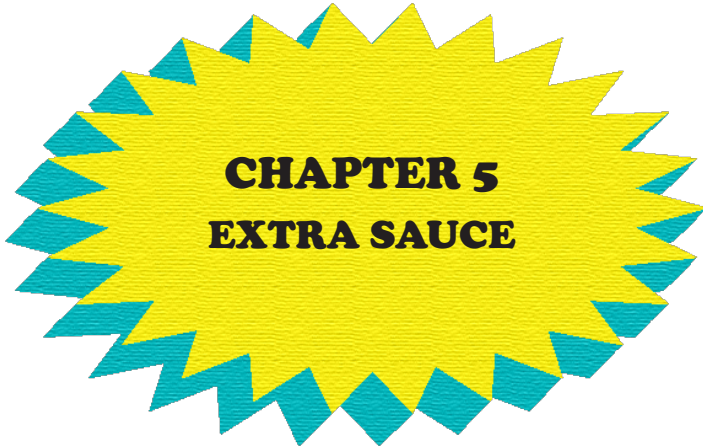
“Jesus answered, ‘Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’”

(John 3:5–8 csb)

Pray: Lord, I thank you for being a God who births people by the Spirit. I ask you to fill the churches in my city with the unity you enjoy in yourself. Help me to find my place in your Bride, Jesus. Holy Spirit, show me how to breathe with you through the birth pains that are often part of loving people as Christ loves the church. When I feel alone, I ask you to increase my awareness of your presence and show me how to reconnect with the people you have put in my life. When I'm weary of the long hike, I ask you for strength to endure. When I feel overwhelmed, remind me of your eternal and holy peace. More than anything, God, I pray my faith would increase so I could speak to the mountains you've invited me to hike with you and see God move. I ask all these things in Jesus's name, amen.

Ponder: Imagine you're preparing for a long hike. Practically speaking, what essentials would you take with you? What items would you leave behind? How would you train your body and your mind for the task? Whom would you choose to go with you? Consider what the answers to these questions reveal about your spiritual journey in community. What are the essential things you need to remain connected to others and make it all the way home to God as one people? What items are you holding on to that are unnecessary for the trip? How can you train yourself, spiritually speaking, for this journey? Most importantly, who is hiking this mountain with you, and how can you cultivate and cling to those relationships for the long haul?

Purpose: Consider your involvement in your community today. Are there opportunities to serve in your city, school, neighborhood, or church that you feel called to step into? How can you intentionally engage in helping to create greater unity by encouraging and serving the people in your life? As you open your awareness to the pain and needs around you this week, ask God what he longs to birth in those situations and actively seek to be a part of that labor.



CHAPTER 5
EXTRA SAUCE

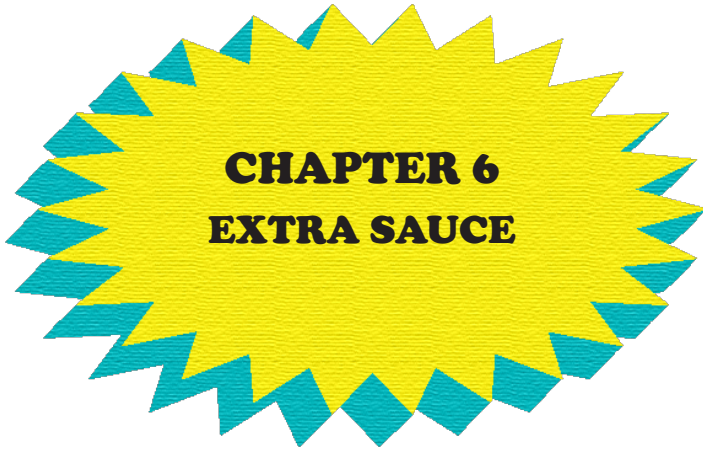
“Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

(2 Cor. 4:16–18 csb)

Pray: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the way you love your church. Jesus, thank you for giving your life so we could be members of your Body. We are humbled by the honor to love and serve this world you created. I pray for endurance for those who feel weak and battered by the storms we've endured. Strengthen and comfort your Church, Holy Spirit. Heighten our ability to sniff out the path to unity, God. Forgive us for fracturing our communities with our immaturity or lack of wisdom. Help us to build bridges where the divides have deepened. Give us a supernatural ability to forgive those who have wounded us, and teach us how to love and support those who lead us. Fill our communities with your glory, God. In Jesus's name, amen.

Ponder: How have you found life in your community challenging? How has God used your church or community to bless and care for you? Journal about a time in your life when God used a community to meet a need in your life, or write out a need you currently have for community and connection. Thank God for meeting your needs in the past and holding your current need with careful tenderness.

Purpose: Try to notice the smells you encounter today. How does the smell of your face wash or your morning coffee prepare your heart for the day ahead? How does the scent of a friend's cologne or a favorite bakery affect your soul? Notice the odors of your home, workplace, subway, or park you walk past. How could recalling comforting smells in stressful moments help center you?



CHAPTER 6
EXTRA SAUCE

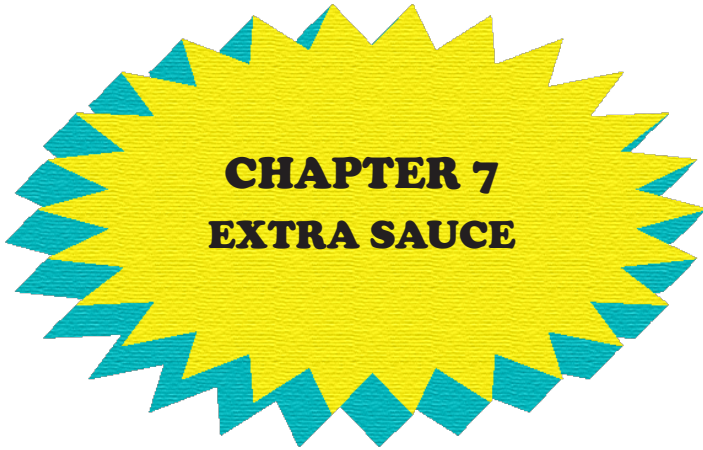
“The Lord your God is among you,
a warrior who saves.
He will rejoice over you with gladness.
He will be quiet in his love.
He will delight in you with singing.”

(Zephaniah 3:17 csb)

Pray: God, I am in awe of how you create life from the Same Old Stuff. Thank you for all the ways you are my strong rescuer and defender. Thank you for saving me from my sin and never leaving me alone without your hope and Spirit. Draw near to the places of my life where I still long for relational connection and care. Help me arise and be an ezer to people in need of belonging. I ask all this in your name, Jesus, amen.

Ponder: If you imagine God as a kind of Gigi, cheering in the stands for you in your life, what does that look like, exactly? Zephaniah 3:17 says God rejoices over you and delights in you with singing. What, specifically, would God say as he sings and cheers for you? When you stand before him as the person he created, what specific characteristics, accomplishments, attitudes, or traits does God delight in about you? Spend some time considering God's abundant goodness within you and all the details he loves about you.

Purpose: Read Matthew 26 aloud. Ask the Spirit for help hearing God's voice as you read his Word. Note any portion of the passage that stands out to you as you read. Gather some bread and wine or juice. Take some time to sit and contemplate what God highlighted to you as you read the passage, and then thank Jesus for allowing his body to be broken and his blood spilled as you take the elements of communion.



CHAPTER 7
EXTRA SAUCE

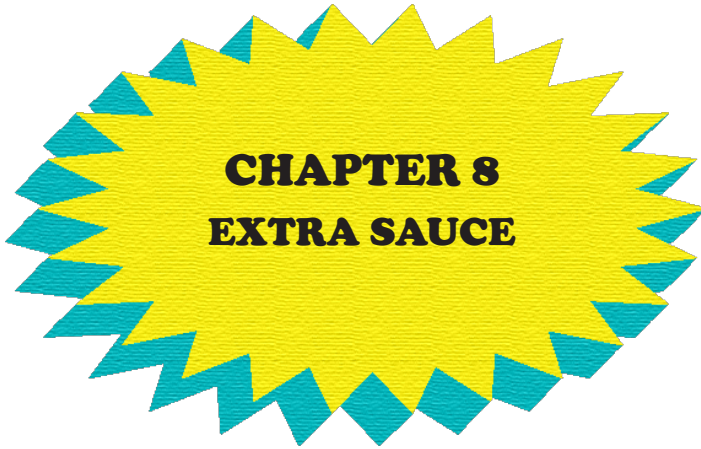
“Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

(Hebrews 10:23–25 csb)

Pray: Giving and Loving God, I praise you today for how you love the world sacrificially, joyfully, and endlessly. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of that great love. God, help me come to you as a person living out Matthew 5. God, show me how to arrive in your presence poor in spirit, mourning the sin that grieves you. Open my heart to hunger for you in greater measure today. Fill me with your mercy and purify my heart with your holiness. God, embolden me to be a peacemaker, even when that choice is costly. Deepen my revelation regarding your great love for people, and help me to join you by loving and giving as you do. I ask these things in the name of your Son, Jesus, amen.

Ponder: Open your journal or the notes app on your phone and make a list of your friends' and family's positive attributes. List their quirks that make you laugh and the characteristics about them that encourage you. Then make another list of your quirks and traits that others love about you. If this is challenging for you, ask for help from a trusted friend. Read through these lists daily for a week, asking God to reveal his delight in you and in the people you love. When frustrations with others or insecurities arise, return to those lists and read them aloud, allowing those words to be seeds of grace in your soul for others and yourself.

Purpose: As you read this chapter, did you think of a particular cause, need, or person? Are you aware of a situation in which people need love? How can you help to meet that need or ease that suffering today? Reach out and give yourself to others and to God in some way.



CHAPTER 8
EXTRA SAUCE

“Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

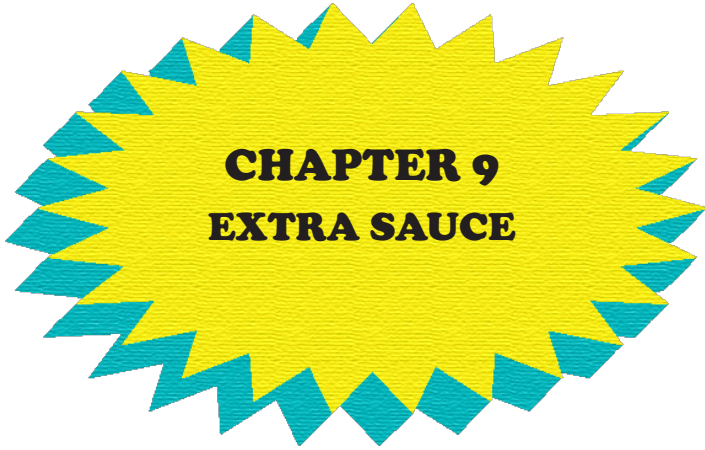
(John 13:1 csb)

Pray: God of new birth, we thank you for the life you have promised us. We hold up our painful circumstances, the losses, and the failures the enemy wants to use as evidence that you are far from us. Help us be brave and allow the pain to show us where to push so we can be a part of your birthing in the world. Forgive us for seeking comfort instead of joining you in loving your people in the world. Forgive us for creating golden calves instead of waiting patiently for you to lead us home. Embolden us to enter your generous dance, even when it's painful. In Jesus's name we ask these things, amen.

Ponder: Consider the parables below, and journal about times or experiences in which you've been able to stay alert, contribute and participate, or remember what is at stake. What perspectives or intentional practices helped you achieve that? Who helped keep you awake and aware? What lessons from those times can you apply to your current circumstances?

- **Stay Alert.** The parable of the ten virgins is Jesus's way of highlighting that God expects us to prepare whatever is necessary to stay awake and present as we wait.
- **Contribute and Participate.** The parable of the talents emphasizes that God expects us to invest and utilize our talents to create an increase of his Kingdom on earth.
- **Remember What Is at Stake.** The parable of the sheep and the goats explains that our treatment of others is how we have treated God. Our eternal connection to God is impacted by our ability to treat his people with the honor, respect, and love he is worthy of receiving.

Purpose: If it isn't triggering for you, enter the birthing space somehow. Find library books or documentaries about childbirth experiences. Or ask a friend who has had a baby to tell you the story of her birthing journey. As you listen and learn, actively seek God in the information you encounter, asking him to show you what he is currently birthing in and through you.



CHAPTER 9
EXTRA SAUCE

“The Lord God has given me
the tongue of those who are instructed
to know how to sustain the weary with a word.
He awakens me each morning;
he awakens my ear to listen like those being instructed.
The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I did not turn back.”

(Isaiah 50:4–5 csb)

Pray: Oh, God, awaken us so we can act as your hands and feet in the world. Send us to the broken, God. Send us to the needy. Soften our hearts and open our ears to listen and obey you so our lives can be places where you rest your head. God, we want to be faithful followers who don't turn back when you ask us to follow you in costly ways. Deepen our understanding of all you sacrificed for us so we can offer ourselves as you did, Lord. In Jesus's name, amen.

Ponder: Look back over your life and consider the seasons that involved additional sacrifice. Make a list of what you gave up to finish your schooling, accomplish your career goals, start a nonprofit, move to a new city or nation, get out of debt, serve your community, or prove yourself trustworthy as a friend, partner, or family member. Now make a list of the people directly or indirectly impacted by your sacrifices. Create space in your heart and mind for how your current sacrifices will affect you and others. Thank God for all the love he's birthed in those lists, and praise him for your future hope.

Purpose: Spend twenty minutes in silence today, intentionally sacrificing productive activity as an act of faith so your life can become a place where God rests his head. When your mind reaches for thoughts, when you feel yourself getting sleepy, or when you feel compelled to grab your phone and check your notifications, press those thoughts and impulses away by centering yourself on the word "rest." Just sit with God and enjoy the peace of his presence.

