



*Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

*Romans 5:5*

*December 2009*

## When Will You Rest?

by Duan Walker, Executive Director

*It's the most wonderful time of the year – beautiful Christmas decorations, caroling, time with friends, time with family, office parties, packed shopping centers, impatient customers, fights over the last toy, and the depression of January after all that comfort and joy. Is it really the most wonderful time of the year? What if we missed the point somewhere along the way? What if there was something greater to be remembered and contemplated at Christmas? What if the Christmas season was a time of rest and reflection, rather than chaos and confusion?*

During a season that is filled with chaos and confusion, we often find it hard to rest and reflect. We don't have time to intentionally rest because we believe that running around frantically will somehow help us get everything done faster. And in the midst of sleepless nights, we blame our stress and lack of peace on external factors beyond our control, rather than seeking rest and peace for ourselves in the midst of chaos.

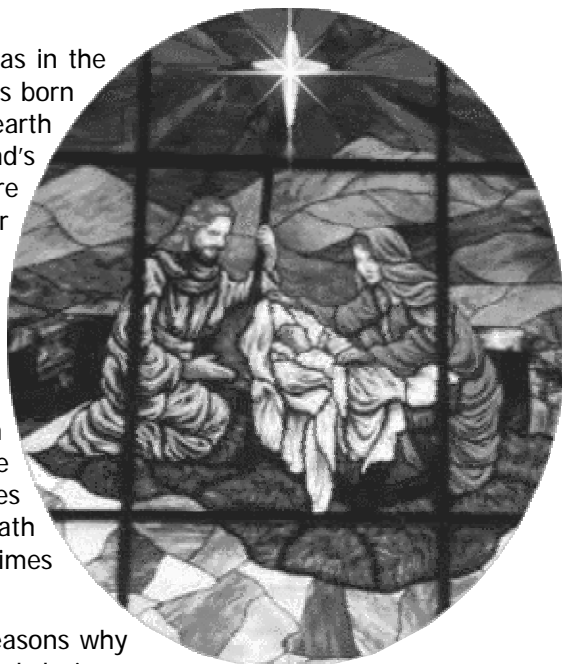
In many ways, rest and peace were part of the whole point of Christmas in the first place. When the angels announce to the shepherds that the savior is born in Luke 2, their praise includes, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace." The gift of Jesus would bring reconciliation – peace – in mankind's relationship with God. In Christ's death, the requirements of the Law were fulfilled. We can live at peace with God and confidently rest in our relationship with Him.

Each December, Mid-Valley Fellowship takes a break from Taking Back Ground, our weekly support program for those struggling with homosexuality. This is partially the reality of all the other demands in December, but more intentionally, it is a reminder of a greater value: rest. God placed intentional value on rest from the very beginning. Even as an all-powerful, almighty Creator who never grows weak or weary, He takes the seventh day of creation to rest. Then when the Law – guidelines for life – is given to the Israelites, he includes a requirement for a Sabbath – for rest. When Jesus was on earth, He even embodied this by taking times away from the multitudes to rest.

For participants in the Taking Back Ground program, there are a few reasons why rest can be valuable. They decided at some point that their homosexual desires were not something they wanted to pursue or embrace. That usually stems from conviction in their relationship with God, but no matter the motivation, it began with their decision to engage. And the process – the journey – is far from an easy one. Difficult decisions must be made – to learn from past hurts and make different choices. There are painful memories that on the surface seem better left untouched but that ultimately lead to healing when faced. And there are the amazingly beautiful times. There is new awareness or healing in a relationship with God or others. Whether difficult or enjoyable, all those things that are part of the journey, can lead to fatigue.

In addition to fatigue in the process, a time of rest can also be an opportunity for participants to catch up emotionally and intellectually. We cover a lot of information in Taking Back Ground and a season of rest can be an opportunity to put those things into practice. Sometimes extra time is needed to contemplate newly acquired knowledge.

Having a season of rest also reminds participants of God's action in their lives and process. In adversarial times, we can remember Moses' words to the Israelites as the Egyptians began chasing after them (Exodus 4:14): "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." When old patterns, behaviors, or relationships from an individual's personal Egypt come chasing after them, this verse is a reminder to press into relationship with God and allow Him to fight on their behalf. Psalm 4 underscores this as well – "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me



## Psalm 30

I will exalt you, O LORD,  
for you lifted me out of the depths  
and did not let my enemies  
gloat over me.

O LORD my God, I called to you  
for help and you healed me.

O LORD, you brought me up  
from the grave; you spared me  
from going down into the pit.  
Sing to the LORD, you saints of his;  
praise his holy name.

For his anger lasts only a moment,  
but his favor lasts a lifetime;  
weeping may remain for a night,  
but rejoicing comes in the morning.

When I felt secure, I said,  
"I will never be shaken."

O LORD, when you favored me,  
you made my mountain stand firm;  
but when you hid your face,  
I was dismayed.

To you, O LORD, I called;  
to the Lord I cried for mercy:

"What gain is there  
in my destruction,

in my going down into the pit?

Will the dust praise you?

Will it proclaim your faithfulness?

Hear, O LORD,

and be merciful to me;

O LORD, be my help."

You turned my wailing

into dancing; you removed my  
sackcloth and clothed me with joy,  
that my heart may sing to you  
and not be silent.

O LORD my God,

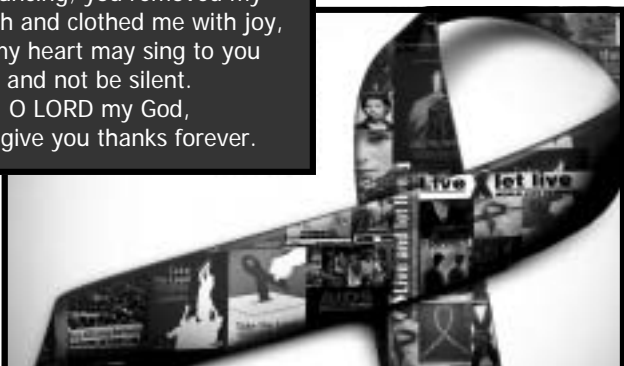
I will give you thanks forever.

safe." When situations are beyond our ability to affect, God takes action on our behalf. We are simply called to obey God's leading – to trust His direction in our lives. And when that trust does not come easily, we must continue to believe that God's heart toward us is ultimately good – that He is the One "who satisfies [my] desires with good things" (Psalm 103:5).

A season of rest is also incredibly valuable for our volunteers that make the Taking Back Ground program possible. These individuals serve in a series of amazing ways. They come each Tuesday night and care for individuals struggling, lead us in worship, or are dedicated to the spiritual battle happening around us – fighting on the front lines through prayer. Those praying with us on Tuesday nights are also joined by others praying off-site. A high level of commitment and care is required for our volunteers, and we realize the necessity of time away – to rest and renew their energy in preparation for another season of intense effort. Rest helps them avoid burnout and models those seasons of rest for our participants.

Having a break from the weekly program also reminds us as leaders of God's action in our participants. We develop a clearer understanding of our role. God can still act and do as He wills, even without us in the picture. He will use us if we make ourselves available, but He can use any willing person to impact another's life. A season of rest, reminds us that God cares so much more deeply for our participants than we do, and He has incredible power to act more perfectly than we do. "[He] is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

As we enter the Christmas season, I challenge you to intentionally pursue rest and peace, even in the midst of a crazy schedule. Remember that we are in relationship with a God Who takes intentional action on our behalf. If you doubt this, simply take a look at the Psalm included on this page, noting God's action in our lives versus the action we are to take. May you have a blessed Christmas season, resting in the peace that flows from a reconciled relationship with God.



## World AIDS Day

December 1st is World AIDS Day, a day when individuals and organizations from around the world come together to bring attention to the global AIDS epidemic. Please join us in praying on December 1st and contemplating what part you might play in reflecting God's heart to those impacted by HIV/AIDS.



## Prayer Requests

Praise for the group of participants that completed the first section of Taking Back Ground at the end of November. Please pray for their continued growth and health during the break from the regular program.

Praise for our volunteers and prayer intercessors who serve faithfully in the Taking Back Ground program each week. Please pray for rest and renewal during the break.

Praise for a valuable time during our recent Board Planning Retreat. Please pray for wisdom as we implement plans for ministry over the next year.

**MID-VALLEY**  
**fellowship**  
*releasing the power of hope*

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