

A Life Long Refuge for the Weary Christ our Refuge Hebrews 6:18-20

If anyone should have been stressed out and weary it was Jesus. He lived the perfect human life, yet--He lived in a whirlwind of activity.

He was constantly eating, walking, talking, and sleeping with twelve men who never seemed to leave Him alone.

Vast crowds and desperate individuals sought him out.

He was chided, rebuked, and even scoffed at by His own family.

He was the personal target of Satan, who tempted Him, tried to derail Him, and entered people to drive them to destroy Him.

He was attacked by every demon that could be rounded up to scream at Him, thrash around in front of Him, and seek to bother Him.

Civil and religious authorities, always plotting to catch Him and take Him off for punishment and execution, hounded him.

His life was so full of people and ministry that he often didn't even have a moment to stop to eat.

Yet, in the midst of all that,
Jesus was peaceful, calm, focused, and confidently following God's will.

How did He do that?

If we follow Him, we can find His secret. Though we can never be sinless, we can learn and follow His pattern for the perfect life in step with God's will. Although Jesus lived an extremely full, busy, and demanding life, every time He is seen in the Scriptures, He is quiet, composed, and led by the Spirit.

Jesus was God, yet He lived the perfect human life as a man. What

kept that perfect life on earth so strong? What was His secret? Time alone with God that rested His soul. He stopped everything else and rested in God.

You can revitalize your walk in this world by starting or restarting a habit of cultivating rest for your soul—time in the Word and time in prayer. The songwriter #497 captures this solitude in secret with God:

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God, a place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God, a place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.

Chorus: O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God, hold us who wait before Thee near to the heart of God.¹

Jesus had cultivated the discipline of resting in His Father by getting alone with Him. He had learned the secret of waiting on God. His life shows us that intimate communion with God is needed to live a godly life full of power, under the control of God's Spirit. He calls each of us to do the same. We must learn to seek and find a solitary place in our life to get alone with God regularly.

Rest for our souls, is the great necessity of our spiritual lives. We need to be alone with God daily. We need to find times to get away alone. We need to get up early if necessary. Few of us are called to spend many hours in daily prayer, but *all* of us must spend *some* time. If it is impossible when the family is awake, pray before they get up. If you have no place you can do this at home, find a place to park your car on the way to work and pray in the anonymity of the passing traffic.

Over the next month we are going to stop and visit Christ in each of these ways the Old Testament has promised Him. As we do so we find that is how the New Testament presents Him.

Here is the pathway of the messages we will share from God's Word:

- This morning we saw that Christ is our 'holy place' and our

¹ McAfee, Cleland B. "Near to the Heart of God." *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*. Ed. Kenneth W. Osbeck. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997.

- 'righteousness'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel unclean, defiled or guilty;
- Tonight we will learn that Christ is our safe and strong 'shoulder'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel weary, exhausted or stressed;
 - Next time we will see that Christ is our 'fellowship'. He is the only Refuge for the lonely who feel left out, left behind, homeless and forsaken;
 - Christ is our 'stronghold' or 'fortress'. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we feel helpless, fearful, and powerless;
 - Christ is 'exalted' and He is in the 'heights'. He is the only Refuge for us when our hearts darken and we feel hopeless;
 - Christ is 'separated' and holy, made higher than the Heavens. He is the only Refuge for all of us when we struggle, and feel so weak when we are tempted.

FINDING CHRIST AS A LIFELONG REFUGE FOR THE WEARY

SHECHEM means "shoulder," and suggests that we find in Christ a resting place, a friend on whom we can lay our burdens. "Can I hold out?" is always the question a new believer asks. The answer is, "He will hold you!" The Lord Jesus is our strong Savior. Most believers have found that they can find no rest trying to live life their way instead of God's.

So Jesus is the **refuge for the weary**. There is no sheep of His pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers to us His perfect rest. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

For a moment do a weariness study of life around us and see if we are weary.

First, we are weary because of the **change and stress** which derail us from seeking God's Promised rest.

Isaiah 30:15 For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." But you would not,

- ✦ Although people will pay to fix their stress, they are not about to change the lifestyle that is causing it. – David C. McCasland
- ✦ The only trouble with success is that the formula for achieving it is the same as the formula for a nervous breakdown. – CHUCK SWINDOLL
- ✦ Stress may be the spice of life or the kiss of death. – Robert Elliot, M.D., CARDIOLOGIST
- ✦ Writer Robert Kanigel understands change and stress. "Here's the problem: While choices multiply, we stay pretty much the same. Our bodies and minds remain the bottleneck through which choice must pass. We still have the same brains our forebears did, still only twenty-four hours a day to use them. We still need time and energy to listen, look, absorb, distinguish,

and decide. The opportunity to choose among many options is, of course, a good thing. But maybe you can have too much of a good thing? Even of choice itself? Each choice saps energy, takes time, makes a big deal out of what isn't.²

Secondly, we are weary because of the ***ceaseless pressures of debt***³ that rob our taking advantage of God's Promised rest.

² Robert Kanigel, "Too Much of a Good Thing?" *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, 12 January 1998, p. 25.

³ Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p. 97-98.

Isaiah 48:18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Another reason we need to cease all and rest weekly is that it keeps us aware of the debt frenzy all around us.

- ✦ We will loan you enough money to get you completely out of debt. – SIGN IN A LOAN OFFICE
- ✦ More than a billion people around the world live on less than a dollar a day. – RON SIDER
- ✦ Interest works night and day, in fair weather and in foul. It gnaws at a man's substance with invisible teeth. – HENRY WARD BEECHER
- ✦ Today, our lives are addictively intertwined in the economic system, and the credit-debt mentality has been fully normalized. "Someone has described a modern American as a person: who drives a credit union-financed car over a bond-financed highway on credit card gas to open a charge account at a department store so he can fill his bank financed home with installment-purchased furniture."⁴

Thirdly, we are weary because of the ***hurry and rush*** surrounding us always displaces God's time for us to rest.

Isaiah 58:13-14 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the Lord honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, 14 Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

- ✦ "America. The land of the rushed," complains small town journalist Peg Zaemisch. "We have proudly defined our American lifestyle as 'life in the fast lane.' Now, we rush to construct passing lanes, so we can get around those pokie-schmokies in the fast lane...do they think we've got all day? We've become a country of out-of-breath-red-faced folks, racing around with our

⁴ Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne: A New Look at the Bride of Christ* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), p. 53.

- hair permanently blowing back." Zaemisch vows to tame her "catch-a-bullet-in-my-teeth schedule –just as soon as I get off this deadline."⁵
- ✦ Even our sentences are peppered with such words as *time crunch, fast food, rush hour, frequent flyer, expressway, overnight delivery, and rapid transit*. The products and services we use further attest to our hurry: We pull in our speeding cars for gas and snacks at **Quick Trip**, send packages overnight by **Federal Express**, talk while we do other things on a cell phone service called **Sprint**, manage our personal finances on **Quicken**, schedule our appointments on a **DayRunner**, diet with **SlimFast**, and even buy swimming gear made by **Speedo**.
 - ✦ Speed. Hurry. We pay a price for the pace at which we live. "No one knows where we are going, the aim of life has been forgotten, the end has been left behind. Man has set out at tremendous speed – to go *nowhere*."⁶
 - ✦ "Yes, the world⁷ is going faster. And yes, we in turn are also going faster. But the important question no one asks is this: When does faster become too fast? Is there a speed limit to life? What happens when we exceed it? Does God give us a ticket? I have thought long and hard about the issue of speed and have come to believe that it is as much responsible for the problem of personal and societal dysfunction as any other single factor. Virtually all of our relationships are damaged by hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions."⁸

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⁵ Peg Zaemisch, "Relating Life Is Harder on the Run," *Dunn County News*, 26 November 1995, p. 4A.

⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), p.56.

⁷ Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p 123-33.

⁸ Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p 123-33.

Respond to Christ. There are three imperatives in two verses.

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This is not an invitation to a party to sip and sample something. Jesus said I AM THE ANSWER, COME TO ME. This is salvation. Rest for the weary starts with salvation. The lost [and disobedient believers] have no rest in their sin. Restlessness is their lifestyle.

Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest, Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 "There is no peace," Says my God, "for the wicked."

In God's Word listening to Christ, is listening to the Holy Spirit, is obeying the Word of God. Jesus called for us to completely turn unto Him as the way to live life.

But Jesus says more; look at the second half of v. 28:

*Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all **you who labor and are heavy laden**, and I will give you rest.*

This sounds so beautiful in the word for word rendering of the Greek. Here is each word in order of the text: **Come toward Me all the ones laboring and the ones having been packed, and I will rest you.**

This calls for us to admit that something is wrong. We have to acknowledge our need. Jesus calls for those who are overloaded, and as the verse literally says "all the ones laboring and the ones having been packed".

Is life a labor? Do you feel packed in, piled so high you can't take another step? Then He says you need to listen to me.

One very gifted writer has expressed modern society's problem as OVERLOAD. Let me explain what he meant. Think with me where you show up on a diagnostic test that detects this deadly condition called overload. Do you have any of these symptoms?

WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE ACTIVITY OVERLOAD - we book our lives weeks into the future and often in the desire to be more efficient we book several things into the same time period. "Activity overload takes away the pleasure of anticipation and the delight of reminiscence." **But God says stop, hold still so you can know Me.**

Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

Psalm 46:10 "Stand silent! Know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation in the world!" (The Living Bible)

WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE CHANGE OVERLOAD - "nothing defines our age more than the furious and relentless increase in the rate of change," summarizes historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. For thousands of years of recorded history change came in a slow, controlled and understandable rate, now we are brutally jerked forward at warp speed whether we like it or not. **But God says seek out the old paths where you find rest for your soul.**

Jeremiah 6:16 Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'

WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE COMMITMENT OVERLOAD - Most of us make more commitments than we have time to give them. In his great book **Balancing Life's Demands** Dr. J. Grant Howard says, "Some people can't say no. They take on too many relationships and too many responsibilities. They enroll in too many courses, hold down too many jobs, volunteer for too many tasks, make too many appointments, serve on too many committees, have too many friends. They are trying to be all things too all men all at once all by themselves!"⁹ **But God says seek Me most, seek me with all your heart.**

Psalm 27:4 One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.

WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE CHOICE OVERLOAD - In the seventies

⁹ (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1983), p.144.

there were 11,767 items in the average supermarket; in the 1990's the number rose to over 24,000. Today that number is near 30,000. This includes over 186 different choices of breakfast cereal you can find at your grocery store. A satellite dish can serve you up 1,500 movie choices per month. Futurist Allan Toffler warns, "We are in fact, racing toward 'over-choice' ". **God says choose whom and what we will serve with all our hearts.**

Joshua 24:15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

James 1:8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE COMPETITION OVERLOAD - it's part of the American dream. To compete is American and it's constantly emphasized in school, business and athletics...but is it spiritually healthy? **Jesus taught a non-aggressive, non-self asserting, non-self promoting lifestyle for His children in the Sermon on the Mount...**

*Matthew 5:1-8 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 3 "Blessed are **the poor in spirit**, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are **those who mourn**, For they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are **the meek**, For they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, For they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are **the merciful**, For they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are **the pure in heart**, For they shall see God.*

What different counsel we get from man! J. B. Phillips illustrates this when he alters the Beatitudes to read as follows:

1. Happy are the "pushers": for they get on in the world.
2. Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them.
3. Happy are they who complain: for they get their own way in the end.
4. Happy are the blasé: for they never worry over their sins.
5. Happy are the slave drivers: for they get results.
6. Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world: for they know their way around.
7. Happy are the troublemakers: for they make people take notice of them.

WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE DEBT OVERLOAD - from the White House to the bungalow on your street most of America is awash in red ink. It is debilitating and unbiblical! **God says not to steal, not to hold on to another's possessions more than love would allow.**

Romans 13:8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Does "Owe no man anything" refer primarily to the Christian's financial practices? Some people believe that it does, and that it is a sin to have a debt. J. Hudson Taylor, the godly missionary to China, would never incur a debt, basing his conviction on this verse. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, had the same conviction. However, the Bible does not forbid borrowing or legal financial transactions that involve interest. What the Bible does forbid is the charging of high interest, robbing the brethren, and failing to pay honest debts (see Ex. 22:25-27; Neh. 5:1-11). Matthew 25:27 and Luke 19:23 indicate that banking and investing for gain are not wrong. Certainly no one should get into unnecessary debt, or sign contracts he cannot maintain. "Thou shalt not steal." But to make Romans 13:8 apply to all kinds of legal obligations involving money is, to me, stretching a point¹⁰.

The point of money is that we are not to be in bondage to wanting more and more. If we can't pay for something we should be very careful about getting it anyway because we think we need or deserve it.

WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE DECISION OVERLOAD - "every day we have more tough decisions to make and less time to do it in. The trivial ones are objectionable just because of how many there are [what flavor, which topping, mint or tartar control, low fat, low sodium, diet or regular...] But we also are facing new choices generations past never dreamed of: whether or not to wait to have children; whether to move and change jobs; whether both dad *and* mom should work outside the home; whether we should put grandma in the home or not. Too many decisions trivial or not in too short a time is vintage overload." **God says bring each decision in life to Me, wait for Me to lead, don't be in a hurry and just go on through life your own way and miss My blessing, and My leading.**

¹⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE HURRY OVERLOAD - "haste is a modern ailment. It is also fashionably American. Our lives are nonstop, lived at a breathless pace. We walk fast, talk fast, eat fast and then excuse our selves by saying, 'I must run.'" Alexander Solzhenitsyn accusingly said, "Hastiness and superficiality - these are the psychic diseases of the 20th century". **God say wait patiently for Me, don't run ahead, don't lag behind. Walk in step with my Spirit.***

*Psalm 37:7-9 Rest in the Lord, and **wait patiently for Him**; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. 8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the Lord, They shall inherit the earth.*

Galatians 5:16, 24 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

*WE ALLOW OUR LIVES TO HAVE MEDIA OVERLOAD - a single edition of the NY Times has more information than a seventeenth century Britisher would have encountered in a lifetime... How well do you know God? How much depth is there in your personal relationship with Him? Do you know His Word as well as you know your favorite hobby or sport for instance? That is the danger of information overload—our minds are full of so much that does not matter to God, eternity and what will last forever. But even more than reading are the power of TV, movies and games. 99% of Americans have TV in their homes; the average US home has 2 and both are on 7 hours a day...Distraction robs us of depth. It neutralizes the benefits of meditation and it encourages restlessness. **God says that to know Me we must guard our hearts.***

Isaiah 33:14b-17 "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" 15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly [truthfulness], He who despises the gain of oppressions [compassionate], Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes [honest], Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed [non-violent], And shuts his eyes

from seeing evil [consecrated]: 16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure. 17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.

POSSESSION OVERLOAD - We have more 'things per person' than any other nation in history. Closets are full, storage space is used up, and cars can't fit into garages. Having first imprisoned us with debt, possessions then take over our houses and occupy our time. This begins to sound like an invasion. Everything I own owns me. Why would I want more? ¹¹ **Jesus said beware of having so much in life that the care of things makes your heart grow cold...**

- *Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
- *Matthew 13:22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.*
- *Luke 12:21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*
- *1 Timothy 6:8-10 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*
- *Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

2. SUBMIT to Christ's rule. Jesus commands us to

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¹¹ This section adapted and quotations taken from Margin by Richard Swenson, pp. 83-87.

light.”

“take my Yoke”. Yoke universal sign of submission. The Bible begins and ends with the call to Submit to Christ. Look with me at the opening words of God to Adam and Eve in Genesis are to obey Him or face the consequences and that is how Revelation ends—with those who rebel facing God’s endless wrath forever.

Does SUBMITTING to Him take that place in my life? Have we given obedience to God the highest place in our lives, as the inspiration for every action and motivation? If we yielded to the searching of the Holy Spirit, we may find we have never given to Him the place of our total submission, or that we have some how over time taken it back. Let us unite in prayer that the Spirit may show us:

- how defective the Christian life is where obedience doesn’t rule all;
- how that life can be exchanged for one of full surrender to absolute obedience;
- and how sure it is that God in Christ will enable us to live it out!¹²

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; **cling to** what is good. (NIV) 2853 kollao from kolla ("glue"); join (one's self 4, cleave 3, be joined 2, keep company 1, vr reach 1; 11 1) to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together 2) to join or fasten firmly together 3) to join one's self to, cleave to

3. Become Christ's Life long Disciple.

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HOLD on to Him: “and learn of Me...” Surround yourself with His true Word. Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the Old Testament, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and

¹² Murray, p.24.

that He will deliver His elect in His time. (Is. 41:17, Lu. 18:1-8)

Gentleness or meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will. (Gal. 5:23);

Enjoy Christ's Promised Refuge for the Weary.

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- **His purpose in life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD!** Hebrews 10:7 "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come In the roll of the book it is written of Me To do Thy will, O God.'" (NASB); **Do we want God's will more than our plans?**
- **His delight in life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD!** John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. (NASB) **Are the things of earth more delightful than the Truth of God?**
- **His patience in life was knowing and DOING THE WILL OF GOD!** Psalm 40:6 Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired; My ears Thou hast opened; Burnt offering and sin offering Thou hast not required. (NASB) **Are you patient enough to let God choose what is best? Remember God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him!**
- **His priority in life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD as even unto DEATH.** John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (NASB) **Are you dieing daily to be alive in the Spirit unto Christ?**
- **His attitude of life was DOING THE WILL OF GOD in humble faith.** Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." **Are we ever whispering, "Not my will but Thine be done"?**

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pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers to us His perfect rest. Remember this week these words from Christ's lips:

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As the world around us accelerates, our energies wane. But we are not defenseless victims. The following suggestions will help replace frenzy with peace and rest.

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us Find Stillness as we bow before God* –

"Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10 NIV). Before hurrying past that profound command, let's turn it over in our minds several times.

The scene is one of stillness and quietness, listening and waiting before Him. Such foreign experiences in these busy times! Nevertheless, knowing God deeply and intimately requires such discipline. Silence is indispensable if we hope to add depth to our spiritual life.

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us in offering our selves in Surrender to God* - Trusting the Lord Completely: The Discipline of Surrender.

There is a wonderfully challenging book by the founder of Wheaton College, Dr. Edman. You will probably shake your head with understanding when I read the following words. Nothing better describes the give-and-take struggle of our early years as a Christian. They are words from a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions.

*When thou wouldst guide me
I control myself.
When thou wouldst be sovereign
I rule myself.
When thou wouldst take care of me
I suffice myself.
When I should depend on thy providings*

*I supply myself.
 When I should submit to thy providence
 I follow my will.
 When I should study, honor, trust thee,
 I serve myself;
 I fault and correct thy laws
 to suit myself,
 Instead of thee I look to
 Man's approbation,
 And am by nature an idolater.
 Lord, it is my chief design to bring my
 heart back to Thee¹³*

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us in True Preparation for worship* - - Preparation¹⁴ - The answer to the problem begins with Saturday preparation. (Any men who interpret the following as women's work are wrong. Both husband and wife should share responsibility for the practical and spiritual preparations for the Lord's Day.) It is advisable that young families have their clothing clean and laid out on Saturday night, and even that the breakfast be decided upon. The whereabouts of Bibles and lessons should be known, and even better, ought to be collected and ready. There should be an agreed-upon time to get up which leaves plenty of time to get ready for church. Going to bed at a reasonable hour is also a good idea. Spiritually, prayer about the Lord's Day is essential -prayer for the service, the music, the pastors, one's family, and oneself.¹⁵

The Puritans understood this well. As one of their great preachers, George Swinnock, quaintly expressed it:

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us Cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity in our Lives by Reordering¹⁶ One's Private World.*

The Decision	The Discipline
to reorder one's private world	simplicity
to be still	silence
to cultivate serenity	solitude
to trust the Lord completely	surrender

¹³ V. Raymond Edman, *The Disciplines of Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1948) 83.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991, p. 109-115.

¹⁵ The following pamphlets are available from Chapel of the Air: #7245, *Getting Ready for Sunday* by David and Karen Mains; 7451, *Rules for the Sunday Search* by David R. Mains; #7454, *Preparation for Sunday*; #7462, *The Sunday Search: A Guide to Better Church Experiences* by Steve Bell.

¹⁶ Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 28.

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us in Genuine Expectancy of God's Presence* -

This knowledge of God through his Word ought to heighten our expectations and instill healthy fear and reverence. As Annie Dillard wrote:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the Catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?...It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.¹⁷

Fleeing to Jesus as our Refuge from weariness: *Helps us preserve our experience the depths of God in our lives* -

¹⁷ Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 40, 41.

How can we preserve our hearts for the Lord's Day. Edith¹⁸ Schaeffer tells how, when living in Villars, Switzerland, the church bells would toll every Saturday at 4:30 P.M. as a reminder to prepare for the Lord's Day. The bells were ignored by most but were a poignant reminder of a more enlightened day.

Is Christ your city of Refuge? Is He easy to reach to you? Are His arms open to you? Do you see His entrance as never locked, and that He is a completely sufficient refuge? Do you see that there is no other hope but Him? Then He is YOUR city of refuge.

How can we start cultivating coming to Christ's promised refuge for the weary? Jesus demonstrated it is our priority, but where do we start? Here are some suggestions:

1. READ GOD'S WORD EVERY DAY.

Rest for your soul comes most readily by reading God's Word. This is the voice of God, and we must listen. No Christian can lead a Spirit-filled life full of power without regularly reading the Bible. Our minds are such that we do not retain what we need to know. They need to be refreshed again and again.

Some who have been believers for years have never read the Bible through even once. There are truths God has for us that we have not inconvenienced ourselves enough to discover. No wonder we are empty. What a difference reading the Word can make in our lives! Dr. Harry Ironside, a man of little formal education but great power, read the Bible fourteen times by the age of fourteen. His mark is still on Chicago and, indeed, the entire world.

Five pages a day is a good place to begin. At that pace, within a year you will have read the entire Bible. However, we must remember that we begin to get alone with God consistently only when we take God's Word seriously as more important even than our daily meals.

2. MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD.

Rest for your soul comes through memorization. Mrs. Barnhouse said of her famous preacher husband:

Someone once asked him how long it had taken him to prepare a certain sermon. His answer was "Thirty years and

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1993, p. 82-84.

thirty minutes!” He had immersed himself in the Bible from the time he was fifteen years old, when he memorized the Book of Philippians a verse a day until he knew the entire book by heart, then went on to other passages. He felt it was not enough to learn by rote — it had to be by heart; because you loved and believed it.¹⁹

Why not begin with a verse — perhaps a verse a week — fifty-two in one year?

Few have lived as stressful and frenetic a life as Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission, but Taylor lived in God’s rest, as his son beautifully attests:

Day and night this was his secret, “just to roll the burden on the Lord.” Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkiang might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor’s favorite hymn [“Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art”]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible—just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.²⁰

3. MEDITATE ON GOD’S WORD.

Rest for your soul comes also by meditation. This is the secret of God’s great warriors. Hudson Taylor conquered immense hardships by daily meditation on God’s Word. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor record this in his biography:

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told

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²⁰ Hughes, R. Kent. *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1997.

that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four a.m. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.²¹

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price. For those who do, however, the rewards are great. According to Psalm 1:1-3:

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season.
Whose leaf does not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.

C. T. Studd was one of God's great servants. His life was like his grass hut: There were no doors to shut. He lived with—and for—his beloved pygmy tribes. How did he prepare to teach as many as 5,000 at a time? How did he get ready to disciple the scores of church leaders who came to sit at the foot of his cot every morning, so that he would awake to a sea of black faces and white teeth waiting for him to open the Book of God to them? His diary dated February 7th, 1886, gives us the answer:

The Lord is so good to give me a large dose of spiritual champagne every morning which brace one up for the day and night. Of late I have had such glorious times. I generally awake about 3:30 AM and feel quite wide awake, so I have a good read, and then have an hour's sleep before I finally get up.²²

Studd's family described these times this way: "A Bible is taken down from the shelf, and Bwana is alone with God. What passed between them in those silent hours was known a few hours later to all who had ears to hear."²³

Studd continues in his diary:

I find then that what I read is then stamped indelibly upon my

²¹ Hughes. *Preaching the Word: Ephesians*.

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²³

heart all through the day; and that it is the very quietest of times, not a foot stir, nor a sound to be heard, saving that of God. If I miss this time I feel like Samson shorn of his hair and so of all his strength. I see more and more how much I have to learn of the Lord. I want to be a workman approved of the Lord, not just with a pass degree as it were. Oh how I wish I had devoted my early life, my whole life to God and His Word. How much I have lost by those early years of self pleasing and running after this world's honors and pleasures."²⁴

Repeat refuge words

'Come unto me, all ye labouring and burdened ones, and I will give you rest,²⁹ take up my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and humble in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls,³⁰ for my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.' Youngs

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

- "I will give you rest" is literally, "I will rest you." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" refers to the salvation of the sinner through Jesus Christ. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" refers to the practical sanctification of the believer. There is a *rest* which Jesus gives, and it is the rest of redemption. There is also a *rest* which the believer experiences, and it comes through commitment and consecration to Christ. You don't have to worry about being recognized; you don't have to jockey for position if you are committed to Christ. Frankly, I quit joining organizations because I got so tired of watching ambitious men trying to be chairman of something or trying to be president of something. If you are committed to Christ, you don't have to worry about that. He will put you exactly where *He* wants you when you are yoked up to Him.²⁵

²⁴ C. T. Studd, *Cricketeer and Pioneer*, pp 57, 206.

²⁵ McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

- **"Come."** The Pharisees all said "Do!" and tried to make the people follow Moses and the traditions. But true salvation is found only in a Person, Jesus Christ. To come to Him means to trust Him. This invitation is open to those who are exhausted and burdened down. That is exactly how the people felt under the yoke of pharisaical legalism (Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10). **"Take."** This is a deeper experience. When we come to Christ by faith, *He gives* us rest. When we take His yoke and learn, *we find* rest, that deeper rest of surrender and obedience. The first is "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1); the second is "the peace of God" (Phil. 4:6–8). To "take a yoke" in that day meant to become a disciple. When we submit to Christ, we are yoked to Him. The word "easy" means "well-fitting"; He has just the yoke that is tailor-made for our lives and needs. The burden of doing His will is not a heavy one (1 John 5:3). **"Learn."** The first two commands represent a crisis as we come and yield to Christ; but this step is into a *process*. As we learn more about Him, we find a deeper peace, because we trust Him more. Life is simplified and unified around the person of Christ. This invitation is for "all"—not just the people of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). 26
- Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews used the phrase *the yoke for entering into submission to*. They spoke of the yoke of the Law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of God. But it may well be that Jesus took the words of his invitation from something much nearer home than that. He says, "My yoke is *easy*." The word *easy* is in Greek *chrestos*, which can mean *well-fitting*. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox. There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the country men came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been: "My yokes fit well." It

may well be that Jesus is here using a picture from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years. Jesus says, "My yoke fits well." What he means is: "The life I give you is not a burden to gall you; your task is made to measure to fit you." Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.²⁷

- Unrest is one great characteristic of the world: hurry, vexation, failure, disappointment stare us in the face on every side. But here is hope: there is an ark of refuge for the weary, as truly as there was for Noah's dove. There is rest in Christ, rest of conscience, and rest of heart, rest built on pardon of all sin, rest flowing from peace with God.²⁸
- A **yoke** was made of wood, hand-hewn to fit the neck and shoulders of the particular animal that was to wear it in order to prevent chafing. For obvious reasons, the term was widely used in the ancient world as a metaphor for submission. The **yoke** was part of the harness used to pull a cart, plow, or mill beam and was the means by which the animal's master kept it under control and guided it in useful work. A student was often spoken of as being under the yoke of his teacher, and an ancient Jewish writing contains the advice: "Put your neck under the yoke and let your soul receive instruction." That is the particular meaning Jesus seems to have had in mind here, because He adds, **and learn from Me**. *Manthano* (to **learn**) is closely related to *mathetes* (disciple, or learner) and reinforces the truth that Christ's disciples are His submissive learners. They submit to Christ's lordship for many reasons, among the most important of which is to be taught by Him through His Word. A yoke symbolizes obedience, and Christian obedience includes learning from Christ.²⁹

²⁷ Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew - Volume 2 Chapters 11-28 (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1975.

²⁸ Ryle, J.C., *Matthew: The Crossway Classic Commentaries*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.

²⁹ MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

