

WEEKLY PERSONAL STUDY- John Elderidge

In this section, you can further explore the material we've covered this week

Each day offers a short reading from the book-along with reflection questions designed to take you deeper into the themes of this week's study. Journal or just jot a few thoughts after each question. The primary goal of these questions is for your personal growth and private reflection.

DAY ONE: FIGHT OR FLIGHT

We live in a world that triggers our souls into vigilance far too often. The complexity of modern life is mind-boggling: the constantly changing social terrain of what's appropriate, the of trauma we navigate in people's lives. The typical sounds of life trigger adrenaline responses in us all day long; deep throbbing bass whump coming from the car four lanes over, the one you feel all through your body, is not that different from the sound of distant artillery. Thanks to the smartphone and the web, you are confronted on a daily basis with more information than any previous generation had to deal with! And it's not just information; it's the suffering of the entire planet, in minute detail, served up on your feed daily. Add to this the pace at which most of us are required to live our lives.

This morning I can't tell whether my soul is more in fight or flight. But I do know this I don't like the state I'm in. I didn't sleep well last night (one of the many consequences of living in a hyper-charged world), and after I finally conked out, I overslept, woke up late, and ever since I've felt behind on everything.

I rushed through breakfast, dashed out the door to get to some meetings, and now I'm rattled. I don't like that feeling, and I don't like the consequences. When I'm rattled, I'm easily irritated with people. I didn't have the patience to listen to what my wife was trying to say this morning. I find it hard to hear from God, and I don't like feeling untethered from him.

I notice now in my rattled state that I want to eat something fatty and sugary; I want something that's going to make me feel better now. When we're unsettled, unnerved, unhinged, it's human nature to seek a sense of equilibrium, stability, and I find myself wondering-how many addictions begin here, with just wanting a little comfort? Get out of the rattled place and soothe ourselves with "a little something"? We live in a crazy-making world. So much stimulation rushes at us with such unrelenting fury, we are overstimulated most of the time. Things that nourish us-a lingering conversation, a leisurely stroll through the park, time to savor both making and then enjoying dinner-these are being lost at an alarming rate; we simply don't have room for them. Honestly, I think most people live their daily lives along a spectrum from slightly rattled to completely fried as their normal state of being. In the late morning, I finally do what I should have from the beginning-I pause, get quiet, settle down. I give myself permission to simply pause, a little breathing room to come back to myself and God. My breathing returns to normal (I didn't even notice I was holding my breath). A little bit

a little bit of soul-space. I'm not trying to fix anything or figure anything out. I'm not trying to release everything perfectly or permanently. That takes a level of maturity most of us haven't found. But I can let it go for sixty seconds. (That's the brilliance of the pause—all we are asking ourselves to do is let go for sixty seconds.) And as I do, even as I say it out loud—I give everyone and everything to you—my soul cooperates a good bit. I'm settling down.

I even sigh, that good sigh.

Then I ask for more of God: Jesus—I need more of you; fill me with more of you, God. Restore our union; fill me with your life.

You'll be surprised what a minute can do for you. Even more so as you get practiced at it. Honestly, you can do this pause nearly anytime, anywhere—in your car, on the train, after you get off your phone. I know it seems small, but we have to start somewhere. This pause is accessible; it's doable.

The desert fathers of the third and fourth century were a courageous, ragtag group, followers of Jesus who fled the madness of their world to seek a life of beauty and simplicity with God in the silent desert. For they saw the world as "a shipwreck from which every man has to swim for their life." And think of it: they had no cell phones, no internet, no media per se, not one automobile, Starbucks, or leaf blower. The news that came their way was local; they did not carry burdens of every community in the world. They walked where they went. Therefore, they lived at the pace of three miles an hour (!). Yet they felt the world sucking the life out of them, and they decided to do something about it.

And so we who live in a far more insane hour and who want to find a better life in God ought to be the first to adopt a few practices that get us out of the madness and into a more way of living. Most of us would be happy simply to be want settled way of living. Most of us would be happy simply to be a little less rattled.

1. How was your first attempt at the One Minute Pauses Where did your thoughts go? How long did the min seem to last?

2. Part of the One Minute Pause is asking for more of Jesus and to be filled with his life. Is this request of greater union with God something you've asked for before? How do you think that might help the state of your soul to do so regularly?

3. The desert fathers described this world as "a shipwreck from which every man has to swim for their life." Would you agree or disagree? Why?

DAY THREE: FREEDOM OF HEART

I'm sitting on a bluff in the wild southwest corner of Wyoming, sweeping the horizon with my binoculars. The view here is staggering—only sagebrush and coarse grasses for hundreds of miles in every direction; I can see the curve of the earth. It's going to be a hot August day. Heat waves are already shimmering in my view, making it hard to spot my quarry. Most folks would probably call these the badlands. Blistering in summer, freezing all winter, nearly always windy—but I come here because wild horses love this country. They feel safe out here.

There are still hundreds of herds of wild horses running through the American West, a fact that makes my soul happy. Wildness, open spaces, and animals living in utter freedom are all good for our humanity. Sometimes we need geography to usher our soul into spaciousness, lightheartedness. And so I've come.

A golden eagle is sitting only twenty yards downslope in front of me. Golden eagles are massive raptors, with seven-foot wingspans and the strength to carry off fawns and lambs. This one is perched on the edge of a cliff, scanning the alkaline landscape for prey. It's a perfect perch for him; with the updrafts coming up the bluff, all he has to do is spread his wings, step off, and he's gone. I can't believe he hasn't seen me. Maybe he has and simply doesn't care. I sigh with peace and happiness.

At dawn this morning I got in my truck, pointed myself north, and just ... drove away. For a blissful week of solitude. No real plans: only my camping gear, fishing rod, and maps of the Wind River range, Yellowstone, and Montana. This is an unplanned, last-minute trip—something Jesus practically insisted on. Many moons have come and gone since I took time to get away, care for my soul, find God.

And I must tell you, it's an extraordinary feeling to have your world fading in the rearview mirror, nothing but an open road before you.

It's a practice Jesus himself cherished (minus the truck I've always been intrigued by his ability to just up and walk away from his world. Right there in the opening chapter of Mark, with excitement building and crowds swelling all round him, Jesus disappears. He just ... leaves.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else" (Mark 1:35-38).

Jesus models a freedom of heart I think every one of us would love to have. His ability to disengage himself from his world is so alluring.

So, like a good disciple, I've done the same. Everyone is wanting something from me, so I've followed my Master and ... left. If I wanted to see wild horses I probably should have gotten here sooner, but ever since I left home this morning, I've been moseying, stopping to read those "points of historical interest" I usually blast by. It'll take a few days to enter in, but already I can feel that exquisite condition coming on—a rare, carefree lightheartedness.

1. How does Jesus model purposeful soul care for us?

2. What would it feel like for you to find moments to leave the madness of your world for time with God?

3. When is the last time you've felt the "rare, carefree light ness" described in today's reading? What does it do for your heart to know not only is this available but it is also God's desire for you?

DAY FOUR: BENEVOLENT DETACHMENT

We are talking in this study about making room in our lives for God so that we might receive more of his wonderful self in us and, with that, the vibrancy and resiliency we crave as human beings. There are external ways we can do this, simple steps like the One Minute Pause. And there are internal ways we do this as well.

To make room for God to fill the vessel of our soul, we have to begin moving out some of the unnecessary clutter that continually accumulates there like the junk drawer in your kitchen. Everybody has a junk drawer, that black hole for keys, pens, paper clips, gum, all the small flotsam and jetsam that accumulates over time. Our souls accumulate stuff, too, pulling it in like a magnet. And so Augustine said we must empty ourselves of all that fills us so that we may be filled with what we are empty of. Over time I've found no better practice to help clear out my cluttered soul than the practice of Benevolent Detachment. The ability to let it go walk away, not so much physically but emotionally, *soulfully*.

Allow me to explain. We are aiming for release, turning over into the hands of God whatever is burdening us and leaving it there. It's so easy to get caught up in the drama in unhealthy ways, and then we are unable to see clearly, set boundaries, respond freely.

Mature adults have learned how to create healthy distance between themselves and the thing they have become entangled with. Thus the word detachment. It means getting untangled, stepping out of the quagmire; it means peeling apart the Velcro by which this person, relationship, crisis, or global issue has attached itself to you. Or you to it. Detachment means getting some healthy distance. Social media overloads our empathy. So I use the word "benevolent" in referring to this necessary kind of detachment because we're not talking about cynicism or resignation. Benevolent means kindness. It means something done in love. Jesus invites us into a way of living where we are genuinely comfortable turning things over to Him

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take upon you. Let me teach you, because I am gentle and merciful at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light" (Matthew 11:28-30, NLT).

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me and you'll recover your life. I'll show how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly (Matthew 11:28-30, MSG).

Millions of people are feeling massively overburdened and looking for some way to lighten their heavy emotional load. This is something Jesus is particularly good at helping us with, which is why learning Benevolent Detachment is such a timely grace.

1. To make room for God to fill the vessel of our souls, we have to begin moving out some of the unnecessary clutter that continually accumulates there like the junk drawer in your kitchen. What specific things do you need to clear from your cluttered soul?

2. Describe what Benevolent Detachment is by writing a thoughts on the meaning of each word. How might turning things over to God in this way help you lighten your load?

3. What most stood out to you from the words in MATTHEW 11:28-30? Why?

DAY FIVE: GIVE EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING TO ME

Worry is only one of a hundred things that burden our souls. Genuine concern is just as dangerous, maybe more so because it's grounded in something noble-your concerns for your aging parents, a sick friend, a people group, a cause crying out for justice. A friend of mine runs a home rescuing trafficked girls. He wrote last week to say that the government facility is overcrowded, and they asked him if he could take eleven girls. The heartbreak was my friend had room for only five; he had to make the brutal call. Today a therapist colleague who does remarkable work with military men and women suffering PTSD lamented he can't see enough people. "We're losing too many to suicide," he said. "It tears me up I can't help more."

These things can fill a backpack and make it mighty heavy. Jesus began teaching me about Benevolent Detachment almost two years ago. Every time I would turn to him with a question, he would say, Give everyone and everything to me. The invitation rang so true; I knew I needed to learn this. So I began to practice it as best I could. But then Jesus kept repeating the invitation. I'd be asking about something entirely unrelated to the people in my life-car repairs, scheduling a trip, my tax returns-and Jesus would reply, Give everyone and everything to me. It was irritating. I finally realized that the reason he kept repeating it was because I wasn't practicing it very well. I was carrying people. Worrying about things.

We are far more entangled with the world than we know. And the thing is, people and causes have a way of entangling themselves with you too.

Some of this has to do with the moment we live in and the obliteration of social boundaries. Thanks to social media, everyone's life is open and accessible through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram—all of it. We've created an assumption that you can enter and observe, or engage, with anyone, anywhere, anytime. There are no boundaries. We've created an assumption that we're entitled to enter anyone else's private space at any time. It's very harmful. Cell phones have been a major contributor to this loss of personal space. A friend who is a successful businessman explained to me how the rules of corporate loyalty have changed: "They expect you to be available anytime, day or night, because of this," he said, holding up his phone. "They can text you, call you 24/7. You are now considered to be available anytime, all the time. Those are the new rules."

I told myself as I drove off into the wilderness this morning that I would turn my phone off for a few days to enforce my disengagement. But I've checked my messages several times in the last hour. It's so odd to be dialed into the technology of the world while I drive through rural countryside. This was the world of my grandmother, raised her entire life in rural America. Back in the day if you wanted to have a conversation with someone, if you wanted to enter their world, you literally had to enter their world. You entered your car and drove to their farm and sat on their porch and conversation. You also understood that there are appropriate hours for doing so. People were very aware that there were public moments and private moments, public spaces and private spaces. All that is completely gone now. There is this unspoken assumption that anyone can enter your world anytime. It's suffocating to the soul; there's no breathing room. People are looking for some way to push this stuff back just a few feet. Gimme some space for heaven's sake. Exactly. Benevolent Detachment is your way out.

1. What does the invitation to release everyone and every thing to Jesus provoke in you? Why?

2. How has the expectation from social media that you be available everywhere at all times affected the rhythm of your day and your ability to rest or simply breathe?

3. Who do you need to release to God now? What projects or deadlines do you need to release? Be specific ... and then release them as you write your responses below.