

[Turn off phones, dim lights, soft largo instrumental music or similar relaxation music. Instruct your group to find a quiet place to sit or lay on the ground so they are comfortable. Do not read the words in brackets]

Take a moment to make sure that you are warm enough and that you are comfortable. Rest your hands loosely in your lap, or by your side. Close your eyes. This is time for you. A time to relax and rest in God's abiding love and experience his shalom, his peace, his love for you and accept his invitation to *"Come away by yourself to a quiet place... and rest a while."* (Mark 6:31).

Today I invite you to imagine yourself walking through a lovely temperate Australian rainforest. You can see the sunlight pushing between the leaves, flickering and dancing over the tree ferns that line the path. The mosses and lichens make a spongy bed on the forest floor that springs under your shoes as you follow the path deeper into the forest. As you amble slowly take in a deep breath of clean, fresh forest air and let it clear your mind.

Breathe in the fresh air and slowly fill your lungs completely. With the out breath let the worries and tensions of today leave your body. With each breath you feel more relaxed, and refreshed. The air feels warm and you are comfortable. You wander down the path enjoying the birds as they sing and flitter in the understorey. The smell of fresh rainforest plants filters into your nostrils, bringing with it a deep sense of God's abiding love for His creation. You are reminded that God's creation is very good and He loves it and upholds it always. God says to His people *"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest"* (Exodus 33:14).

As you stroll further into God's garden, your body relaxes more and your mind is receptive to His presence with each step that you take. As you walk you breathe in unison with your steps.

Breathe in 2, 3, 4.... hold 2, 3.... breathe out 2, 3, 4, 5. (repeat 3x)

You become aware of the sound of a babbling stream and you look to the right and see it there in a lovely sunlit forest glade. A wonderful little freshwater stream gurgles its way from the Kosciusko high country, full of life and promise as it heads toward the Murray bringing refreshing life to all along its course. You sit on the moss covered bank watching the stream playfully meander its way south. You hear a voice - warm and kind - God's voice - saying *"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul."* (Matthew 11:28-30). Ahh rest for my soul... that's what I need... leaning back against a sturdy snow gum you close your eyes because you want a lighter burden. Lean into the tree until you feel comfortably secure, warm and relaxed, taking in the forest sounds, the smells and sensations of this wonderful place.

Take a long, slow, deep breath in... hold, slowly, breathe out. Empty your lungs completely as you breathe out. Taking another breath in hear God speaking to you gently saying *"Be still, and know that I am God."* *"You can rest in me. Fill yourself with my love"* (Psalm 46:10). Take your time and allow any tension in your body to dissolve away with each breath. Feel yourself moving slowly into a state of deep relaxation resting in God's garden where all is at one with your Creator, all is at peace, all is in harmony.

With each breath you go deeper and become quieter, breathing in slowly and out slowly... relaxing and feeling loved and at peace... relaxing deeply with each breath in and slowly out.

Continue to breathe slowly and gently and bring your awareness to the top of your head. Just sense or imagine a feeling of relaxation beginning to spread down from the top of your head.... feel the muscles in your forehead relax. Allow your eyes to release and your cheeks and jaw to relax and lose their tension. Let God's loving peace flow down into your neck, loosening every muscle, every fibre relaxed and secure. With every breath you take you feel more relaxed, deep into your shoulders... soothed ...released... rested.

Let the loving peaceful feeling flow down your shoulders and your arms into your hands...relaxed and soothed.....all the way to the tips of your fingers. As you feel your body relax, your mind releasing all negative interrupting thoughts, let them flow off into the air like bubbles that float off into the forest air. Your thoughts are becoming lighter as you slide further into the stillness of God's garden, where your *"...soul finds rest in God alone; your salvation comes from him. He alone is your rock and your salvation; he is your fortress, YOU will never be shaken."* (Psalm 62:1-2)

Now, become aware of your chest and stomach. Feel it rise with each breath in, and lower as you breathe out. Let God's peace flow through this part of your body, soothing your muscles and relaxing your whole body.

Turn your attention to your upper back, and feel this relaxing sensation flow all the way down your spine. As it gradually works its way down your body, feel every muscle in your back relax and unwind. Feel your upper body become loose and relaxed.

Feel your hips relax as God's peaceful love works its way through your lower body. Relax your bottom... your thighs, front and back, let them melt into the cushion of moss beneath you. Feel yourself secure and comfortable, hear God's voice saying *"...return and rest... you will be saved, in quietness and in trust you will become strong"* (Isaiah 30:15.)

Soothing feelings of relaxation flow down through your knees, and into your calves. Your ankles relax. Now your feet relax. Your whole body is now relaxed. Allow any remaining tension in your body to flow out through your toes, *"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:7)

You are comfortable and relaxed experiencing God's shalom. Now it's time to go on an inner journey to the place where God can minister to you personally because you are in *"...in Christ, so you are a new creation. He is making the old pass away and the new you is being transformed now by His spirit at work in you"* (2 Cor 5:17). As you feel his love flood your inner-being refreshing your spirit, renewing your mind, you feel God's loving care and experience his newness of life. He is unfolding a new plan for your life. As his new creation he is readying you for a new way of living in his peace and love.

You lie there and just bask in that peace and love and say to yourself I am calmed and quietened... *"I am content"* (Psalm 131:2). Breathing slowly in and out, relaxed and loved. Relaxed and content.

It's time to leave this garden and re-join the world feeling a renewed sense of purpose, peace and joy in your life. God is not leaving you he is coming with you. Hear him saying *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20.) He is walking back into life with you, empowering you to do His work, so come back feeling free, healthier, energised and renewed.

Wriggle your fingers, Wriggle your toes, take a deep breath and breathe out, roll your shoulders, have a stretch, smile because God loves you, and when you are ready open your eyes. Welcome back!

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written for the 'Still Me' program