



## **Reading Guide**

## A Note from the Author

I wrote *The Sacred Pulse* in response to a persistent feeling of weariness. I wasn't physically exhausted as much as I was soul-level tired. On the afternoon when the idea for *The Sacred Pulse* was born, I arrived home from a day in the office and realized no simple change could address the way I was feeling. I was no longer moving with the rhythm that leads to life. I wasn't caught up by the pulse of the heartbeat of God.

Over time, this realization led to the exploration of twelve different areas of life where we might find the opportunity to listen again for the sacred pulse. This list is not exhaustive, and there might be others you wish to add into this study and explore.

This reading guide offers questions for reflection, creative ways for engaging both *The Sacred Pulse* and Holy Scripture, and opportunities to consider what it might look like for you to move in step with the life-giving rhythm of God in each of the twelve areas outlined in this book.

The structure of each session will include:

*Invitation* - a time of reading Scripture and asking God to make us more aware of God's presence, along with an opening prayer.

*Imagination* - an activity to enter into the topic of the chapter.

*Listening for the Sacred Pulse* - the heart of the study. This is where readers are invited to consider the specific pulse and challenge from the chapter.

*Rehearsing the Rhythm* - an opportunity to consider how to put the sacred pulse into practice.

*Reverberation* - echoes and reflections from the chapter.

My hope is that this book offers you a respite from the busyness of life and an opportunity to listen again for the pulse that leads to wholeness and life.

Blessings as you listen for the sacred pulse,

*April Fiet*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Invitation

*Read Psalm 19:1-14*

Psalm 19:1 begins with a remarkable claim: *“The heavens are telling the glory of God.”* The psalmist goes on to list the parts of the created world that join in to tell of God’s glory: the heavens, the firmament, each day, and every night. But, there is a problem: *“There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard”* (Psalm 19:3).

The world around us is proclaiming the glory of God, even though creation lacks the language with which to do so. Creation has a song, and that song calls us to praise God along with the birds, the wind, the monsters of the deep, and the trees. But, its song is without language. It simply exists.

I find it interesting that the psalmist concludes Psalm 19 with these words: *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:14).

Perhaps the psalmist longs to sing of God’s glory as naturally as the heavens do. The creation praises God simply by functioning the way it was created. The psalmist asks God to make such praise be natural from his mouth, too. May the words he speaks, and the wonderings and rumblings of his heart tell of God’s glory just as much as the sight of a rainbow in the sky or the hatching of birds in a nest!

May we discover the song God has given to us, so that we can sing it without fear.

Let us pray:

*Creative and Creator God, we see your fingerprints all over this marvelous world you have created. In this moment, open our minds to discover anew the wonder of all you have made. Gently remind us that you created us with care and creativity too. As we embark on this study of The Sacred Pulse, help us to listen to your holy rhythm, your heartbeat, so that we might learn how to dance and thrive. Amen.*

## Imagination

In the Introduction, April shares a memory of climbing up on her grandparents' piano bench and marveling at their old-fashioned metronome. She talks about the way the metronome moved more quickly when the weight was closer to the base. When the weight was pushed to the top, the metronome would slow way down as the pendulum swayed from side to side.

Take a moment and imagine a time in your life when everything felt like it was moving at a breakneck pace. Remember what that felt like. Picture the activities and expectations, the to-do list or the movement around you. What was that like for you? Now think of a moment when time seemed to stand still or stretch out. What was that like? Imagine your surroundings and what you were doing.

1. What stands out to you as you remember the time when everything seemed to be moving quickly? What words would you use to describe the way you felt during that time?
2. What comes to mind for you as you remember the time when everything slowed down? What words would you use to describe the way you felt during that time?

## Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. For the introduction, we will explore the central concept of the book. As it says on page 2: "The world has a rhythm that pulses and moves. It ebbs and flows; it nudges us to keep moving. We were created to step in time with this rhythm."

April suggests that God created the world with a rhythm and that people flourish when they step in time with that rhythm.

1. Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. Imagine moving against the rhythm of the world. How do you think that might feel? What would it feel like to move in step with the rhythm instead?

Rehearsing the Rhythm

When a musician first begins to learn a piece of music, she has a lot of practicing to do. The more the musician rehearses the music, the more instinctive it becomes. Eventually, the beat and the movement of the piece become second nature.

1. What would it look like for you to rehearse the sacred pulse?
2. What competing rhythms might need to be turned down or turned off altogether?

On pages 8-9, April talks about the idea of “nature-deficit disorder” proposed by some psychologists as a contributing factor for a range of behavioral problems in children. These psychologists suggest that spending time in nature helps us recalibrate and reconnect with what it means to be human.

1. In what ways have you connected with the created world in your own life? Do your daily routines and your location make this easy, or is it more of a challenge?

Reverberation

Before we dive into the heart of *The Sacred Pulse*, take a moment to think about your hopes for this study. What are you hoping to learn or gain?

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# Part I - The Dance of Time

## CHAPTER 1 - Drumbeat of Time: The Holy Rhythm of the Day

### Invitation

*Read Psalm 90:1-12*

In Psalm 90, the psalmist grapples with the brevity of human life. He compares life to a dream (Psalm 90:5), grass that is renewed in the morning and withers by nightfall (Psalm 90:6), and like a sigh that fades away (Psalm 90:9). Yet, despite this, the psalmist finds comfort in God's eternal nature.

The first two verses of the psalm grab hold of God's limitlessness: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." The infinite nature of God and the frailty of human beings exist as opposites in this psalm, but rather than be troubled by this, the psalmist finds it as a tremendous source of comfort.

The holy rhythm of the day is made up of a series of chronological moments (*chronos* time), and within those ordinary moments, there are also extraordinary moments (*kairos* time). As we consider what it looks like to move in step with the holy rhythm of the day, we are invited to savor our moments and discover where the *kairos* moments might be waiting for our notice.

Let us pray:

*Infinite and everlasting God, we come to you as finite and vulnerable people. Help us to find comfort in knowing that you are always there for us, even when we are in over our heads or we are at the ends of our ropes. In this moment, open our hearts to receive the wonder of the day—the rhythm of day and night. May this rhythm be a movement that leads us toward wholeness and peace. Amen.*



## Imagination

The way we were raised has an impact on how we experience time. Our understanding of time may be cultural and/or geographical, it may be influenced by our family of origin, and it may be impacted by the people we spend the most time with.

Imagine for a moment the way you experienced time as you grew from childhood into adulthood. Were you always early, right on time, late? What took priority in your family of origin: punctuality or relationships?

1. As you remember the way you experienced time as you grew up, what has changed from then to now? Or, do you experience time in largely the same way you used to?
2. Think of a time when your understanding of time was vastly different from someone else's. Did it cause conflict or a problem? How did you resolve it?

## Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 1 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of the Day,” the rhythm of sunrise to sunset. In this chapter, April grapples with the difference between everyday, ordinary time, and sacred time. She invites the reader to pause and consider the sacredness of our everyday moments.

1. Greek has two words for time that mean different things. *Chronos* time “is about sequence and quantity” while *kairos* time “refers to the fullness of time, an opportune moment” (page 16). As you consider these two different kinds of time, think of a time when you experienced a *kairos* moment. What was that like for you?
2. Do you find it easier to live into *chronos* time or *kairos* time? Why do you think that is?



### *Blue Light and Daylight*

1. In chapter 1, readers are invited to consider their relationship to blue light and other artificial sources of light. The solution, however, isn't to get rid of all blue light producing technologies, but instead to give our bodies "time to rest, to sleep, to be restored" (page 21). April continues on page 21, "We need a division between our waking, working life and our sleeping, restorative one." What methods do you use to create a separation between your waking, working life and your sleeping, restorative one? Where would you like to grow in this area? What pitfalls do you face?

### *Time Is Not about Me; It Is about Us*

1. On page 22 it says, "Undergirding the understanding of time in the book of Genesis was the notion that everyone needed to stop moving, stop producing, stop being defined by the endless expectations and tasks of the daily grind." How do you react to this statement (emotionally, physically, spiritually)? How might this understanding bring a community of people together?

### *Presence or Distraction*

1. Think about a person who has shown you the gift of presence rather than distraction. How did they show this to you? What did it feel like to receive that gift?
2. What are the distractions in your life? What might it look like to set a boundary in this area?

### *Listening for the Sacred Pulse of Time*

1. On page 27, April writes: "Listening for the sacred pulse of time is a challenge in a world saturated with blue light. It is difficult because many of our jobs, our relationships, and our hobbies depend on screens and are built around expectations of constant productivity." Have you experienced this tension in your own life? What has that been like for you?



Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. It can be tempting to become legalistic as we seek to get back in step with the sacred pulse of time. Although the answer cannot be found in to-do lists or adding more expectations onto ourselves, it is sometimes helpful to take inventory of how we are spending our time. In chapter 1, April talks about time wasters and “Bermuda Triangles” for time. What are your biggest time wasters? Is there a particular time of day - or location - where these are more of a struggle for you?
2. In our fast-paced world where cell phones can make us feel like we are “on call” at all times, we may feel tempted to choose productivity over being present with others (or even with ourselves). Think of a time when you chose productivity over being present. What was that like for you?
3. What’s one thing you could do this week to be more present and open to the *kairos* moments around you?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of the day often runs counter to the rhythm of the daily grind. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 2 - Symphony of the Seasons: The Holy Rhythm of Gardening

### Invitation

*Read Genesis 2:4b-17*

The birth of humanity took place in a garden. The poetic creation story in Genesis 1 focuses on a more expansive view of creation, and then Genesis 2 zooms in for a more intimate look at the formation of people and their location within the vastness of what God had created. Every time I read this chapter of Scripture, I am struck by the idea that the man was created and placed into a garden. The garden is where humanity first experienced what it meant to be fully alive; the garden is where humanity first found its purpose “to till it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15).

Later on, in Genesis 3, part of the struggle humanity would face because of the entrance of sin into the world was that working the land would be burdensome. Humans would struggle to participate in the growing cycle of the world as thorns and weeds grew and pests competed for the same food sources. Yet, God does not take away the commission for people to take care of the world they live in. It would become harder work for them, but it would still be a necessary part of what it means to be human.

The holy rhythm of gardening is not about all of us becoming master gardeners or sprouting green thumbs overnight, but is instead an opportunity for us to consider what it means to be part of a community of people who were formed in relationship to the world around us. As we take time to reexamine our relationship to the world we live in, perhaps we will discover more of what it means to be fully alive.

Let us pray:

*God of abundance, you created us and put us into a world overflowing with your creative goodness. You made a variety of plants and trees, birds and animals, and you invited us to delight and participate in the movement of the world. Help us to see the world around us with fresh eyes and to consider anew what it means to be commissioned to till and to keep the earth. May this rhythm energize and enliven our lives. Amen.*

Imagination

Some of us may have grown up spending a lot of time outdoors in our younger years, while others of us may have had fewer opportunities to explore creation. And some of us may have had the opportunity to be outdoors, but we preferred spending our time indoors for whatever reason.

1. Think back on your growing up years. Remember what your relationship to the outdoors was like. What is something you got to do outdoors that you remember and enjoyed?
2. Think about the location of your home and/or your place of work. What outdoor opportunities exist in that location? Imagine the positioning of the windows in these places, the plants (if there are any), or any other points of connection between the inside world and what's outside.

Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 2 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Gardening,” the movement from one season to the next. In this chapter, April grapples with the disconnect many of us face as we work increasingly indoor jobs and spend less time outside.

1. On page 32, April shares some statistics and research findings—from many reporting their favorite vegetable as french fries to some believing that chocolate milk comes from brown cows. Did these research findings surprise you? Many of the children (and adults) who are unaware of where their food comes from live in locations without access to fresh fruits and vegetables or without much connection to the process that brings food from farm to table. Have you experienced any initiatives or programs designed to help increase literacy in this area?

### *Disconnected from the Land*

1. On page 35, April writes this: “The answer to this disconnect is not a return to pre-industrialization days. For the vast majority of us, it is impossible or impractical to raise all of the food we need for survival. Instead, we are called to examine our habits and choose ways to reconnect to the rhythm of the place where we live.” What are some small ways you could choose to reconnect to the rhythm of the place where you live? What are some things you are already doing?

### *Reconnecting to Patience*

1. April talks about the lengthy growing season of asparagus and the importance of waiting until the proper time to begin the harvest. Jesus told a parable about a man who planted a fig tree, but the fig tree did not produce any figs. The gardener advised the man to fertilize the tree and wait another year rather than giving up and cutting it down (Luke 13:8-9). How might this teach us about patience? How have you experienced the importance of fertilizing and waiting in your own life (in actuality or metaphorically)?

### *Reconnecting to Joy and Hope*

1. When April and her family moved to Nebraska, April experienced grief as she left the hard work of her garden behind. In a strange twist, she discovered hope that new life was possible from a gardening catalog that advertised garlic for planting. As you think about gardening and the changing of seasons, think about something that brought you hope in the midst of a time of change.
2. The garlic April planted in the fall became a source of joy in the spring. She wrote about the delight of discovering that garlic grows during the winter, and she marveled as she learned about the life cycle of garlic plants. Where are you finding joy right now? What might it look like to make space for more joy and delight in your life?

Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. All through the Bible are connections creation. Isaiah speaks of mounting “up on wings like eagles” (Isaiah 40:31). Jesus tells stories that connect his listeners to the seasons and to the created world (like the lesson to “consider the ravens” and “consider the lilies” in Luke 12:24,27). Do you have a daily routine that lends itself to noticing what God is teaching us through creation and the movement of the seasons? If so, what is that like for you? If not, how might you modify your day-to-day habits to make more space for considering creation?
2. Chapter 2 talks about gardening as a way to reconnect to the rhythm of the seasons, but not everyone enjoys gardening or has a place for a garden where they live. What are some other ways to intentionally connect to the rhythm of the seasons and to the rhythm of the way plants grow?
3. On page 45, it says this: “We are meant to be more than consumers. When we reconnect to the rhythm of the seasons and become participants in the raising of our food, we will experience unexpected gifts.” Have you found this to be true in your own life? What would it look for you to become more of a participant than a consumer?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of gardening reminds us that our food goes through a process before it arrives in our grocery stores. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 3 - Cadence of the Kitchen: The Holy Rhythm of Mealtimes

### Invitation

*Read Luke 24:28-35*

After the resurrection, the disciples had trouble recognizing Jesus when he appeared to them. Outside of the empty tomb, Mary confused him for the gardener and only recognized Jesus when he called her by name. On the road to Emmaus, two disciples walked with Jesus, and they did not recognize him even as he explained to them by the Scriptures what had taken place.

It was not until he broke bread with them that their eyes were opened and they realized it was Jesus. When they understood it had been Jesus all along, they wondered to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). When he spoke to them, their hearts knew even if they would not allow themselves to believe. But, when he broke bread with them, everything changed.

When we take time to eat with others, we see them in a whole new way. We begin to know them in a way we didn’t before. I think this is one reason among many that Jesus instructed his disciples to keep observing the Lord’s Supper together. When we gather in community and share food and drink with each other, we remember Jesus and our relationships with one another are transformed.

Let us pray:

*All-embracing God, you chose to leave the first disciples (and us) with a meal as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet we will enjoy in the presence of Jesus. You also gave us the gift of mealtimes as a way to connect with ourselves, our family, and our friends. May we receive this gift from you with open hands. Amen.*



Imagination

Mealtime is something that happens every day, usually two or three times a day. On page 50 it says, “Mealtime is the cadence of our days, and we step in time with its beat.”

1. Take a moment to remember your earliest memories that took place at mealtime. Did your family of origin eat around a table? Were meals more of a grab-and-go experience? Now think about how you do meals now. Is it the same now, or has it changed?
2. What were holiday meals like for you growing up? What is your favorite meal-time memory?

Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 3 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Mealtime,” the cadence that orders our daily life. In this chapter, April invites the reader to reflect on our habits around mealtime and how they might have an impact on our lives.

1. On page 51 it says this: “Instead, the way we pull up our seats and gather to eat provides us with an opportunity to live into the two great commandments that Jesus gave to his disciples—and to us—so many years ago: to love God and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves” (Matthew 22:34-40). Have you experienced mealtime as a place for giving and receiving love?

*We Belong at the Table*

1. “We often acknowledge that eating with others is an intimate thing, but we do not always recognize the intimacy of eating by ourselves” (page 52). Do you agree that eating by ourselves is a vulnerable thing? If so, why? If not, why not?

### *Jesus at the Table*

1. Why do you think Jesus faced so much criticism for who he chose to eat with?
2. From page 55: “Meals to Jesus were not about status; they were about gathering to share and receive the love of God. Who most needs that love? Perhaps it wasn’t those who were working the hardest to be close to God but those who hadn’t even been allowed to try.” As you consider your own context, who might be considered someone who “hadn’t even been allowed to try” to be close to God? What would it look like to make space for these people at your table?
3. Even with the fast-pace of life in today’s world, people still prioritize eating their meals at home. Yet, rates of loneliness have increased. Why do you think this is?

### *Practicing Love and Belonging at the Table*

1. Take a moment to make an inventory of what distractions might make it harder for you to be fully present at mealtime. What is one thing you can try as you seek to choose presence over distraction?

#### Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. Former US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy identified loneliness as a pressing health crisis that often lurks behind more noticeable struggles. Think about your neighborhood and your daily routine. Does your daily movement make it easy to form community with others, or more difficult? What might help make it easier?
2. Using the inventory of distractions you made up above, what are one or two small things you can try as you look to step in time with mealtime’s cadence of love?
3. Make a plan to share a meal with someone else. If you are unable to arrange for an in-person meal with someone, consider inviting someone to share their mealtime with you over Zoom, Skype, or some other platform.



Reverberation

The holy rhythm of mealtime reminds us of the importance of receiving and sharing the love of God. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## Part II - The Dance of Intentionality

### CHAPTER 4 - Tempo of Transactions: The Holy Rhythm of Shopping

#### Invitation

*Read Luke 18:1-8*

Jesus tells a parable about a persistent widow who petitions a judge everyday for justice. We are told that the judge “neither feared God nor had respect for people” (Luke 18:2), yet this woman approached him daily and did not give up. In a day and time when women did not have much power, and widows were largely dependent upon others, the persistent widow pressed on until she wore the judge down. He relented, not because he had a change of heart, but because he was tired of her making her request.

Justice is something we have to pursue, it doesn’t just happen. And the rhythms and routines of our society are not always inclined toward justice. In chapter 4, as we think about the rhythm of shopping and our transactions, we are invited to consider what it would look like for us to become persistent people who do not give up. We are invited to choose a rhythm of intentionality rather than convenience.

When it comes to the things we purchase, we have so many quick and inexpensive options at our fingertips. Sometimes widespread availability is a help to us. Sometimes our circumstances don’t allow us to do anything else. The answer is not always as easy as “shop local, not online.” Instead, as we consider the story of the persistent widow, we are invited to ask what it would look like for us to be pursuers of justice in an era of convenience.

Let us pray:

*God of justice and compassion, it is easy for us to be impatient people in a fast-paced world. In this moment and as we read this book, offer us the gifts of intentionality and peace. Grant us space to breathe and to pause. Help us to become pursuers of justice and people who build up a community of sharing and partnership. Amen.*

Imagination

Imagine that your favorite author has a new book coming out. The big day has finally arrived and the book has been released. Do you: 1) Order the book online (or, maybe you even pre-ordered it), 2) Buy the book from a local bookstore, or 3) Wait for the book to be available as an e-book from the library?

1. Why did you choose this shopping method? (Speed of delivery? Price per book? Delivers right to your door? You know the people at the bookstore? You are in the habit of getting books from the library?)
2. What would happen if this shopping method went away? What would you do instead?

Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 4 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Shopping,” the rhythm of the way we buy things. In this chapter, April wonders how much of our shopping habits are centered on convenience, and how we might move from convenience to intentionality.

1. April shares the story of the coffee shop barista who remembered her name the second time she came into the coffee shop. That experience helped April to feel known and like she belonged somewhere after relocating to a new state. Do you have any experiences like this one?
2. “Convenience” is the way things come together for us - time savings, faster shipment, wider variety. What role does convenience play in your shopping habits? Has this changed based on your life stage, geographical location, etc?

*Convenience Isn't Everything*

1. “The choice to prioritize convenience is a choice to deprioritize the human side of shopping. I put convenience in my online shopping cart, but I add unintended items to my basket too” (page 72). Is this always true? How might we push against the impulse for convenience?

### *The Cost of Convenience*

1. On page 74 it says, “Something like 87 percent of people are influenced by delivery speed when considering an online purchase.” Online retailers know this and work hard to be able to promise the quickest shipping options possible. Why do you think fast shipping is important to so many people? Why is it important to you?
2. When April wanted to sew a skirt, she realized the cost of supplies was higher than what a finished skirt would sell for at a large retail store. This realization highlighted the disparity between what things are worth and what things cost. Have you encountered this in your own life? How might we begin to shift the way we think about our purchases (away from what costs me the least toward what is just)?

### *A Posture of Persistence*

1. “When the disciples asked Jesus how they ought to pray, he taught them the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer was intended not only to teach us how to pray but also to change the way we live” (page 79). How might the Lord’s Prayer challenge the way we live and encourage change?

### Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of convenience? Which of these are most compelling to you?
2. Convenience urges us to become impulsive. Intentionality encourages us to wait and be deliberate in what we do. What are some practical ways to foster intentionality in our daily lives?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of shopping often runs counter to the rhythm of convenience. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 5 - Composition of Making: The Holy Rhythm of Handcrafting

### Invitation

*Read Ephesians 2:1-10*

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are what he has made us.” But, what is it that God has made us? The verse continues: “...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” The phrase “what he has made us” is a beautiful word in the Greek—*poiema*. This word is translated in other English translations as “handiwork” or “masterpiece.” We are not accidental creations of God. We were made with intentionality and purpose, and as it says in Genesis 1, God saw that we were good.

We are made in God’s image, and God is a creative God. God made the beauty of the world, the variety of plants and animals that we know about (and even things we haven’t discovered yet), and the uniqueness of each and every person. When we are creative, we are embodying what it means to be God’s image bearers. We are proclaiming what God made us to be when we make beautiful things.

Whether you are a person who enjoys crafts and art or you are someone who struggles to draw a stick figure, God created you as a masterpiece. When we take time to make things with our hands - whether it is a weekly menu for our household, a crocheted blanket, or a woodworking creation, we are connecting with the sacred pulse of handcrafting, a rhythm of creativity and goodness.

Let us pray:

*Creator and creative God, you created us with purpose and intentionality. In your infinite imagination, you made each of us unique and gave us gifts and talents. As we make space in our lives to consider creativity and handcrafting, we pray that you would inspire us to live as your people, whether we are engaged in making handiwork of our own, or we are admiring the work that others have done. Amen.*



Imagination

Imagine that you have been given a free afternoon, the only requirement is that you do something creative. You have access to any supply you might need, and you have an entire afternoon free from distractions to do whatever creative endeavor you might choose.

1. What creative activity would you choose? What would you make/do?
2. Does the prospect of an entire afternoon for something creative sound refreshing, stressful, unreal, etc.?

Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 5 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Handcrafting,” the rhythm of creativity. In this chapter, we are invited to consider the way our creativity connects us to the creativity and imagination of God.

1. April writes about the way time seemed to stretch out, or stand still, when she was in her Granny’s house. There was something about the rocking of her chair and the movement of the crochet hook that made time feel more spacious. Have you ever had an experience like that? What activities make time feel more spacious for you?
2. When you think about “handcrafting,” what do you think about? Do you have any early memories surrounding handcrafting?

*Wholeness in a Fraying World*

1. “What I find is that just as the wind from God hovered over the formless voice before the dawn of the new creation, so too does the Spirit hover over the chaos and struggle in my life, just waiting to make all things new” (page 85). Creativity and handcrafting are opportunities to make something new, and to remember that God is making all things new. When you are feeling stressed, or when things feel particularly scattered in the world, what helps you feel like you are putting something back together? Where do you find peace in the chaos?
2. Think about someone who models wholeness to you, someone who makes time feel like it stretches out or holds more possibility? When you are with this person, what kinds of activities do you participate in? In what ways do they model wholeness to you?

### *Speaking through Creativity*

1. On page 89 it says, “When we are creative, we allow our innermost selves to speak. In our creativity, we give voice to whispers buried deep within ourselves; we learn more about who we are.” Has this been true for you? Do you have a particular creative practice that allows your innermost self to speak? What does that look like for you?
2. Creativity doesn’t just happen. Very occasionally inspiration may strike on a whim, but more often it is the fruit of discipline and “showing up.” Is creativity a routine in your week? If so, what does that look like? If not, what might it look like for you? Or, where might you find creativity in what you’re already doing?

### *Rough Drafts and Masterpieces*

1. Perfectionism can have a way of interrupting our creative pursuits. Author Anne Lamott even wrote that “Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people” (page 94). Does perfectionism keep you from pursuing your creativity?
2. On page 95, April writes, “Most days, I feel less like a masterpiece and more like a rough first draft.” But God sees us as masterpieces, as purposeful and beautiful creations. How does it make you feel to know you are God’s masterpiece?

### Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. “Until we find the courage to receive grace and let our imperfections hang out, we will either create nothing at all or we will create thin shells of what could be—all the while believing them to be fuller than they are” (page 97). What would you want to make or create if you *knew* the end result would be beautiful? What keeps you from trying to create it?
2. April shares an experience about a college professor who urged her to revise her work. She struggled to receive that advice and instead insisted her work was fine as it was. How do you react to criticism and critique?
3. Where might you make space for creativity this week?



Reverberation

The holy rhythm of handcrafting can sometimes feel wasteful or unproductive, but it provides an opportunity to embody some of what it means to be made in God's image. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 6 - Breath Mark of Snow Days: The Holy Rhythm of Free Time

### Invitation

*Read Ephesians 5:8-16*

“Idle hands are the devil’s playground.”

“Laziness leads many people astray.”

“Do or do not. There is no try.”

I am the kind of person who has a hard time sitting still. If I’m sitting down, I’m crocheting, or reading, or writing. Rarely do I let myself be completely still. In Ephesians 5:15-16, it says, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.” Because of this, I thought the best way to make the most of my time was to *do* something with it.

When I learned that the word translated “making the most” is the word for “redeeming,” this gave me some much needed perspective. What if it redeeming the time means using it the way God intends for us? What if sometimes that looks like rest, stillness, and simple moments of enjoyment?

Snow days and other unexpected moments of free time aren’t days wasted of schedules ruined. They are an opportunity for us to consider how we can redeem this moment, this time, this day for joy, and rest, and wonder. What would it look like for you to embrace the unexpected moments in your life?

Let us pray:

*God of all we see and cannot see, we offer our time to you. When we are frustrated with ourselves for not getting enough done during the day, give us your grace. When we are impatient because we have to wait (in traffic, at the grocery store, in a line), help us to receive these unexpected moments of stillness. In our hurried moments and in our opportunities for downtime, we ask that you would meet us where we are and transform our lives. Amen.*

Imagination

Imagine you received a phone call first thing in the morning that cleared your calendar for the rest of the day.

1. How would you react to this phone call? Would you feel: disoriented, excited, relieved, etc.?
2. What kinds of things might you do if you had an unexpected free day?

Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 6 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Free Time,” the rhythm of unexpected space in your day. In this chapter, we are invited to consider our response to unexpected calendar erasers and discover how free time can be a gift from God.

1. In this chapter, April explores the difficulty of embracing snow days. What kinds of interruptions in your daily life are most difficult for you to deal with?
2. Think of a time when something was unexpectedly cleared from your calendar. What beautiful moments did this make possible?

*Freedom of Letting Go*

1. One of the reasons April struggled to accept the gift of unexpected free time was her concern about expectations: the expectations she had for herself, and the expectations she thought others had for her. Do you struggle with expectations - either your own, or what you think others expect of you?
2. Take a moment to name these expectations—real or perceived. Where do these expectations come from?

### *The Peace of Perspective*

1. Occasional moments of free time might be fun, but they can quickly lose their luster. COVID-19 felt like a months (years?) long snow day (only a terrible one), and the constant need to pivot or allow our time to be up in the air has been exhausting. What has this struggle been like for you? How are you making space to attend to the way this long season has impacted you?
2. “Unexpected time allowed us to make some of our favorite memories” (Page 109). What memories do you have of snow days or other times when you experienced unexpected gifts of free time?

### *The Joy of Space*

1. “What opportunities for beautiful moments exist right here and now, things we would have missed out on if life kept moving the way we had expected?” (page 110)
2. Marie Kondo’s struggle with clutter changed when she stopped focusing on what to get rid of and began thinking about what to keep. When we receive the unexpected gift of free time, it is tempting to focus on what we are losing out on. Imagine something on your calendar got canceled. What is something you would be able to keep if that happened?

### Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. Imagine your ideal snow day. Work is canceled. School is canceled. You have nowhere to be except for home. How would you spend your time?
2. “We might avoid pausing and breathing because we are concerned it will cost us something?” (page 113) What concerns or fears do you have with regards to taking a break or taking time away?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of free time interrupts our expectations and forces us to let go of a sense of control over our lives. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## Part III - The Dance of Belonging

### CHAPTER 7 - Movement of Community: The Holy Rhythm of Interdependence

#### Invitation

*Read Genesis 2:18-23*

Genesis 2:18 is the first time in the creation story that something was “not good.” “It is not good that man should be alone.” While this passage is often taken to show the importance of romantic relationships, this verse in the creation account more broadly describes our human need for relationships in general. Human beings were created to be in community with each other.

Community is not always easy. We may face conflicts and disagreements with one another, and we may wonder if community is worth the effort at times. While we cannot have close relationships with every person, and while boundaries are a necessity, we still need community. And being in community will take work.

As we study community in the Scriptures, and as we read about community in *The Sacred Pulse*, we are encouraged to move beyond our echo chambers and isolationism into relationships of give and take with one another.

Let us pray:

*Triune God, in your very self you show us the importance of community. You created us in your image, and you saw that we need each to be part of something greater than ourselves. Help us learn not only the value of giving in love to others but also the freedom of lowering our defenses to receive. Fashion us into a community that brings glory to you. Amen.*

#### Imagination

Think back on a time when you experienced meaningful community.

1. What did this experience feel like?
2. What ingredients are necessary for community?

## □ Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 7 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Interdependence,” the rhythm of community and belonging. In this chapter, we are invited to explore what it means to be created for community.

1. “Despite our need for community, many of us struggle to find a place where we belong” (page 118). Do you think this is true? Is community something that comes easily for you, or has it been more of a struggle?

### *Isolation and Echo Chambers*

1. April shared the story of visiting a church when she was in high school. A person after the service told April’s family that she loved the church because everyone always agreed on everything. Have you had an experience where you did not feel welcome to disagree? What was it like for you being on the outside of a group where everyone else agreed?
2. “One of the barriers we face when it comes to moving with the sacred pulse of community is the temptation to surround ourselves with people exactly like ourselves” (page 120). How do you work against this barrier in your own life?

### *Giving and Receiving*

1. “It may be ‘more blessed to give than to receive,’ but often it is more difficult to receive (Acts 20:35).” Do you find this true in your own life? Can you think of a time when you had to open yourself up to receiving from others? What was that like for you?
2. Have you experienced the “helper’s high” Allan Luks noted in his research? This feeling can motivate us to keep giving, and can be a positive in that way. It’s not wrong to feel good about helping, as long as we can also learn to receive from others, too.

*Created for Interdependence*

1. “...many of us internalize the idea that asking for help is a sign of weakness” (page 127). Why do you think so many people feel this way?
2. April shared a story about the way newcomers to neighborhoods in some parts of Japan will bring gifts and introduce themselves to their neighbors. These newcomers are moving into an already-established community, and bringing gifts to the neighbors is a sign of wanting to become part of that community. Have you seen community modeled in other cultures, countries, or neighborhoods? What might these examples have to teach us?

Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. “...we must remember that having *more* points of connection does not always mean a greater sense of community” (page 131). What are some ways you foster community in your own life? Have you felt “spread too thin” by having multiple places to connect online and in person?
2. What are the unique barriers to community in the places where you live/work/go to school?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of community can be a struggle in a busy and individualistic society. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 8 - Harmony of Friendship: The Holy Rhythm of Relationships

### Invitation

*Read Ruth 1:6-14*

The book of Ruth begins with grief, suffering, and desperation. Naomi and her daughters-in-law had fled a famine, lost their husbands, and came to a crossroads where a decision needed to be made. Naomi urges her daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah to go back to their families of origin, where they might remarry and be taken care of. Orpah refuses at first, and then complies and returns home. Ruth, on the other hand, is undeterred. She will return to Bethlehem with Naomi.

Ruth and Naomi provide a picture of friendship, loyalty, and sacrifice. They were not obligated to each other, but they chose each other. They helped each other, and they took risks for each other. Their friendship transcended geography, family ties, and social expectations.

In our fast-paced and individualistic society, it can be difficult to find and maintain friendships. We may experience seasons (or years) of loneliness, and our loneliness may be exacerbated by geography or life circumstances. In the book of Ruth and in this chapter of *The Sacred Pulse*, we are invited to consider again the importance of friendship in an otherwise lonely world.

Let us pray:

*Compassionate God, in friendship you show us the beauty of relationship and companionship. Sometimes we are lonely, or we feel as though we aren't seen or known by anyone but you. Encourage us, O God, and help us to befriend ourselves as we seek to befriend others. Amen.*

### Imagination

Think about a friendship in your life that was/is a blessing to you. Imagine the kinds of things you might do as you spend time with that particular friend.

1. What kinds of things did you/do you do with that friend?
2. How do/did you feel after spending time with them?

## Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 8 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Relationships,” the rhythm of friendship. In this chapter, we are invited to befriend ourselves even as we hope to befriend others.

1. In the beginning of the chapter, April refers to the friendship between Ruth and Naomi. Can you think of any other biblical examples of friendship?
2. What are the defining characteristics of these biblical friendships?

### *Alone, Not Lonely*

1. “On a scale of one to ten (with one being not at all comfortable, and ten being very comfortable), how comfortable are you spending time alone?” (page 220)
2. Is solitude part of your weekly routine? Or is it something out of the ordinary?

### *Befriending Ourselves*

1. “What is an area of your life where you struggle to show yourself compassion? How might you be a better friend to yourself in this area?” (page 220)
2. What are some things you like about yourself? Take a moment to celebrate these things.

### *The Harmony of Friendship*

1. “And this is the mystery of the cross: Jesus offered his whole self so that human beings might find friendship with God” (page 146). Have you ever thought about the cross as an act of friendship? Does this change the way you think about it?

Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. In talking about “oneliness,” April writes, “By withdrawing from the busyness, the expectations of others, and the noise of daily life, Jesus was making space for prayer and for relationship with God” (page 137). What are some ways you find space for prayer and for relationship with God? What is something you’d like to try as a way of making space for these things?
2. On pages 139-140, April shares an experience she had sitting in front of an icon during a time of silent retreat. She writes, “After pushing through the discomfort, I was confronted by my insecurities. In my vulnerability, I was wrapped up in the love of God.” There is something healing about allowing our insecurities and wounded places to rise to the surface so that we can allow God to embrace us. Think of a time when you felt the embrace of God? What was that like?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of friendship is not always easy to find, but it is one that nourishes us in a relationship of give and take. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 9 - Requiem of Grief: The Holy Rhythm of Loss

### Invitation

*Read Genesis 23:1-20*

In Genesis 23, we find the story of the death of Sarah, of Abraham's grief, and of the painful reminder that he is a stranger in the land where he dwells. Abraham has no place to bury his wife, and even as he grieves and weeps, he is concerned about how he will honor her with a proper burial place.

Verse two speaks of his grief in this way: "And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." Sarah was Abraham's companion, the mother of Isaac, and the one to whom God had promised a child in her old age. In her death, Abraham is confronted with the loneliness of losing his wife as well as the loneliness of having no place of his own.

God provides a tomb for Sarah from the hand of the Hittite people who lived in the land. In this strange provision, Abraham is given what he needs as he grieves, and he is assured that he isn't walking this road alone. Grief can be a lonely journey. We may even feel like strangers in our own lives as we try to make sense of what our lives mean in light of our loss. God draws near to us in our brokenheartedness (Psalm 34:18), and does not abandon us as we learn to carry our griefs with us through our lives.

Let us pray:

*God, draw near to us in our griefs and bind up our broken hearts. Even as we feel the loneliness in our losses, we ask you to embrace us and remind us that we are not alone on this road. Help us find the courage to share our losses with each other and to bear one another's burdens. Amen.*



Imagination

Psalm 56:8 says, “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?” God holds our griefs, our losses, and our tears. Take a moment to imagine entrusting these burdens to God.

1. If you so desire, take a piece of paper and journal about the griefs you are offering to God. Or, write a prayer of lament, or draw an image that connects with you as you offer these pains to God.

Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 9 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Loss,” the rhythm of grief. In this chapter, we confront the stigma surrounding grief and are invited to give grace to ourselves and to others because no two grief journeys are alike.

1. Right before the visitation for April’s mother-in-law, the pastor told the family this: “People are uncomfortable with grief. They mean well and they want to comfort you, but they don’t know how. People might say terrible things. Let’s make a game of it and see who has the worst thing said to them tonight.” This act helped the family bond with laughter in the midst of the hurt. As you think about “platitudes” or hurtful things said with good intentions, what is the worst or most outlandish things you’ve had said to you?
2. Often, people are quick to try and comfort those who are grieving with their words. What are some unspoken ways people have shown comfort and love for you when you were grieving?

*Confronting Our Vulnerability*

1. “What words do you associate with failure?” (page 220)
2. What is your relationship with failure? Did you grow up afraid to fail, encouraged to try new things even if you failed, or somewhere in between?

### *Accepting Our Whole Selves*

1. Drawing off of the imagery of the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, April writes, “Sometimes we are made known to ourselves in the breaking open of the wounds we conceal” (page 155). Do you think this is true? How have you seen this in your own life?

### *Releasing the Burden*

1. When writing about grief, April notes, “We may or may not have had healthy examples to follow in those around us” (page 162). Think about the examples of grief you had around you as you grew up. What did these examples teach you about how/how not to grieve?

### *Experience God with Us*

1. In the story of the raising of Lazarus, Martha confronts Jesus with her pain and her grief, even though Martha also believed in the power of resurrection. Her beliefs did not spare her the pain of grief. April writes, “Like Martha, we can bring our whole selves—our pains and our trust—before God. God can handle it” (page 163). How does this make you feel?

### Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. “Do you have a favorite psalm? If you do, what about this psalm makes it your favorite? Consider writing your own psalm to express both your joys and your griefs” (page 220).
2. On page 157, April talks about “giving grief legs,” which allows our grief to accompany us through life. This allows us to acknowledge our griefs and losses without hiding them. Have you experienced “grief with legs” in your own life? What has that looked like?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of grief requires vulnerability as well as grace for ourselves and others. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## Part IV - The Dance of Renewal

### CHAPTER 10 - Crescendo of Celebration: The Holy Rhythm of Appreciation

#### Invitation

*Read Psalm 148:1-14*

In Psalm 148, the call to give praise to God extends from the highest heavens to the depths where the sea monsters dwell. Large and small, things that creep on the ground or soar in the sky, all are called to sing God’s praise.

God created us to give praise and to celebrate. In the book of Genesis, God pauses to celebrate each step of creation, and God pronounces a blessing of “very-goodness” over all of it—including us. As we discover what it looks like to move with the holy rhythm of appreciation, we begin with praising God for all that God has made and done in the world and in our lives.

Imagine what it would sound like for the whole world to reverberate with praise and thanksgiving. Quiet your heart and listen for the sound. And then, consider how you might add your praise to the chorus—both with your words, and with the using of your gifts and talents.

Let us pray:

*Creator God, we offer you our praise. Receive the unique song you’ve given to each of us, and help us to find our voices. Cultivate in us a rhythm of appreciation and celebration so that we might receive the delight that is all around us, and that you created for our enjoyment. Amen.*

#### Imagination

Imagine that the last year of your life was a painting. Take a moment to visualize the colors, the textures, and what might be included in the painting.

1. What does your painting look like?
2. What might you celebrate from this year-of-your-life painting?



## □ Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 9 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Appreciation,” the rhythm of celebration. In this chapter, we are encouraged to take time to celebrate everyday things.

1. What keeps you from celebrating the work you’ve done?

### *Neither Perfect, Nor Shameful*

1. “Are you a perfectionist? Whether you are a perfectionist or not, how does your view of yourself impact your view of God?” (page 221)
2. “At our core, we want to be seen and loved. But the entrance of sin into the world did more than make us have to struggle harder for our food; it also made us afraid to be seen for who we are” (page 172). What are some ways we make it harder for people to see who we are? What kinds of things do we hide behind?

### *Relearning Celebration*

1. “The first step in relearning how to celebrate is exchanging fear for grace” (page 173). What are some ways fear gets in the way of celebrating our accomplishments? How might we exchange fear for grace?
2. Another reason we might struggle to celebrate the things we accomplish is that much of our work is endless. We always have emails to check. Many of our jobs or routines are ongoing with no defined beginning or end. Do you have any hobbies or interests that have a definable beginning and end point? How might you celebrate those accomplishments?

### *Everyday Appreciation*

1. When April started raising her own chickens, she realized how miraculous eggs are. You can buy twelve of these miraculous things in a carton at the store! What are some everyday things that you appreciate or find fascinating?
2. “Appreciation is a muscle we can exercise and strengthen.” (page 179) What are some ways you have found to strengthen your appreciation muscle?

Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. In this chapter, April talks about picking up a hobby or about reconnecting to delight in our everyday lives. Do you have a hobby that helps you celebrate, or is there a hobby you would like to pick up?
2. What are some ways to reconnect to the delight that is already present in your daily life?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of celebration may require us to confront our fears and embrace the grace of God and others. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 11 - Repetition of Rest: The Holy Rhythm of Restoration

### Invitation

*Read Mark 2:23-28*

At the end of Mark 2, Jesus and his disciples are spied doing something on the Sabbath that should not be done. They are plucking heads of grain. When this is noticed by others, they call out this infraction on Sabbath-keeping, but Jesus responds in a surprising way. He says, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

Sabbath was intended as a gift, as an opportunity for refreshment and rejuvenation, but we might struggle to receive rest because we don’t think we’ve earned it or deserve it. Or, we might create all kinds of rules about how we can observe rest by making a list of dos and don'ts. Jesus reminds the people that Sabbath—rest—was intended to be for our benefit. It was not meant to become a prison.

In this chapter of *The Sacred Pulse*, we have the opportunity to reflect on our relationship to rest. Do we avoid it? Do we think we have to earn it? Or, do we feel uncertain how to go about it unless we have a system of rules for ourselves? Perhaps we can discover rest all over again by beginning from the inside out. Perhaps rest can be found as we receive God’s declaration of very-goodness. Maybe then rest will become a gift for us, one that we are eager to embrace.

Let us pray:

*Gracious God, you demonstrated rest for us after the work of creation, and you offered it to us as a gift. In the chaos and busyness of the world, rest is not always easy to find, but we know we need it. When we are weary, help us to make space to receive the gift of rest. Amen.*

### Imagination

1. What would a day of rest look like for you?
2. How often do you pause to rest during your week?

## □ Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 11 focuses on the “Holy Rhythm of Restoration,” the importance of cultivating a habit of rest. This chapter encourages the reader to move beyond a legalistic understanding of rest and into a rhythm of resting in God and in who God made us to be.

1. April shares the story of having a panic attack in her office. This experience was a crash course in learning how to take care of herself and find a rhythm of rest and restoration in her life. Have you experienced a crash course in needing to rest? What was that like for you?

### *Resting in Enough*

1. “The ways we can overwork and overfunction are as varied as we are, but underneath it all remains the tiny voice asking us if we are good enough just the way we are” (page 188). April suggests that rest moves from the inside out. Do you find this to be true for yourself?
2. “How would it feel if someone said to you, ‘You are enough just as you are?’” (page 221)

### *Resisting Legalism*

1. One temptation we might face as we seek out rest is the temptation to become legalistic about what counts as “work.” What would it look like to seek out balance between creating a rhythm for rest and allowing for circumstances in which rest is difficult or impossible?
2. “It turns out that the answer to chronic weariness isn’t a rigid day off. The answer isn’t legalistic rest, which becomes no rest at all. The answer is contentment. Without contentment, there can be no rest” (page 193). What does contentment look like to you? Where in your life are you finding contentment?

*Connecting to Contentment*

1. Philippians 4:11b says, "...for I have learned to be content with whatever I have." The word "content" is less about peace and more about receiving our "very-goodness" from God. Is contentment something that comes easily for you, or is it more of a struggle?
2. "To receive the rest of God is to reverse the curse of shame" (page 195). How do you react when you read this?

Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. What would it look like for you to create a rhythm of rest in your life? What things might have to change?
2. What are some ways you already incorporate rest into your life? How might you expand these or make more space for these opportunities?

Reverberation

The holy rhythm of rest can be difficult to enter into. It is something we learn from the inside out. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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## CHAPTER 12 - Counterpoint of Holidays: The Holy Rhythm of the Church Year

### Invitation

*Read Romans 14:5-6*

In the book of Romans, the church struggled with how to be present in the world while also remaining true to what was important to them. Paul wrote to the people about food sacrificed to idols and about the observance of holy days and festivals. He urged people to discern how much they could participate in each of these things while still holding to their values, and that answer might be different for each person.

The church year offers the opportunity to enter into a rhythm of seasons shaped by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Some churches follow the rhythm of the church year, while others do not follow it. Neither is bad or good, but both offer unique opportunities. For Christians that move with the flow of the church year, the holy days and seasons sometimes work well with the rhythms outside of the church. At other times, the church calendar is at odds with the calendar we operate with in our work lives.

This chapter on the church year is not meant to argue that every person of faith should observe the church calendar. Instead, chapter 12 of *The Sacred Pulse* invites us to consider the holidays and holy days we do celebrate and how those special days provide unique opportunities for growing in faith.

Let us pray:

*Caring God, you meet us on our ordinary days and on the days we set aside for special observances and celebrations. As we consider the church year and the holy days in the Christian faith, give us the courage to explore the way we interact with the days you have given us. May both our workaday lives and our liturgical lives be opportunities to encounter your love for us. Amen.*

Imagination

Imagine you were invited to create a holiday. Your holiday could celebrate anything that is important to you, as long as that celebration wasn't harmful to someone else in some way.

1. What holiday would you create? What would your holiday celebrate?
2. What kinds of rhythms or customs would be part of your holiday celebration?

Listening for the Sacred Pulse

In this section of the reading guide, readers will be invited to consider the core pulse of the chapter. Chapter 12 focuses on the "Holy Rhythm of the Church Year," the way holy days and rituals intersect the rhythms of everyday life.

1. April shares a story about how much she looks forward to the call and response of "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" every Easter Sunday. What customs or traditions from the church year do you most look forward to?
2. If the church year is something you are not very familiar with, what holiday or tradition would you most like to learn about?

*Little (and Larger) Liturgies*

1. Drawing from the writings of James K.A. Smith, April reflects on the way our everyday habits and practices shape our lives. Choose one household chore and reflect on how that chore forms and shapes your life.
2. Thinking about worship services you've attended or observed, how might the liturgies and customs of these weekly services shape a church-goer's life?

### *When Seasons Collide*

1. Sometimes the seasons of the church year “collide” or run counter to the rhythms of society. For example, the month of December is a busy time for shopping and getting everything ready, all the while church year-oriented churches are talking about Advent themes like peace, hope, love, and joy. This collision can be uncomfortable at times. Can you think of any other “collisions” between the church year and the secular calendar? What are those like for you?
2. April shares about how she has grown to love the twelve days of Christmas. These days provide an opportunity for living into the themes of the Christmas season without any of the social pressures of early December. If you are familiar with the church calendar, what is something you enjoy that is a gift of the church calendar to you?

### *The Widening of Time*

1. When reflecting on the discomfort she felt when she remembered the cross of ashes on her forehead while at a school event, April wrote, “The ashes themselves didn’t change me, but receiving them reminded me of my need for change. Ordinary ashes widened my vision to see the *kairos* moment in front of me” (page 207). Think of a time when time was widened like this for you. What was this moment like for you?

#### Rehearsing the Rhythm

1. Do you have any liturgical practices you have brought into your home (e.g. an Advent wreath, activities for the season of Lent, etc.)? If so, what do you find meaningful about doing these things at home?
2. “All of us are shaped by the stories we tell (and hear) and by the habits we engage in” (page 209). What are the stories that have shaped you? Are there any that you might need to reframe in light of God’s story?



Reverberation

The holy rhythm of the church year sometimes informs our daily life and other times collides with the expectations of the rhythm of the world around us. As you reflect on this chapter, what do you hope to bring with you from your learning and reflection?

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