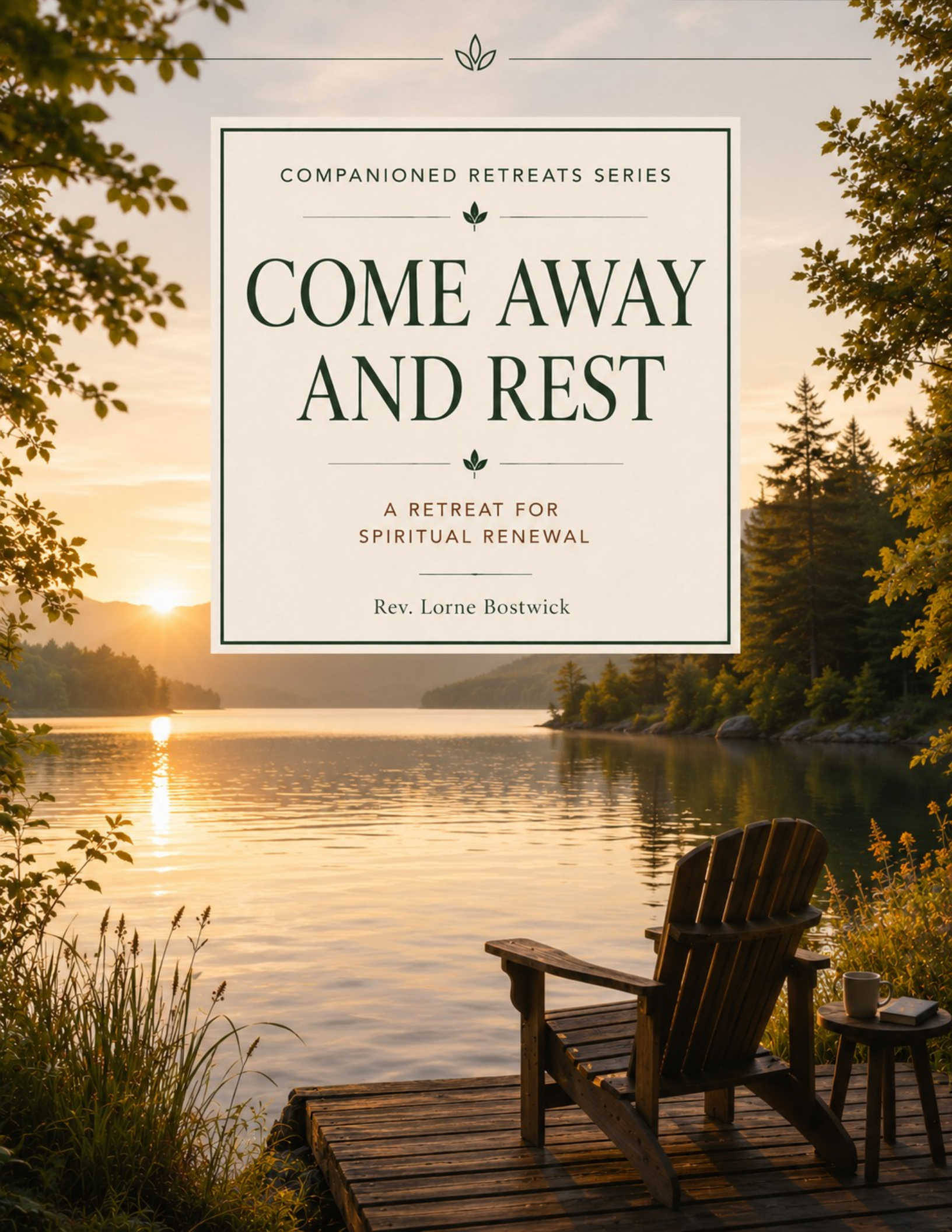
COMPANIONED RETREATS SERIES
COME AWAY AND REST
A RETREAT FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL
Rev. Lorne Bostwick

Come Away and Rest

A Companioned Retreat for Spiritual Renewal

[Insert the approved Common Introduction here, with the revised "Before You Go" language about completing immediate post-retreat responsibilities before leaving.]

Come Away and Rest

You may have come because you are tired.

Or perhaps you would not have called yourself tired until you stopped.

Ministry can keep you moving long after your body, mind, and spirit have begun asking for rest. There is always another conversation, another Sunday, another person to visit, another email to answer, another meeting to prepare for, another decision waiting to be made.

Even good ministry can exhaust you.

And sometimes the response to exhaustion becomes one more thing to accomplish: exercise more, pray more faithfully, establish better boundaries, take better care of yourself.

Those things may matter.

But not here.

For these days, you are not being asked to become better at resting.

You are being invited to rest.

Jesus once said to his disciples:

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."
—Mark 6:31

That is enough of an agenda for this retreat.

Come away.

Rest awhile.

For two days, let go of usefulness.

Sleep. Eat. Play. Make things. Read stories. Move. Sit.

Enjoy being a creature whose worth is not measured by what gets accomplished.

Before You Arrive

Before you leave home, finish the work that genuinely has to be finished for your return.

If you will come home Saturday afternoon and preach Sunday morning, prepare the sermon before you leave. Don't bring it along because you'll have plenty of quiet time to work on it.

Leave behind the report you could finish, the professional journal accumulating on your desk, and the theological book you have been meaning to read.

Productivity has a remarkable ability to disguise itself as relaxation when we happen to enjoy the work.

Instead, bring something simply because you enjoy it.

A novel. A mystery. Short stories. Poetry. Fantasy. Science fiction. A biography you are reading because the person fascinates you rather than because you need to learn something from them.

Bring something you can disappear into for a while and then put down.

You might also bring something for your hands: knitting or crochet, cross-stitch or embroidery, a sketchbook or watercolor set, a model to build, LEGO, a jigsaw puzzle, carving, beading, a coloring book, origami, cards, or a puzzle book.

Perhaps there is a hobby you haven't touched in years. Perhaps there is something wonderfully unnecessary you have always wanted to try.

If you make music, bring an instrument.

Bring comfortable clothes and whatever you need for swimming, gentle movement, sitting outside, or simply being comfortable.

One question can help you decide what belongs in your suitcase:

What do I enjoy doing when nothing depends on the outcome?

Bring some of that with you.

The First Evening

Put It Down

You have arrived.

Before doing anything that looks like retreat, settle in.

Unpack. Find where you will sleep. Learn the place.

Eat when you are hungry.

If someone else has prepared your meal, receive the gift of not having to prepare it yourself. If you are cooking, keep it simple.

Then find somewhere comfortable to sit.

For a few minutes, notice what is still traveling with you.

Names may come to mind.

Tasks.

Conversations.

Something unfinished.

Something waiting when you return.

Don't make a list.

Simply notice that these things came with you.

Now open your hands.

Rest them, palms up, on your lap.

You don't have to imagine anything leaving them.

Just stop holding them closed.

Sit that way for a while.

When you are ready, say:

For tonight, this can wait.

Then let it wait.

Before Sleep

Read Matthew 11:28–30.

Read it once.

Pay particular attention to the invitation:

Come to me.

You have probably spoken these words to other people.

Tonight, they are spoken to you.

Close the Bible.

Let the rest of the evening belong to you.

Read. Make something. Sit outside. Play music. Have some tea. Look at the stars.

Or go to bed.

Even if it seems ridiculously early.

Especially then.

The First Morning

Let Morning Arrive

Don't set an alarm unless you need one.

If circumstances allow, let your body decide when morning begins.

When you wake, don't reach immediately for your phone.

Notice how you feel.

Perhaps you slept deeply.

Perhaps you didn't.

A retreat does not guarantee good sleep.

Lie there for another few minutes if you want to.

When you get up, make coffee or tea. Find somewhere you like to sit.

Let morning arrive before the retreat resumes.

When You Are Ready

Read Psalm 23.

You know it.

That may be precisely why it belongs here.

Read it without trying to make familiar words unfamiliar.

Notice what the shepherd does.

The shepherd leads.

The shepherd restores.

The shepherd prepares.

The shepherd accompanies.

The sheep receives.

Stay for a while with:

“He makes me lie down in green pastures.”

Sometimes we choose to lie down.

Sometimes we need to be made to stop.

Close the Bible.

Have breakfast.

The Morning

Let Your Body Have a Vote

This morning, let your body choose what comes next.

Perhaps it wants movement.

An easy walk. Stretching. A swim. Floating in the water.

Perhaps it wants stillness.

A comfortable chair. A porch. Sunlight. Shade. A place beside the water. Another hour in bed.

Don't choose what seems healthiest.

Notice what feels restorative.

Your body has carried you through every day of your ministry.

For this morning, it doesn't have to carry you anywhere in particular.

Late Morning

Rest Does Not Mean Doing Nothing

You may discover that having nothing to do does not feel restful.

That's all right.

Rest and inactivity are not the same thing.

There are things you do because something needs to be accomplished.

There are other things you do simply because you enjoy doing them.

For these days, choose the second kind.

Read your novel.

Work on the puzzle.

Knit.

Build something.

Play solitaire.

Sketch badly.

Play the same piece of music three times because you like playing it.

Do something completely unnecessary.

Nothing depends on what you are doing.

Stay with it until it no longer holds you.

Then stop.

Midday

Be Fed

Eat lunch.

If someone has prepared it, receive being fed.

Someone else thought about the food. Someone else prepared it. Someone else put it before you.

Let yourself receive that.

If you are preparing your own meal, make something satisfying without turning lunch into a project.

Eat slowly enough to taste it.

Then linger if you want to.

The Afternoon

An Unproductive Afternoon

The afternoon is yours.

There is no retreat assignment.

You brought things you enjoy. You may have a place you haven't finished exploring. You may have discovered a chair that deserves several hours of your life.

See what appeals to you.

Sleep.

Play.

Read.

Make something.

Go outside.

Change your mind halfway through.

Nothing needs to be completed.

At some point, you may hear a familiar voice:

I should probably be doing something.

Notice it.

Then ask:

Do I actually want to do something?

If the answer is yes, choose something you enjoy.

If the answer is no, don't.

Toward Evening

What Restores You?

Late in the afternoon, take your journal if you brought one.

There is only one question:

What actually restores me?

Not what is supposed to restore you.

Not what somebody else calls self-care.

Remember times when you have felt yourself returning to yourself.

What was happening?

Where were you?

Were you alone or with someone?

What was your body doing?

What weren't you doing?

Let memory answer before you make a list.

Perhaps you recognize sleep, solitude, friendship, movement, music, cooking, water, laughter, prayer, working with your hands, being outdoors, reading—or something entirely your own.

Write down what you recognize.

Then close the journal.

You aren't making a plan.

It is simply worth knowing what gives life back to you.

The Second Evening

Let Something Be Enjoyable

Have dinner.

Then let the evening unfold.

You have practiced enough today.

Enjoy something.

And notice that enjoyment does not require justification.

Before sleep, read Psalm 4.

Let its final words accompany you:

“I will both lie down and sleep in peace.”

Turn out the light.

The Second Morning

Enough

Begin slowly again.

Have coffee.

Watch the morning.

Eat breakfast.

When you are ready, read Exodus 16:13–21.

Manna appears in the wilderness.

There is enough for the day.

Those who gather much do not have too much.

Those who gather little do not have too little.

And what they try to preserve beyond its time spoils.

You know what it is to live ahead of yourself.

Next Sunday.

Next meeting.

Next crisis.

Next season.

Ministry continually asks you to anticipate what will be needed.

This morning, you don't have to.

Carry four words with you:

Enough for today.

Don't make them into a principle.

And definitely don't make them into a sermon.

Just take them with you.

Later in the Morning

Enough for Today

Yesterday you were given choices.

This morning, try having fewer.

Choose one thing you would enjoy doing.

Then give yourself to it.

Read.

Make something.

Swim.

Play music.

Sit somewhere beautiful.

Return to yesterday's puzzle.

Take your coffee outside.

Whatever you choose, stay with it without wondering what should come next.

If the words return, receive them:

Enough for today.

If they don't, that's all right too.

Midday

A Meal You Don't Have to Earn

Have lunch.

Enjoy it.

There is nothing you need to finish first.

Nothing in this retreat has to be completed before you deserve to eat.

You are hungry.

There is food.

Eat.

The Final Afternoon

Before You Become Useful Again

Soon you will pack.

You will go home.

There will once again be things that genuinely need doing.

That is part of life. It is also part of vocation.

But before you return to it, notice where you have been.

For two days, usefulness did not get the final word.

You slept.

You ate.

You played.

You made things that did not need making.

You read stories that did not need studying.

You moved when you wanted to move and sat when you wanted to sit.

Some things remained undone.

And the world continued.

Rest is part of a human life that is good in itself.

You sleep, eat, play, make, enjoy, and receive because you are a creature, not a machine being serviced so it can return to production.

Sabbath appears in the biblical story not merely as recovery from work but as part of the rhythm of creation itself.

Work has dignity.

So does stopping.

You are about to return to work that matters. There will be sermons to prepare, people to care for, decisions to make, and responsibilities that rightly belong to you.

But those things are not what make your life valuable.

You are a creature of God before you are useful to anyone.

Stay there for a while.

Before You Leave

Receive a Blessing

Read Numbers 6:24–26.

You have probably pronounced this blessing over other people.

For these few moments, don't pronounce it.

Receive it.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

You are the one being blessed.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

You are the one receiving grace.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Receive peace.

Sit for a little while.

Then pack.

There is no need to hurry.

Going Home

You may return feeling deeply rested.

You may return newly aware of how tired you actually are.

Both can happen.

A few days cannot repair every season of depletion, and this retreat was never meant to do that.

Nor were these days a maintenance stop so you could return to ministry running more efficiently.

You rested because rest belongs to life.

You played because play belongs to life.

You ate because you were hungry.

You slept because you were tired.

You enjoyed things because they were enjoyable.

You received because not everything in life has to be earned.

Resist the temptation to make the retreat useful now that it is over.

You don't need a new Sabbath program.

You don't need a better self-care plan.

You don't need to prove you learned something.

Go home.

Return to the life and vocation that are yours.

And when usefulness begins claiming too much territory again, remember:

You are a creature of God before you are useful to anyone.

The invitation remains:

Come away and rest awhile.