



Life-Giving Devotions
from a Restful Shore



LAKE SIDE *Retreat*



Marci Seither



TO

FROM

DATE







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from a Restful Shore



LAKE SIDE *Retreat*

Marci Seither



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Lakeside Retreat: Life-Giving Devotions from a Restful Shore

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*To the memory of Cliff Vennerstrom and his forever blushing bride of more
than sixty years, Shirley Vennerstrom.*

*Together they exemplified what it looks like to live out the gospel, not just
on distant shores of the mission field but also around the table at home.*

*The love they had for the Lord and for each other
is a legacy passed on to their children and their children's children.*





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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Lakeside Retreat

BEYOND SPRAWLING FARMLANDS and past groves of birch and maple trees is a lakeside lodge nestled against the shore of Lake Nebagamon, Wisconsin. This rustic retreat has been in the Vennerstrom family for generations and is a place of refuge and respite.

Inside, on a worn wooden bookcase, sit albums filled with photos taken over the years: kids with their first fishing poles, cousins sunbathing on the floating raft, a picture of Great Grandma Swann taking a moment to read on the porch. The cabin is lovingly referred to as Swann Stuga, named after Great Grandma Swann and *stuga*, the Swedish word for cabin.

For nearly thirty years, my husband, John, and I have considered Bob and Ginger Vennerstrom among our closest friends. We met when John and I moved from California to Minnesota. Bob and Ginger were also new to that area. Bob and John loved soccer, and Ginger and I enjoyed making strawberry jam and raising kids. We have laughed together, cried together, and prayed for each other.



LAKESIDE RETREAT

For years during the summer months, Bob and Ginger always headed to their cabin to spend time with extended family, while John and I traveled in the opposite direction to visit our family on the West Coast. Because our travels took us westward, we never got to experience the cabin that they loved and talked about so much.

When John and I moved back to California, we remained close friends with Bob and Ginger in spite of being separated by miles. So when Ginger invited me to spend time with her at Swann Stuga, I couldn't refuse! It was an opportunity we both looked forward to.

Ginger met me at the airport, and then we picked up Ginger and Bob's granddaughters—Lydia and Gracie. We planned to spend a fun-filled week together at the cabin before Bob and John joined us.

From the moment I walked through the cabin door, I felt an overwhelming sense of tranquility and comfort, like being wrapped up in one of Ginger's hand-stitched quilts lying across the foot of each bed. The thought of taking a canoe across the lake to get a Dairy Queen Dilly Bar—versus being stuck in midday traffic—was refreshing.

Sometimes rest feels like something we try to schedule or accomplish on a Sunday afternoon between church, family events, and errands. I didn't know how much I actually needed it until I began to unpack my suitcase.

I set my flip-flops next to my floppy brimmed sun hat and powered down my laptop. Then I put my suitcase in the closet, sank onto the soft bed, and looked outside my window. Tall trees framed the lake as though reaching toward the sky in worship. I could feel myself relaxing. A soothing calm washed over my mind and soul. There is

INTRODUCTION

a big difference between being rested and being fully relaxed, but at that moment, I was experiencing both.

Maybe you also need time to rest, relax, and renew. Close your eyes for a moment. Inhale. Can you smell the scent of pine trees? Now listen. Can you hear the loon's call echoing off the water and the geese honking as they fly overhead? Now imagine tasting delicious, gooey marshmallows roasted over the smoky campfire. Think about feeling the warm summer sun on your skin and the cool breeze against your face.

A place of respite awaits.

Let's go to the lake!





PACKING



Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.... For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."


MATTHEW 11:28, 30

AFTER MONTHS OF waiting, it was finally time to go with my friend Ginger to their family cabin on Lake Nebagamon for two full weeks of sun, granddaughter giggles, swimming, and enjoying each other's company.

I started to make a list of all the things I might need for the trip. *What if one of my tennis shoes gets wet and isn't dry before our next walk?* I wondered. So I tossed a spare pair of shoes in the suitcase. More questions arose: *What if I need a raincoat and a jacket with a hood? What about extra socks or a spare pair of leggings?*

Soon the pile I had built looked far bigger than my suitcase. Bathing suits, hiking shoes, notepads, watercolors, books I hoped to read, extra clothes and shoes for cooler weather.

My carry-on was full of cameras, extra batteries, a digital recorder, my laptop, and pens. I also crammed in my cooking magazines, a novel, and a self-help book about being organized.



LAKESIDE RETREAT

“Isn’t there a washer and dryer at the cabin?” my husband, John, asked when he saw my pile.

“Who knows what the weather might do?” I said, trying to justify my packing choices. “It could get cold or rainy.” I looked at my rain boots and wondered whether I would really be walking in the woods during a downpour. Probably not.

I began to remove anything I *really* didn’t need. Ah, what a relief to get rid of unnecessary baggage.

Overpacking for my time at the cabin felt the same as stuffing my calendar and never-ending to-do list, cramming as much in as possible and then wondering why my shoulder hurt and back ached from carrying around the cumbersome load.

Perhaps it’s time to reevaluate what we are carrying around physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. Sometimes we think we might need things in case of an emergency or unexpected circumstances, so we try to carry more than is really necessary. We worry about things outside our control—such as what we would do if we were to lose the security of our home, if our kids never graduated from college or found a good job, if we had to care full-time for our elderly parents. We spend a lot of energy wondering how to manage all the stuff in our arms.

The Lord sees the burdens we carry and offers not only to help us carry them but to give us rest as well. He wants us to come to him with our overflowing suitcases so he can help us see what we don’t need and trust him for the things we do need.

PACKING

*Lord, thank you that I can trust you with my heavy burdens.
Thank you for urging me to come to you so you can lighten my
load as I go through this adventure called life.*

Are you carrying too much? Make a list of ways you can help
lighten your load.





FISH STICKS



Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. Spread your protection over them, that all who love your name may be filled with joy.

PSALM 5:11

GINGER AND I chatted as we drove through the lush green farmland of Wisconsin to Lake Nebagamon. When we turned off the main road, I knew we were getting close to our destination. I could see glimpses of the lake through the tall pine trees that lined the shore.

Finally Ginger pulled into a gravel driveway. The cabin looked just like the pictures I had seen for years, only better. I was here with one of my best friends for two weeks of sun and fun, rest and renewal. Within a few hours of arriving, we had put on our bathing suits and were heading toward the dock, towels in hand.

I took in the scenery: tall pine trees, rock-lined shores, quaint cabins, a pontoon boat pulling a youngster on an inner tube, and an expansive sky dotted by white fluffy clouds. I inhaled deeply, grateful to have a couple of weeks to rest and enjoy being unplugged.

As we walked toward the lake, I noticed how clean the path and surrounding area appeared. Pine needles had been raked, firewood

cut and stacked, and small trees thinned. But not everything seemed cleaned up. Next to the dock was a tangle of branches.

Looking closer, I saw the branches were lashed together with rope and secured at the lakeshore. The tangle extended out into the water, where small waves caused the floating mass to gently lift and then settle back down.

“What is up with the tree mess?” I asked Ginger.

“Oh, those are fish sticks.”

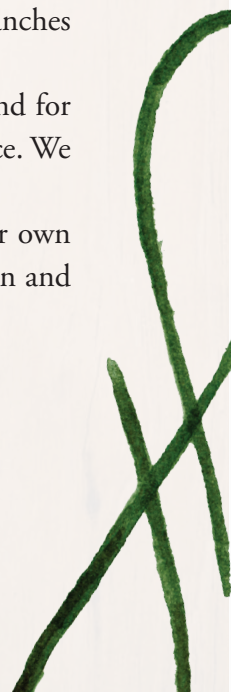
“Fish sticks?”

Ginger explained that they were ensuring the smaller fingerling fish could find refuge from birds of prey or larger fish looking for an easy meal. “Sometimes we need to make a habitat for little fish to have a safe haven, until they grow bigger and can live in deeper water.”

I spotted minnows and small fish darting in and out of the shadows and among the tall reeds at the edge of the shore. Everything they needed for safety was right there. I no longer saw the branches as a blockade but as a blessing.

Sometimes we, too, need a refuge. When we are left to fend for ourselves, we can be vulnerable to attacks we’re not ready to face. We need a safe place to shelter.

In his wisdom and kindness, God offers us just that—our own “fish stick”—right under the cross. It is our place of protection and refuge.



FISH STICKS

Thank you, Lord, for being a safe refuge. At a time when I feel exposed and vulnerable, I am thankful for the "fish sticks" you place in my life, where I can be safe and find rest.

When feeling vulnerable to things that want to devour your peace, hope, and joy, where do you seek shelter?



MARANATHA BAY



You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

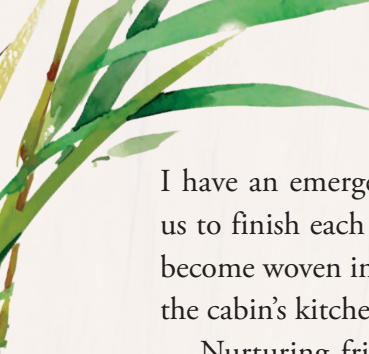
1 PETER 1:22

NESTLED NEXT TO the shore, in a cove on Lake Nebagamon called Maranatha Bay, sits a long stretch of cabins. Though the small community is not officially written on a map or posted on a sign, everyone knows exactly where it is.

It started when a pastor from Chicago brought his family up to Lake Nebagamon to get out of the summer heat and enjoy a place where they could rest and reconnect. In those days it was a ten-hour drive from Chicago, but I'm sure it was worth every mile.

Other Chicago pastors decided to follow suit, and soon the families who filled the row of cabins had a close connection—a love of the lake, but even more, a shared love for the Lord.

I understand the importance of this connection because a shared faith has been at the center of Ginger's and my friendship. We met at MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), where we served as mentor moms more than twenty-five years ago. I often call Ginger first when



LAKESIDE RETREAT

I have an emergency and need prayer, and it isn't uncommon for us to finish each other's sentences or break out into song. We have become woven into each other's lives like the fabric that drapes over the cabin's kitchen table.

Nurturing friendships is more than borrowing a cup of sugar from a neighbor or sending a digital card at Christmas. It is being there for each other in a way that feels like family. Self-reliance has become more of the standard in our society, but it has come at the cost of feeling isolated. It is not easy to be vulnerable with others, yet the Lord knows we need each other.

I have to wonder what our communities, churches, and homes would look like if we decided to authentically invest our lives into the lives of others. Do we simply nod in passing, or do we take a moment to ask how someone is really doing, with the hope they will share the good or the bad with us?

Make a commitment to reach out to someone who needs a friend, or be willing to make a new friend. Who knows, you might even create your own version of Maranatha Bay.

Thank you, Lord, for giving me the gift of friendship. Please show me how to be a better friend by taking the time to be present in the lives of others.

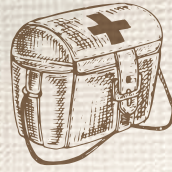
MARANATHA BAY

Make a list of several friends you would like to reach out to today. Send a card or call to let them know you are thinking of them. Ask how you can pray for them, and be sure to follow up. It might be exactly what they need.





First Aid Kit



When we're packing for an adventurous outing, we think about the clothes and paraphernalia we'll need for our trip, but have you ever stopped to think about bringing a first aid kit? Being prepared is always a good idea. An injury can happen at any time. If we make our own first aid kits, we can ensure they're stocked with the items we'll need most.

If you're making a first aid kit for the cabin, why not also make a small one for your backpack? When hiking, you need to be mindful of watching out for nuisances such as poison oak or poison sumac. And if you'll be on a boat, you might consider using a waterproof container for first aid supplies.

Items you might want to consider include the following:

- **Absorbent gauze pads.** Think scraped knees and elbows.
- **Adhesive tape.** Gauze pads always need help staying put.
- **Antibiotic cream.** A small tube or individual packets. Between gauze pads, adhesive tape, antibiotic cream, and ibuprofen, you should be okay in 99 percent of all emergencies!
- **Antiseptic wipes.** Germs happen.
- **Assorted-sized adhesive bandages.** I love including fun printed bandages for kids.
- **Cold compress.** I love the ones you squeeze to activate. For minor sprains, wasp stings, or bumps on the noggin, these are great to have on hand.

- **Disposable gloves.** If you are dealing with blood, you need to make sure you are fully protected as well.
- **Facial tissue.** Great for tears and to get specks of dirt out of eyes. Plus, you never know—someone might get a bloody nose.
- **Hand sanitizer.** After all, you're not always near a sink, soap, and water.
- **Hydrocortisone cream.** Handy for bug bites and rashes.
- **Ibuprofen or acetaminophen.** You can find packets or small bottles of these medications located in the travel section of any store.
- **Sunscreen.** I love sunscreen sticks. They're easy to use and great for a quick reapply.
- **Tweezers.** Nothing like having a splinter and not being able to get it out.

Make sure you occasionally take an inventory of your supplies and restock as needed. Also keep in mind that sunscreen has an expiration date. Owning a basic first aid reference guide, such as the one the Red Cross carries on their website (redcross.org), and taking a first aid and CPR class are always great ideas.

