

AHHH Horses

Winston Churchill was quoted as saying, "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man" I couldn't agree with that more. There is just something in me that delights in horses. It makes me really grateful that God created them. I love watching them and discovering the intricacies of their personalities. I love the way they move and respond to their environment. I love seeing them play and interact with one another. Feel free to pull up a rocker and just watch them and delight in them. There is a rocker in the barn and one down by the spiritual direction room. They are amazing creations.

As I authored this retreat, God showed me many activities through which He has something to show you. Allow yourself to follow His lead as for the pace and the selection of the activities. On retreat, the rhythm and pace is different than our life is otherwise. So begin, by relaxing into the setting of The Haven. Perhaps a nap, or a horse story from the books *Horse Miracles*, or *Great Horse Stories* is a good place to start. Resist the urge to attack this retreat as an agenda, or project that needs to be finished. But rather, settle into God's presence here at The Haven and let Him lead you. Trust Him. He has great things for you that He has invited you here for.

What follows then are the various activities you **could** choose to engage in. Begin by reading through the various options. Pay attention to your both heart and head reaction to these activities. Which ones excite you? Which ones bring up resistance in you? (that could be a good thing to look at) and which ones fall in the neutral category? Make note of these initial, internal responses. After you get through the list of options, check in with the Lord as to where to start. Be aware of sticking points in the process of these activities. Sometimes, a change in environment or processing is required. If you have been sitting, perhaps you need to walk and allow God to speak to you in a different environment or connect with him through nature. There are hiking trails listed in the notebook in the armoire upstairs. Sometimes using a different medium such as colors or paints or chalk, brings things out that words and thoughts couldn't. Don't be afraid to mix it up.

Options

1. This is a scripture that the Lord really impressed on me for this retreat. It's not horsey but somehow He brought it to me ... "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to HIM." (2chron 17:9) You may want to meditate on it free style, or use Coe's Lectio divina with the first pass through just looking for the word(s) God highlights, the second pass through asking God what He wants you to see or know, and the third pass through asking God if there is a way that He wants you to respond to this.
2. Go to page 138 of the book *Horse: A Portrait*. Read about the eyes of a horse and what they can communicate. Now let your eyes rest on the 3 photos of those horses, paying attention to their eyes. What do you see there? What does it communicate about their heart? What do you guess about their history, life experience, or current circumstances that are evident in their eyes? Now go to the mirror and look at your eyes. What do you see there? Open these thoughts to the Lord and be with Him in that. Where are areas that need His care right now? Where is there fear? Where is your past story evident in your eyes? What do your eyes reflect from your heart? "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparable great power for us who believe." (Eph 1:18) Sit with this prayer. Personalize it.
3. In the book *Horses Don't Lie*, the author writes: "You see, horses don't lie. They don't separate how they feel and how they act. The expression what you see is what you get, could have been coined for them. Whether they're feeling scared, confused, submissive, or just relaxed and confident--and believe it, horses feel all those emotions and more- they tell you exactly where they're at and what they want from you and mean it down to the bone." How does this quote strike you? Would you like to be more free, more openly honest like the horse, in your communication of your emotions and what you want or need? Does this represent freedom? Does this bring up fear?

Open this to God and allow him to show you your response to this quote on a deeper level. Is there a response to this quote that God is asking of you?

4. Psalm 20:7 is an old favorite of mine. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses but we trust in the name of the Lord, our God." It was given to me by a friend many years ago during a different horse chapter in my life. God brings it back to mind for me at different random times to nudge me about where my trust lies. I offer it to you. You may want to meditate on it. Walk with it in mind. Whatever. Or you could Lectio Divina it as outlined in option 1.
5. Visio Divina is another visual way to sit with the photos in the *Horses: A Portrait* book. The process is outlined on the board in the Experiential Worship Room but I will repeat it here. Page through the book and find an image that draws you in.
 - Prepare: Take a few moments to be still, invite the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your heart. Center yourself in Jesus.
 - Reflect: What image or place in the image is drawing you? Where is your eye being invited to rest? What attracts you? What is arising for you out of this? A memory? A feeling? A thought? Allow space for these to unfold, simply noticing your experience and being present to what is stirring in your heart? Put yourself in the scene. What would it feel like to be in this place? Is this place safe and inviting? Is it scary and challenging? Turn to Jesus now, in your heart, and respond.
 - Respond: As your prayer deepens, be open to what the Holy Spirit is showing you. How are the feelings, thoughts, desires and meanings evoked by this image connected with your life? What connection does it have with things that are important to you, or what event or season in your life does it reflect? What invitation from God is there for you? How do you want to respond?
 - Rest: now simply rest in the grace and love of God for you.

6. The bridle and bit. I have set out a bridle and bit for you. The bit is the metal part that goes in the mouth. There are different levels of control associated with different bits. This one is the highest level of control for a very naughty, not to be trusted not to run off, kind of horse. Other bits have less metal and more give. This one does not. Hold it, examine it, imagine that bit in your mouth with someone pulling on the reins to make you go where they have decided they want you to go, sometimes with rough hands that are demanding and other times with a bit more of a gentle ask. Nevertheless, with this bit in your mouth, a refusal or reluctance will have a consequence that will be immediately felt. Psalm 32:9 says "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle." As you consider that scripture and hold the bridle and bit in your hands ask the Lord in what ways are you like a horse, lacking in control. We know that when the Holy Spirit controls our life he will produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Ask the Lord to open your heart that you may see what kind of control the Holy Spirit has in your life. Where do you need to humble yourself to the Holy Spirit so that he may produce self-control? Thank the Lord that you are not going through life with this bit and bridle controlling you. Pray that when you are wrestling for control, God will bring to mind this bridle and bit to mind that you may humble yourself and allow the Holy Spirit to take the reins.
7. The author of *Horse: A Portrait*, tells a story on page 176, that I love! Turn there and laugh at the crazy hair photo of Arabella vom Taubergrund. Read her story about capturing this photo of the pony because of the fly, but amidst the impatience of her husband. What story in your own life does God bring to mind? A story of serendipity? Of almost missing out on a treasured memory due to impatience? What about that story does He want to speak to you about?
8. I think this option probably fits best at the end of the day, around dusk after a sweet day of retreat with the Lord. Although the early morning on the day of departure might be a great time for this too. I think the upstairs sanctuary room is the best place for it. The photo on page 170 in the book *Horse: A Portrait* is gorgeous!

Appreciate it. Psalm 19:1 says "The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of His hands." As you gaze out the window at the sky, praise Him and thank Him for the work of His hand as He brings things to mind.

I imagine that anyone who chose this retreat is now fully refreshed and delighted with how our God used horses to speak to them on retreat. God knows just what delights us and refreshes us and communicates to our deep. Blessings to you fellow horse lover.

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