

How to Rest When You've Learned It Was a Dirty Word

For the woman who learned that being useful, productive and always available made her lovable.

@healingandheadwraps

A birthday gift for you

Storytime

I wish my story had a more graceful opening. Something like: I decided to slow down because I had an enlightened realization that my worth was inherent. Sounds nice, right?

Honey, I was burnt out so badly it brought me to my knees. Literally! This is the true start of my journey towards guilt free rest. I had back and chest pain so intense that I thought I was having a heart attack in my 30s. Not once - three times. It took those experiences, and conversations with doctors, for me to begin understanding that the strain I was carrying might be showing up in my body. At the time, I was a high performer in my career, mothering young children, remembering all the activities, participating in their school life, and dressing up a body that wasn't okay. Only I didn't realize it. I love that version of myself. She tried so hard to live life the way she knew how. And now she knows it isn't supposed to feel like constant strain. We all arrive at our wake-up calls differently. That was mine.

When my doctor told me I needed to go on medical leave. I asked when, because, well, I had a project to finish. She said, "Last week." I walked away from that job and sat in the quiet of my home. My husband took on responsibilities I had been carrying, because I couldn't do those either. He had been willing to participate, and I hadn't always made room for him to show up that way. Accountability is something I've had to become friends with in my healing. Not to blame myself for burning out, but to understand the patterns I could begin changing to avoid it again and again. The first boundary I remember setting was with a friend. I told her I was trying something new and needed her support to receive it. I explained what I needed, with a tummy ache from the discomfort of asking. She said, "Of course. I didn't know you felt that way. Thanks for telling me."

Imagine that. All that worry, and there was room for my needs.

Prentis Hemphill's writing helped me think about boundaries; a way to find the level of closeness or distance from someone that lets us care for ourselves and others at the same time. Not simply walls to keep people out, but ways of making relationships more honest. Over time, I learned that it was okay to disappoint my

children sometimes. I didn't have to lean into every ask. They could learn that Mom is human, that other people have needs, and that disappointment is a feeling we can move through. I learned that my needs matter. That I didn't have to overwork to be loved by people in my life. Some relationships shifted when I stopped overfunctioning. Some people who benefited from that version of me fell naturally out of my life. There was a gift in that clarity, and there was hurt, too. I also learned to stop rescuing people from every hard thing. Sometimes doing everything for someone else gets in the way of their own growth and my willingness to trust their humanity to handle life.

Slowing down did not come naturally. I had the flinch to do more, over and over. Resisting the flinch looked like breathing slowly, dancing, or talking things through with my therapist. I began to think about how hard my ancestors worked, and how I wanted to make use of the ease they had hoped future generations might know. I deserve time in nature. I deserve to play, to move at a human pace, and to question a culture that treats constant productivity as a virtue.

Ease is my birthright. Ease is OUR birthright.

The prompts that follow are based on your own inner wisdom. Take what serves you. Leave what doesn't.

Thank you for receiving this gift.

Hey, you dropped this 👑

1.|Noticing the urgency

When I slow down, what thoughts, feelings or sensations show up?

Where did I learn that being busy, useful or dependable made me valuable?

2. |Making room for boundaries

What is one need I have been hesitant to name? What makes asking for it difficult?

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Where am I doing more than I genuinely have the capacity or desire to do? What might sharing the load look like?

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3. | Letting myself be human

What do I fear might happen if I say no, ask for help or let someone be disappointed?

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How might my relationships change if I allowed others to show up for me, too?

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4. |Practicing ease

What helps my body recognize a moment of safety, softness or spaciousness?

What is one small, realistic way I could make room for rest this week—without turning it into another task to perfect?

A closing reflection

You don’t need to become a different person to deserve rest. You can be caring without carrying everything.

You can be ambitious and still have limits. You can love people and let them learn to meet you halfway.

Maybe ease begins with your first no or a request for help, or one afternoon you refuse to fill with work.

You get to move at a human pace. Ease is OUR birthright.

Hey, you dropped this 👑

Disclaimer: This guide is for personal reflection and is not a substitute for medical or mental health care. New or severe chest pain should always be medically assessed.