

Searching for Rest

I want you to imagine with me...it's the end of a long busy day. It's finally time to go to bed. You brush your teeth, put on your pajamas, and crawl between the sheets. As you settle onto the mattress you breathe a sigh of relief. You can finally get some rest. You close your eyes and wait for sleep to come. And you wait. And you wait. And you wait.

I'm sure that we've all had those nights, where sleep eluded us. We were so tired but we just couldn't rest. Our trouble sleeping may be caused by different things. I've had a lot of trouble sleeping over the years, but I think my problem is genetic. My mom is often up through the night watching TV because she just can't sleep. Her father did the same thing. Sometimes our sleep issue may be physical. Our hormones are out of balance or we need more melatonin or we had too much sugar or caffeine too close to bedtime. Sometimes, though, our problems are bigger than that. We have something on our minds that prevents us from being able to rest.

Now, this study is about rest, but not physical rest. It's about spiritual rest. However, I see a lot of correlation between physical rest and spiritual, so I will be using sleep, or the lack thereof, as an analogy to help us recognize and understand some of the reasons that we may struggle to find spiritual rest. At the end of this study, I cannot promise that you will be sleeping any better, but my hope and prayer, is that you find yourself refreshed and well-rested spiritually.

This study is easily the most personal that I've ever written, because this study has been born out of my own desperation. I certainly don't want to make it all about me, but I want to share my story with you so you can understand where I'm coming from with the study. Maybe some of you can relate.

The last couple of years, I've kind of been at a low point in my life emotionally and spiritually. I often found myself irritable with my kids, resentful toward my husband, angry, bitter. There was a tremendous lack of joy in my life. There was a weariness that I just couldn't shake. I knew I did not want to continue this way, but I wasn't really sure how to fix it.

Have you ever found yourself in need of spiritual rest? What did you do to find rest?

I tried different things. I went to a doctor, to see if there was something physical going on. After running some tests, she gave me some vitamins and told me to come back in a few months. The vitamins may have helped a little bit, but they didn't fix the problem.

Over the last few years, I have been hearing a lot about self-care, which has to do with taking care of your own well-being and happiness, taking time out for yourself to do things that are meaningful and relaxing to you.

In fact, not that long ago, I received an email with the subject line "Thriving Mom = Thriving Family. Open for Self Care." When I opened it, I read, "What if taking care of yourself is the first step to helping your family thrive? Mothers are humans too. We require love, compassion, rest, and renewal. Taking care of our needs strengthens us and equips us for the road ahead."

Now, I don't disagree with that necessarily, and I have tried taking time for myself, which isn't easy for a stay-at-home mom. At the end of a stressful week, I might go out shopping by myself, or take myself out to lunch. Those things are nice, and I enjoy them while they last. But when I get home, the kids are still fighting, the housework is still waiting. I found that self-care was a temporary fix. It didn't solve my problem.

What I came to realize is that my problem went deeper. It wasn't something that could be fixed by physical rest or relaxation because my weariness was spiritual. I had this fatigue deep in my soul. And

because my problem was spiritual, I knew I needed to find a spiritual solution. So, I set out to discover how to find the spiritual rest that I so desperately needed, and this study is the culmination of that.

Where should we go for the answers to our spiritual problems?

The verses in Matthew 11:28-30 kept coming to mind: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

I definitely wanted that rest for my soul, but how was I supposed to go about getting it? I’m convinced that many Bible studies and Bible teachers are great at telling us what we should do, but they don’t always tell us how to do it. That’s where I was. I knew I needed to come to Christ for rest, but didn’t know exactly how to do that.

What does it mean to come to Christ, as we read in Matthew 11:28?

The verses say come to Jesus and He will give us rest. So, spiritual rest is obviously not something that we can find on our own apart from Him. But how do we come to Him?

I also thought about the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:39-42:

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.

We may talk more about this story later, but what struck me here was the idea of Mary just resting at the feet of Christ. I realized that coming to Christ simply means being in His presence, spending time with Him.

Do you struggle when it comes to spending time with Christ? If so, why?

I think I struggled with this, though, because unlike a human that I can see and talk to, Jesus is this invisible presence. So, I started thinking about, “How do we spend time with Christ?” And the answer that came me is through what we call the spiritual disciplines, things like Bible reading, meditation, prayer, worship, and confession and repentance.

Are you familiar with the spiritual disciplines? Which do you practice regularly?

Now you may be thinking, “That’s so obvious, I can’t believe she didn’t get that sooner,” but this was actually an “aha” moment for. I already knew that I needed to be doing those things, and I was to some extent. But I realized that I wasn’t doing them for the right reasons or in right way or not often enough.

I’m sure that you all know the importance of a daily quiet time. But I would guess that, for most people, their quiet time consists of reading a little bit in the Bible or reading a devotional, followed by a prayer. And that’s probably about it. I would guess worship is mostly saved for the Sunday morning service, and meditation is rarely practiced. Confession probably only comes when you have a guilty conscience. At least that’s how it is for me. Maybe you are doing much better in this area than I am.

What I had to realize is that these things are not an end unto themselves, meaning we don’t read the Bible just for the sake of reading the Bible. The spiritual disciplines are a means unto and end, meaning that they are meant to be tools that bring us into the presence of Christ. We’ll be talking about each of them individually, but let’s have a quick overview.

Scripture Reading: When we read the Bible, for example, we don't do it just to check it off of our list for the day. The purpose of reading the Bible is to help us spend time with Jesus. Our goal in Bible study is not to learn more about ourselves or get some moral or principle that we can apply to become better people. The goal of Bible study is to find Christ on every single page of Scripture, even the hard books like Leviticus or Deuteronomy. Believe it or not, Jesus is in Leviticus just as He is in Matthew or Mark. We should walk away from our Bible having rested at the feet of Christ.

Meditation: Many people misunderstand meditation, relating it to the idea of emptying your mind and entering a meditative state. That's not what we mean when we talk about it in a Christian context. According to Wikipedia, Christian meditation simply refers to "the process of deliberately focusing on specific thoughts (such as a Bible passage) and reflecting on their meaning in the context of the love of God."¹ Meditation can help us spend time with Christ by dwelling on who He is and what He has done for us.

Prayer: When we pray, it's not about just giving God our wish list for that day... "God help so-and-so, and please heal so-and-so." There's a place for that, but our prayer is to be Christ centered. We can find rest in Christ through our prayers.

Worship: Worship is much bigger than just singing songs on Sunday morning, although that certainly is a form of worship. We can worship Christ anytime and in many ways. Worship is another way of being deliberately aware of Christ's presence and focusing on Him.

Confession and Repentance: When we have unconfessed sin in our lives, it creates a barrier between us and God. It's hard to rest with a guilty conscience. By confessing our sin and repenting, our relationship with God is restored, and we can find rest.

These are the things we'll be talking about in this study. In the first lesson, we'll discuss the meaning and importance of spiritual rest. Then, each lesson after that will focus on one reason that prevents us from finding spiritual rest, and then the spiritual discipline that is the cure for that problem. But the focus overall is on Christ, and how to use these disciplines to draw us into His presence.

How satisfied are you with your use of spiritual disciplines? Which do you hope to improve on?

Hopefully, this is something that will be beneficial to all of us. However, if you feel like you already know how to rest in Christ, come anyway, because then you share your wisdom with us. This is not something that I have worked out. I'm still sorting through things and figuring it out. I'm definitely hoping that some of you can share your insight and add to the discussion.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_meditation#:~:text=Christian%20meditation%20is%20the%20process,God%20that%20marks%20Christian%20communion.