

Chapter 06

Learning to Remain

There is a quiet difference between visiting a place... and living there.

Most of us know the feeling.

We have walked through beautiful gardens while traveling.

We have stood beside oceans whose names we no longer remember.

We have watched sunsets that took our breath away.

For a moment, we belonged to the beauty... then we left.

The memory remained; the life did not.

There are people who treat peace the same way.

They visit it:

A quiet *weekend*;

A meaningful *retreat*;

A beautiful *song*;

A moment of *prayer*.

For a little while, everything feels clear... then Monday arrives...

The *traffic* returns;

The *phone* rings;

The *diagnosis* comes;

The *argument* begins.

And peace feels as though it packed its bags and went home.

Perhaps peace was never meant to be a place we visit.

Perhaps it was meant to become our address.

When I was younger, I imagined spiritual growth as climbing.

One step, then another.

Always reaching;

Always improving;

Always hoping

I was making progress.

The older I become, the less that image helps me.

Life doesn't always feel like climbing...

Sometimes it feels like sitting beside a hospital bed.

Sometimes it feels like waiting.

Sometimes it feels like holding the hand of someone you cannot save.

Sometimes it feels like learning that love has work to do even when nothing can be fixed.

Perhaps growth isn't always upward; perhaps it is inward.

There is a tree not far from where I often walk.

I have passed it in every season.

Winter leaves this tree looking almost lifeless; its branches seem empty...

Its strength hidden... then spring arrives.

Without hurry...

Without announcement...

Life quietly appears...

The tree never seems anxious about becoming itself.

It simply remains where its roots have always been.

I wonder how much of our exhaustion comes from confusing movement with life.

We are always moving:

Learning.

Achieving.

Recovering.

Planning.

Improving.

Yet the soul seems to ask a different question...

Not, *"How far have you traveled?"*

But, *"Where have you been living?"*

Jesus used a simple word. *"Remain."*

Not because He lacked stronger language.

Perhaps because no stronger language was needed:

Remain,

Stay,

Make your home here,

Live from this place.

...It is one of the gentlest invitations in all of Scripture.

There is no urgency in it;

No threat,

No performance,

Only an open door.

I have begun to think that remaining is less about holding onto God...

and more about discovering that God has never let go of us.

Like a child asleep in the back seat of a car.

The child may awaken unsure of where the journey has gone.

The father has never once forgotten.

Love has been carrying the child all along.

Perhaps we spend too much energy trying to hold onto the One whose hands have never loosened their grip.

The people I most admire have one thing in common.

They have stopped dividing life into sacred and ordinary:

Making coffee...

Watching birds...

Holding a friend's tears...

Walking quietly...

Reading...

Laughing...

Sitting beside someone who has no words.

Somehow all of it has become holy, not because the moments changed...

But because their awareness did.

Perhaps that is what “*remaining*” finally becomes...

Not escaping the world... Seeing it differently.

Finding that the Eternal has been quietly waiting in ordinary moments all along:

A kitchen table;

A hospice room;

A garden path;

A child's laughter;

A shared silence.

The holy has never needed dramatic entrances,

It has always preferred to arrive unnoticed.

The more I read the Gospels, the more I notice how often Jesus slowed down.

He noticed interruptions.

He paused for conversations others hurried past.

He ate meals that seemed unimportant.

He lingered with people who had nothing to offer Him.

Perhaps remaining always looks unproductive to a hurried world.

Yet almost everything beautiful grows slowly.

There is a strange freedom that comes when we stop asking,

"How can I find God?" and begin asking,

"Where has Love already been waiting for me today?"

The first question assumes distance;

The second assumes Presence.

Those are very different worlds.

Sit With This...

What if nothing extraordinary needs to happen today?

What if today is already full of quiet invitations?

Before this day ends...

Notice one ordinary moment that asks nothing of you except your attention.

Remain there, in that "ordinary moment" for a little while.

You may discover that Love was waiting before you arrived.
