



On Valentine's Day of 2024, my husband and I anticipated a scrumptious dinner and a sunset walk by the water, not knowing that our plans would be dramatically altered by day's end.

My journal entry that morning prepared me in advance. Read a portion:

I want more. More of Jesus, more of His wisdom, more of His grace. Jesus describes Himself as Living Water, and those who drink of Him will no longer thirst. Then why am I unsatisfied? Why do I still thirst? Why can't I get enough?

I'm too busy, too distracted, too task-oriented. I can't hurry holiness, but I long for it. I want to emulate Jesus, but my will battles against my will. Huh?

Wordy apostle Paul gets it with his I-do-not-do-what-I-ought-to-do-but-the-things-I-do-I-should-not-do spiel (see Romans 7:15-20).

This Christian life feels like a long process of surrender, a slow lifting of the arms and humbling drop to the knees. O God, help me conquer my self-will so I can crawl an inch closer to holiness.

I feel like a toddler demanding "More!" while the Spirit is saying, "That's enough for now." Why would He withhold more growth in me? Doesn't He want me to become holy as fast as possible? My loving Father knows what I need and when I need it. He lets me taste and see that He is good (Psalm 34:8) so I keep coming back for more.

He doesn't give me a five-pound weight to lift when I can barely lift a two-pound weight.

Lord, help me lift the weight You've given me today. May I be faithful to repeat, repeat, repeat the actions until the muscle You have me working on is strong. Coach me to spiritual fitness.

I need some Living Water. I know I'll get thirsty again. That's OK. Too much water at one time is lethal.

I trust You to provide the right amount of water today. May I be satisfied in Your provision.

After our morning chat and prayer, Tom went out for his walk but returned within minutes. He plopped down on the couch, face pale, rubbing his chest.

I froze with my teacup halfway to my lips. I hoped this wasn't what I thought it was. "Are you OK?"

"No. I've had this intense pressure on my chest for four days and it's not going away." Uh oh, the elephant.

Off to the ER we went. Tom despises hospitals, but when he agreed to go, I knew it was serious.

Fast forward to the diagnosis after endless tests: four blocked arteries. This, for a man on no meds with no medical history who chops wood, walks two miles daily, and eats a Mediterranean diet. We were shocked.

"He needs open heart surgery," the cardiologist announced.

Jaw drop. Life pivot.

We tried to bring levity to this life'n'death ordeal with jokes like, "We sure know how to make Valentine's Day all about THE HEART."

But our fears hid beneath the surface. We had no control over the surgery outcome or the longevity of Tom's redesigned heart. God held Tom's life in His hands; suddenly life seemed so fragile, so brief.

"The peace of God that passes all understanding" became a pleading prayer rather than a memory verse.

Only hours earlier, I had journaled that I wanted more of Jesus and still felt unquenched by the Living Water.

Although Tom faced a formidable life change, God had work to do in me as well. As I focused on caring for Tom after his successful surgery (thank You, Jesus), my To-Do list fizzled in importance.

I needed a reset. A renewed gratitude for Tom who has laid down his life for me. A fresh perspective on my why. A forced retreat from the dark world of sexual abuse where I spend much of my time as I write, research, and interact with survivors.

God benched me.

I'm not big into sports, but I've seen a player taken out of the game, benched, and handed a water bottle. Perhaps told to sit, sip, and rest. Regain strength.

OK, so how is all this relevant to healing from sexual abuse? Where's the hope?

Have you ever been so thirsty that you obsess about a refreshing cup of cold water? Just as our cells scream for H₂O when we're dehydrated, our souls yearn for healing, comfort, and peace when we're hurting or in crisis.

Are you feeling benched in your healing journey, or like you're in a holding pattern? Taken out of the game while nothing seems to be happening? Perhaps the weight of your struggle feels too heavy.

In my journal, I had asked God to “help me lift the weight You’ve given me today,” oblivious to how heavy it would be. But He knew. He doesn't waste our experiences, and He equips us in advance.

It’s all part of the plan. God knows when you need rest. He wants you to sit and sip some refreshing Living Water.

No earthly pleasure or spiritual striving will restore you.

God has been whispering to me, “Stop doing. Just be. Be with me.” I’m not good at not doing. I’m learning to BE. God wants to refine my identity as daughter.

- My purpose in life isn’t to achieve but to abide.
- My meaning isn’t found in ministry success but in humble surrender.
- My value isn’t in how others view me but how God cherishes me.

Our hope for healing is in knowing that “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6 NIV).

This "forced retreat" often felt more like a punishment than a blessing. Two steps forward, one step back. In the months prior to Tom's surgery, I prayed things like...

- make me more like You, Jesus
- reveal more of Yourself to me, Lord
- I am Yours to do whatever You want with me

...knowing it could be painful and humbling.

God was doing something new which I couldn’t clearly identify. Maybe the rearview mirror would reveal His purpose one day. Meanwhile, I chose to trust.

John 4:14 (NIV) says, “Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Our bodies cannot live without water. Our souls cannot be healed, restored, and sanctified without Living Water. When you find yourself feeling benched, go to the source that Jesus says is in you, continually nourishing you. Sit. Sip. Rest.

You’ll go from benched...to quenched.