

What is saving your life right now?

By [Elizabeth Hagan](#)

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There's a popular poem about JOY, which you may have heard before. It's an acrostic:

Jesus first

Others second

Yourself last.

It's another way of saying, "If you really want to be happy in life, you'll learn to love Jesus more than anyone else, even yourself."

I was taught this way of life as child. It teaches faith in God and selflessness. But as I became an adult, I began to wonder if Jesus' own ministry modeled this acrostic of JOY. Did Jesus *never* eat, sleep, take retreats, or be quiet from time to time? Christian culture seemed to teach me that Jesus was a robot of activity, never stopping.

But the truth is: Jesus stopped! He napped. He found quiet time just for himself. He prayed often alone. Go read any Gospel and count the references to activities such as this.

Yet, often it's not what we model in the church.

I can't tell you how many times I've been at clergy gatherings where fellow colleagues have boasted of "never taking their vacation" or "working from sun up from sun down."

I can't tell you how many church suppers I've been to where there is nothing healthy to eat.

I can't tell you how many times I've seen the joy sucked out of church folks because they don't ever stop and take a moment to enjoy the life in their own backyards!

What does this say about our faith?

As a child, I was taught salvation is making a stated confession to a community of my sin, repentance, and acceptance of Jesus. It was such a big deal that people would ask, “What was the day that you came to Christ?” And, when you appropriately answered with a markable moment, your salvation story was complete.

But, in my third year of Duke Divinity School, [Esther Acolatse](#), my pastoral care professor, challenged me on everything I thought I knew about salvation. She said that **salvation is a process of becoming a human being—the human being God designed each of us to be at creation. To be saved is to be made whole.**

There are so many implications of this definition of salvation, if we truly embrace it. But one important one is this: that, yes, God calls us to take care of ourselves.

For, there’s no way that you and I can be *human* if our schedules are out of balance or if we’re eating the wrong foods or not sleeping enough. And the list of self-care could go on.

And so maybe what is saving our lives looks like this:

Spending time with people who make us happy (*even if they are not the people we should be hanging out with*).

Eating foods that our bodies will smile about when receiving (*even if it is not what our mamas cooked growing up*).

Taking naps on our days off when we are tired (*even if it means saying no to grandchildren to hiring a babysitter for our kids*).

Staying at home some nights and doing exactly what we want (*even if we were invited to an event and should make an appearance*).

And, above all, I think activities like eating, drinking, sleeping, walking are not unspiritual. In fact by engaging in them, we are glorifying God through and with our bodies. We are saying the image of God is in us and so we must rest and love and breathe as God does.

In her book [*An Altar in the World*](#) Barbara Brown Taylor says about our salvation journey, “My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world.”

So, I’ve taken a week off to do just this—to become more human. I need more salvation. As Taylor said, our lives depend on it.

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