

The Best Rest

[Jesus said,] “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30

Song: “Come, Ye Disconsolate”

I don't enjoy exercising. I don't go to the gym. I don't run. What I do enjoy is working in the garden and playing with my granddaughter. Even though I'm doing things I love, I can feel it in my muscles and joints. Twinges of discomfort remind me I should go for more walks and get more regular exercise. It doesn't take long, though, to get past these temporary aches and pains.

Emotional pain and mental weariness, however, are not so easy to recover from. These burdens weigh us down more than any kettle bell at the gym. Sometimes it can feel as if there is no relief in sight—as if we're destined to live every day with worry, sadness, anxiety, and regret.

God does not promise us a journey free from burdens, but He does promise us relief. When we take on His yoke of humility and begin processing our burdens through the lens of His Word and with the guidance of His gentle Spirit, He will comfort and refresh our spirits with a peace that only He can provide.

Father, help me remember to bring my worries and burdens to You. You know the outcome of everything that concerns me. Thank You for the rest I can find in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

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 January 27–February 2. **Carla Edmisten** is a social worker and writer living in Ladysmith, Virginia. She enjoys reading, gardening, and spending time at the lake. Her most recent favorite pastime is being a “grammy.”

So Many Distractions

How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? (Psalm 4:2).

Scripture: Psalm 4

Song: “Seek Ye First”

I have the best intentions of getting things done on the weekends. Monday through Friday, I jot down many tasks that I plan to accomplish when the workweek is over. But when Saturday morning rolls around, I find myself drinking just one more cup of coffee and scrolling on social media for just another minute. Before I know it, I’ve spent more time than intended peering into the lives of friends, watching entertaining videos, and considering whether a trending product could actually change my life. Meanwhile, my to-do list sits in my planner, untouched. As a result, I end up rushing to get things done or moving tasks out to the following weekend.

Today’s verse calls us to stop chasing what is false and worthless. Our false gods can take many forms. Our electronic devices, social media, and television can all easily get more of our time, attention, and affection than the lasting value of seeking God and the things of God.

While it may seem odd to put prayer time and Bible reading time on our calendars or as an entry in our daily planners, doing so can help us establish these as our priority, keeping what’s important in view and reminding us to be thoughtful about how we spend our time.

Father, help me get and keep my focus on You. I want to establish patterns that will make You the first priority in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Persistent Prayer

[Jesus said,] “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?” (Luke 18:7).

Scripture: Luke 18:1-8

Song: “Hear My Cry, O Lord”

When my son was only 7 years old, he suffered a severe arm fracture that required surgery. Recovery was slow and painful. Just as he was almost healed, he took a fall that displaced the screw that had been holding the bone in place, requiring another surgery. Finally, the day came to take off the cast, but we were faced with more bad news. The screw was working its way out, and once again, surgery was necessary. We felt so defeated. Despite the prayers of many, it was as if God wasn't listening. I was angry and tired of watching my child suffer. I told God how unfair it was and that my son had been through enough.

Despite my anger, I was still talking to God. Even though He wasn't answering my prayers the way I wanted Him to, I could sense His presence. He gave us the strength to keep going and provided help in the form of family and friends who came alongside us when we were so weary.

God knows our hearts and hears our prayers, even when it feels like He isn't listening. When the answers don't come in the way we think they should, continuing to cry out to Him honors Him and demonstrates our trust in His wisdom and ways.

Father, help me to stay in constant communication with You, even when I am discouraged and disappointed. In Jesus' name, amen.

Honest Community

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (James 5:16).

Scripture: James 5:13-20

Song: “Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy”

For many years I ministered to women in the church whose pasts were filled with hurt and shame. It was a tough, painful ministry as various ones brought forth their secret regret and laid it all out before God and other women. As the weight of bearing their guilt by themselves was lifted from their hearts, there was a visible change in their demeanor and countenance. On their path to restoration, many said to me, “I thought I was the only one.” The look in their eyes when they realized they were not alone was like seeing a prisoner set free.

James tells us as believers to confess our sin to one another. When we do this within a safe community where grace and truth are lived out, we can experience the honest, heart-felt support of other believers. And as we pray for one another, God’s effective and powerful work in our lives sets us free from sin and shame.

It’s not spiritually or emotionally healthy for us to wear a false costume of perfection, pretending to be without sin. Only when we are humble and real with one another are we able to share our struggles, praying for each other and holding each other accountable.

Father, help me to be willing to be vulnerable with others and to have a spirit of grace that provides safety for others to share their burdens with me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

True Shelter

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1).

Scripture: Psalm 91

Song: “On Eagle’s Wings”

Living on the East Coast, our family is accustomed to storms and tornado warnings, particularly during hurricane season. Several years ago on a summer afternoon, notifications for storm watches and warnings started coming up on our cell phones. Tornados were headed our way. All members of my family were in three different locations, encompassing roughly a 40-mile stretch. As I huddled under a stairwell with my coworkers, I watched the radar on my phone. The storm was approaching my husband’s office, then heading toward my teenage son. A text thread had quickly developed between the three of us about our various stages of watches and warnings. Although we were all sheltered, I longed for us to be together. That evening, when we had all arrived home safe and sound, I had the most peaceful feeling.

Today’s passage reminds us that we can trust in God to provide a sense of peace and safety when we dwell in the shelter of His presence. Even in the worst of life’s storms, we are ultimately safe, at home in His perfect care.

There are many people, places, and things that can provide us with temporary shelter, but God wants us to dwell in *His* care. Rather than pop in and out when we are in crisis, we can remain in the unwavering peace of His presence.

Father, thank You for providing an everlasting shelter, for being my refuge in all of life’s storms. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Thief of Joy

You make me glad by your deeds, LORD; I sing for joy at what your hands have done (Psalm 92:4).

Scripture: Psalm 92

Song: “How Good It Is to Thank the Lord”

I have a sign in my house that reads, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” I need this reminder because I enjoy looking at magazines and watching shows that feature beautiful homes with all the latest in custom cabinetry, in-ground pools, and trendy paint colors. I can be just a few pages into a home-design magazine when I begin mentally renovating my small, 30-year-old house. As I compare—from flooring to front doors to kitchen appliances—my home seems to get smaller and more dated by the minute. Similarly, when I visit friends’ homes that are spacious and new, I am truly happy for them, but I return to my house feeling dissatisfied—all because I have compared!

For some of us, it’s easy to get caught up in thinking about blessings in terms of the material realm. But today’s passage reminds us that God’s goodness and greatness, His protection and provision, His righteousness and strength are our greatest blessings. As we focus on these, we will stay grounded in gratitude and remain full of joy.

When we’re intentional about expressing thanks each day, we stay attuned to the blessings that matter most. And as we resist the temptation to make comparisons, we preserve our contentment and joy in the Lord.

Father, thank You for this reminder that when I keep my heart at home in gratitude, rejoicing in Your goodness to me, nothing and no one can steal my joy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Honest Conversations

[Jesus said,] “When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:7-8).

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-15

Song: “Jesus Loves Me”

As a child in Sunday school, when the teacher asked for someone to pray out loud, my stomach knotted up. I avoided eye contact and even got out of praying once by saying, “I don’t feel good.” When my mother learned of my fear, she asked me about it. I told her I didn’t know what to say. She encouraged me to talk to God like I do when I say my prayers before bed. The next week when I attempted this in class, I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. I let out a pitiful, “I don’t know what to say.” Amid classmates’ giggles, the teacher put me out of my misery by calling on someone else.

That experience triggered years of fear and panic for me about praying in public. But the verses in today’s passage eventually helped set me free. I came to realize that prayers aren’t performances. They’re honest conversations with God.

God knows our every hurt, worry, and joy. He doesn’t care how our prayers sound, as long as we come to Him with humble, sincere hearts.

Father, I’m grateful for what Your Word teaches me about prayer. You don’t look for perfect phrasing or dramatic delivery. Thank You that even when I can’t find words, You always hear my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.