

# *Soul Rest*

*A Journey with Jesus*

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I love all of you.

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# *Introduction*

“COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOR and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Isn't that what you want—rest? Isn't that what we all want? You want that curl-up-in-a-blanket, put-your-feet-up, sip-hot-cocoa, or snuggle-in-bed-and-snore kind of rest. It sounds so good, and you should have it, right? Isn't that what Jesus meant when He said His yoke is easy? Isn't that what busy women and moms deserve?

I'm going to tell you, no, that isn't what He meant and, no, that isn't what you deserve. He actually meant something much greater than “me time,” and He has called believers away from the measly things we think we deserve.

This book is not a self-help, DIYer on how to find time, make time, and use time. This study is not going to help you supernaturally get all your ducks in a row. This book, however, invites you to come alongside Jesus and His disciples to learn from the Master. You are going to see that, through the believer's careful tending and thoughtful intention toward knowing the Savior, God delicately places into that believer's heart the gift of soul rest.

With two small children, a husband, Bible study classes to teach, worship to lead, chores to do, and dreams to pursue, I have often found myself right where you are or, perhaps, have been: tired, frustrated, lonely, and feeling as though everyone else has figured this thing out except me. Weekends away couldn't fix it; kid-free shopping trips couldn't fix it; dinner dates and manicures couldn't fix it.

So, what does? What does provide deep, life-changing, freedom-giving rest? I found that all the “me time” in the world, every amount of self-care, and every last drop of coffee couldn't give me the rest I needed—my soul was tired, not just my body. As the Lord delicately and graciously pulled my gaze

back to Himself and away from myself, I was easing into a life where breathing came naturally again. It's not always perfect; I still lose sight of Him and of what I am made for. I still get buried under my own expectations. But I am learning, and I want to show you.

Come with me and let's see what our rest in Christ, our soul rest, really looks like, where it comes from, what it accomplishes, and how to get it as we walk, work, and rest alongside our Savior in a journey through moments in the four Gospels.

# *God's Plan of Salvation*

Carefully ponder these Scripture verses, as they explain how you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. God loves you and wants you to enjoy the abundant life He offers you.

- John 3:16—“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
- John 10:10—Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

All people are sinful, and their sin separates them from God.

- Romans 3:23—“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God].”

Jesus Christ's death is the only provision God has made to pay for man's sin.

- Romans 5:8—“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- John 14:6—“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

You must receive Jesus Christ as your Savior before you can personally experience His love for you and the abundant life He has planned for you.

- John 1:12—“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”

You can invite Christ into your life right now by an act of faith.

- Ephesians 2:8–9—“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Are you ready to invite Christ into your life to be your Savior? Use the following prayer as a guide to help you express your desire to God: “Lord God, I know I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe Jesus died for my sins. Right now I receive Him as my Savior. Take control of my life, and replace all the restlessness and anxiety with peace and contentment.”

If you have prayed this prayer, tell your Bible study leader or a friend who has been trying to help you.

Learn to trust God’s Word—not your feelings—when doubts come.

- Romans 10:13—“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
- 1 John 5:11–13—“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”



## L E S S O N 1

# Come to Me

*Soul rest is deep, sustaining refreshment that comes from surrendering ourselves as we draw near to the Lord.*

JESUS SAID, “COME TO ME, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). His voice echoes through the hills of time and excites us with His promise of rest. I’m sure you’re not surprised to find Matthew 11:28–30 in a book about rest. If you’ve been around the Bible or believers long enough, you’ve come to know this Scripture passage well. But don’t let your familiarity with verse 28 lull you to sleep. There is a treasure of truth in these verses and so much more than we typically spot from the surface.

Open your Bible to Matthew 11 and get ready to pull this passage apart and savor it one bite at a time. I want you to really fill up on Scripture, so read verses 20–30 and take your time. I’ll wait.

## Study

### Come to Me

*Read Matthew 11:20–30.*

1. In your own words, paraphrase Matthew 11:28–30. Don’t worry about getting it wrong or sounding silly. We’re all friends here.

“Come” is an active word commanding immediate action. It indicates the leaving of one place or thing and the action of going intentionally toward another place or thing. It is an invitation to something else. But what?

2. Glance back to Matthew 11:20–24. Considering this context, what could the calling to “come” be a call to?

Jesus was rebuking the cities in which He had done great miracles. They saw the Christ and His power but rejected Him as their Messiah. They did not repent.

We often look at our exhaustion, fatigue, and inner turmoil as if they are the problem when they are just the symptoms. Access to deep, fulfilling rest depends on the condition of our souls; the condition of our souls depends on repentance! Repentance is a “radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience.” Isaiah 30:15 says, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” According to this verse,

Returning/Repentance + Rest = Salvation

Jesus’ invitation to “come to Me” is an invitation to turn from our wickedness to meet Christ. It is meeting Him at the foot of the cross to receive His grace through faith.

You can’t have rest without first having repentance. When Peter preached to the crowds in Solomon’s Portico (Acts 3:11–26), he said, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (v. 19). Repentance is always the first step in coming to Christ.

Now, before you think, “I’ve already done that; I’m good,” let me urge you to slow down and consider this: repentance is not a onetime thing; it is a way of life.

As seen in Romans 7:15–25, the apostle Paul struggled with his sinful thoughts and choices. Likewise, all Christians, young

and old, are still massively flawed creatures who are prone to wander. As we sin, we are to continually repent and reclaim our rest. This does not mean that when we wander we lose our security in salvation, but it does mean that we have wandered away from the intimate relationship available to us with the Savior (Hebrews 12:7–11).

3. When was the last time you repented? If it has been a while, quiet yourself and ask the Lord to reveal any unconfessed sins and then confess them immediately.

In Matthew 11:28, who is this “Me” to which we come? He is the Christ (John 20:31), the Messiah (John 11:27), the Holy (Isaiah 43:15) and Righteous One (1 John 2:1), the prince of life, Whom God raised from the dead (Acts 3:15). He is the One Who heals (Mark 2:11), saves (John 3:16), redeems (Ephesians 1:7), shelters (Psalm 27:5), justifies (Romans 5:1), and loves (1 John 4:19).

This action of turning and moving toward another place or thing (repentance) is worth considering only if the person or place we move toward is worthy.

4. Read Matthew 11:27 and John 14:6. What is the significance of Jesus’ claims about Himself in these verses?

Jesus does not call us to a program, a system, or even a religion. He calls us to Himself.

## **All Who Labor and Are Heavy Laden**

Are you laboring? Most women would answer with an enthusiastic if not exhausted yes! An overloaded in-box and an overflowing laundry basket? Check. An overgrown to-do list and an overgrown lawn? Check. Children to feed, home repairs, school projects, overbearing bosses, ungrateful teenagers, and the list goes on. Check! Check! Check!

But Matthew 11:28 doesn't address this kind of labor directly (we'll get to that later). This verse is addressing intense labor as a response to the heavy-laden burden that has, at some point, crushed us all. It is the labor of unsuccessfully attempting to shake off the chains of a burden.

5. Read Psalm 38:1–8. Write a summary statement of David's feelings and situation. Make sure to note what was bringing him such grief.

There are two types of people laboring under an excruciating burden: the ones who have yet to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and the ones who have believed but who haven't fully surrendered to intimacy with Him.

The first type of person is laboring under a heavy burden that her unrepentant soul simply cannot bear. This labor is hard, unpleasant work, such as the Jews under the burden of Old Testament law; present-day religionists laboring under sacraments, rules, and ordinances; or nonreligious people simply trying to get the most out of life. These things are apart from God and His salvation and, therefore, place an unnecessary burden on top of her already sin-weary shoulders.

The nineteenth-century Baptist pastor Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "A soul which has to bear the load of its own sin, and the load of divine wrath, is indeed heavily laden. Atlas with the world upon his back had a light load compared with a sinner upon whom mountains of sin and wrath are piled."

The second type of person is laboring for a different reason. She has received the grace of God and the forgiveness of her sins, but she thinks she needs to make herself worthy. The longer she labors unnecessarily, the heavier the weight of her sin feels.

A five-pound weight in my hand doesn't feel like much until I try to hold it for five minutes, five hours, or twenty-five hours.

Eventually I will become paralyzed by that little five-pounder. The same goes with the burden of our sin: the longer we hold it, any sin will eventually debilitate us.

The second person finds it impossible to rely fully on God's grace; she stacks up piles and piles of extras. If your church needs a new nursery worker, she's your gal! If your Christian school needs someone to bake cookies for a fund-raiser, she'll feel guilty if she doesn't do it! She works because she can't possibly imagine why God would want her just as she is. Not with her heart and its secrets. Not with her past and its skeletons.

If we know that it is "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8), why are we always trying to do something to get into God's good favor? Spurgeon put it like this: "Your old, toilsome labor must be done with, for no man can carry the double burden of his own guilt and of the service of God. That cannot be."

6. Are you laboring to earn salvation, to be good enough to enter Heaven, or to "go big" in this life? Or are you laboring to be worthy of the salvation you've already received by grace? Are you struggling to shake the guilt of your past and trying to self-soothe through greater and greater "service" to God as a means of making amends?

## **I Will Give You Rest**

Jesus doesn't say, "Take my yoke . . . because I said so." Instead, He says He has a gift for us when we come to Him. He offers to give us rest in exchange for our sinful burdens. He gives beauty for ashes (Isaiah 61:3). What a gift!

7. What is your definition of "gift"?

I'm guessing that your definition includes the word "willing," "present," "undeserved," or "free." In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus Christ is offering to immediately exchange our mess for

His rest through the gift of salvation. This rest is conditioned only on our acceptance of the gift.

Earlier, I mentioned Peter preaching in the temple. I specifically quoted Acts 3:19 but left out the end of the verse. Let's look at it in its entirety.

8. Write out Acts 3:19 and 20 below and highlight or underline the result of repentance.

The rest Jesus offers is refreshment from being with Him. His nearness—by itself—is enough.

## **Take My Yoke upon You**

A “yoke” is a “wooden bar or frame by which two draft animals (such as oxen) are joined at the heads or necks for working together.” The yoke Jesus offers brings the person who accepts it into intimacy with Him so the two can work together. John Walvoord explains it this way:

In exhorting them to take His “yoke,” Jesus was inviting them to discipleship. A pupil enrolling for instruction under a teacher is considered as coming under a “yoke.” Instead of exchanging one burden for another, however, it is exchanging one which is onerous and crushing for one which is light and rewarding. There is an inner satisfaction and rest of soul in being a disciple of Christ which is unknown by the child of the world, who attempts to bear his own burden.

In Matthew 11:29–30, Jesus described His yoke.

9. Complete Matthew 11:29–30, paying special attention to the words.

“Take My \_\_\_\_\_ upon you and learn from Me, for I am

\_\_\_\_\_ and lowly in heart, and you will find \_\_\_\_\_ for your souls. For My \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ and My \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.”

Believers are yoked with Christ like a bullock to a huge ox. Yoked with the ox, the young bull learns how the ox moves, the path the ox walks, and how to do the work. Additionally, while the bullock is busy learning, the large, towering ox continues to carry all the weight of the yoke. J. Dwight Pentecost says, “The yoke to which Christ invited people, when borne as a co-laborer with Jesus Christ, is no burden at all. It is a source of rest, satisfaction, enjoyment, and contentment. Christ is our life and he is our strength. When one is yoked to Jesus Christ, that which is performed is the joy of the true disciple.”

10. Complete the chart below. I have filled in the “My Yoke” side for you; these are some descriptions of a person’s burden under the law, sin, or self-imposed works. Fill in the second column with the opposite description of Jesus’ yoke. Scripture is provided for reference.

My Yoke	Jesus’ Yoke
Lonely; without help and strength	Psalm 46:1—
Sinful and self-righteous	2 Corinthians 5:21—
Bringing no joy	Romans 15:13—
Bringing death and destruction	Romans 8:6; Matthew 7:13–14—

If you have yet to repent and “come” to Christ, Matthew 11:28 is a great promise! But some of us who are already followers of Jesus can read Matthew 11:28–30 and think we must have missed something: we made the exchange yet still feel incredibly burdened by a heavy load. Why?

Often we mistake this passage to mean that life will be easy and light, or that our aspirations will be easy and light, or that our anxieties will be easy and light. No! It is Christ’s yoke that is easy and His burden that is light. As we walk through life, we pick up baggage; we get dust on our feet. We are broken people in a broken world, and the burden is going to ache sometimes. The muscles in our shoulders are going to get sore, our legs are going to get weak, and our lungs are going to burn.

For you—if this is you—your rest is found in this yoke too. Remember that the “large, towering Ox” Who has gone before you now walks beside you. Lift your head, look up, and see Him there with His understanding eyes and the sweat on His brow. Remember that you are not alone.

## **And Learn from Me**

Once we have entered the rest of Christ and taken on His yoke and His burden, we enter His apprenticeship program. Like any good apprentice, we will make mistakes along the way, but we will learn only as we continue to watch, listen, study, and position ourselves near to the Master.

What’s even better is that we don’t learn just His work; we learn Who He is! We increase in personal intimacy with Him.

11. According to the second part of Matthew 11:29, what are two things we will learn about Christ?



Doesn't that sound like the kind of master you want to know?

## **Find Rest**

Previously we saw that Christ gives rest, like an undeserved endowment. In Matthew 11:29, however, the words change, and we see that we find rest.

12. Does this change in words contradict the previous promise of the immediate gift of rest? Or does it mean something different? Write your thoughts.

We receive immediate rest from Jesus as He frees our souls from sin and death. But we also find daily rest as we take on His yoke and burden and as we learn from Him. So the rest that we "find" is an ever-deepening rest that we slowly and steadily discover as we learn from Jesus and learn about Him. In other words, eternal soul rest is given when we come to Christ, and daily soul rest is found as we walk with Christ.

## **Application**

It is under the grace-filled yoke of Christ that we find rest; therefore, that is where we must start. Examine your heart now. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, change that immediately. (See "God's Plan of Salvation," p. 7.) If you do have a personal relationship with Christ, ask Him to reveal any labors you are still working out or any burdens you are still insisting on carrying. Then repent and release them.

## Prayer

*Heavenly Father,*

*I have laden myself with the unnecessary burden of my own desires, my own choices, and my own sins. I confess those to You now and ask that You continue to search my heart, revealing to me places of my soul that need tending. Lord, help me to assume only the burden You have intended for me to bear, to continually come to You, and to find rest for my weary soul at Your feet.*

*Amen.*