

Monday: Where to Find Rest

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

-Matthew 11:28-30

You don't have to go very far into your day to feel burdened by the stresses and difficulties that come in this life. Many times our own mistakes or shortcomings bog us down, make us tired, and put weights on our shoulders. Jesus' offer in these verses is especially inviting when we're facing those sorts of burdens. His gentleness and humility, his rest, and his yoke. If we learn from him, rest will be found for our souls.

The problem is that instead of admitting how heavy the burden is we try to carry the weight alone. This is one of the ways that the devil gets us to feel alone and isolated. For you, listen to Jesus' invitation again. He tells anyone who is tired or weighed down to come to him. So, draw closer to him, and learn from him. There is no better teacher to learn from, and no other teacher who will make your burdens lighter.

Thought for today: What burdens could you bring and lay at Jesus' feet? How will you make sure his teaching is in your mind today?

Deeper Question: When you feel overwhelmed or overburdened where do you usually turn for support? What would it look like for you turn and come to the Lord with all of your burdens when you're feeling this way? How could you prepare yourself to do that next you need to?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for taking our burdens and giving us rest. Please help us to take your yoke and learn from you.

Tuesday: Drawing Near to Listen

Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

-Ecclesiastes 5:1-3

People, apparently, have always struggled with taking their worship to God seriously. It is not hard to make worship to God more about yourself rather than about God. If there is not much thought or intentional effort to listen to God then people often start slipping into a selfish version of worship. The worst part about it is that we can fool ourselves and not even realize what we are doing.

So you need to guard your steps as you approach God in worship; be careful! The key action that is given here as a solution for selfish worship is listening rather than speaking. We use our speech selfishly all the time, in general if you can grow as a listener you will grow in selflessness. But it is especially important in your relationship with God, you need to listen much more than you speak!

Thought for today: The times you gather with the church do you go to listen or are you there for some other reason?

Deeper Question: What does it look like to be a good listener? How could you grow to be a better listener to others? How could you grow to be a better listener to God?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for listening to us and hearing our prayers. Please help us to draw near to you and listen.

Wednesday: Our God is Patient

But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

-2 Peter 3:8-9

God sees the world differently than us in many ways, but what Peter says here about time is especially challenging. For our God one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. Time is both shorter and longer for him, and that makes our head spin because we can't really grasp it. But that's not really Peter's point in saying that. Peter is trying to help us understand how important it is to God that all come to repentance. Our Lord is incredibly patient because he is waiting for more people to turn to him.

What's funny is that we struggle to be patient for the day, or for a couple months, and anything longer than that often doesn't seem possible for us. Our God exists in patience. The fact that the world is still turning is because God is being patient with you, with me, and with everybody else. Hopefully today as you reflect on God's patience it will encourage you not only to be more patient yourself, but also to see the value of all the people around you that God is patiently waiting to build a relationship with.

Thought for today: How can you remind yourself to be more patient today?

Deeper Question: Find another verse where God's patience is talked about—what does it say about God's patience and how does it help you to grow in this way?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for being patient with us. Please help us to grow in patience and see the world the way you do.

Thursday: Such a Time as This

Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

-Esther 4:13-14

Esther lived in a very unique time. Her and many of the Israelite people were still living as captives in the land of Persia. As event unfold for Esther she gets married to the king of Persia, but a decree to kill all of the Jewish people in the land goes out not long after that. She was in a special position to possibly be able to help, but if she spoke up she might also be put to death. It took encouraging words from her uncle, Mordecai, to help her realize that maybe she had come to her position of authority to save her people.

Now you probably are not queen of a country, but that doesn't mean that you fall into the trap that Esther almost fell into. It is really easy to underestimate what your example, words, actions, or influence might accomplish if you are willing to put yourself out there and act! Maybe you aren't seeing the opportunities to be helpful in your family. Maybe you're missing how you could help your friends at school or at church. Maybe there is somebody you could give a call or write a letter to. There are many opportunities, and maybe you are where you are so that you can help!

Thought for today: What is one place in your life that there might be an opportunity to serve that you haven't helped with? How could you help in that situation?

Deeper Question: Are there any times you can look back on and see the way somebody else helped or encouraged you? What did they do for you? How can you learn from them and what extra motivation does that give you?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for using us in your service. Please help us to see the opportunities you have placed in our lives to serve.

Friday: Forgiveness is for All

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

-Romans 3:21-26

All people are equal in our need for forgiveness from God. Everybody has made selfish mistakes and there is no way that we could make up for those mistakes on our own. Thankfully, because our God is so gracious and merciful, we have been given forgiveness through Jesus Christ. His blood covers all of our sins and shortcomings no matter how ugly we might think they are.

There are two mistakes that are commonly made when trying to understand God's forgiveness. The first is a problem of self-magnification. What I mean by that is that you take a magnifying glass to your own sins and make them so big in your mind that you believe forgiveness is impossible! You may believe that others can be forgiven, but you could never be forgiven because the mistakes you made are worse. Jesus' sacrifice is bigger than your failings, and his grace covers you. The second mistake is a lack of reflection. You may appreciate that God forgives you, but you don't reflect on that fact enough to share it with others. Once forgiven you have to reflect God's forgiveness to the people around you who need it just as much as you do.

Thought for today: How does God's forgiveness change the way you respond when people wrong you?

Deeper Question: Do you know what all of the words used about God in these verses mean? Take some time to think about what righteousness, justified, redemption, propitiation, and forbearance mean.

Prayer: Our God, thank you for forgiving us. Please help us to appreciate that forgiveness and reflect it to others.

Saturday: More than Religious

"I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

-Amos 5:21-24

There are many times in the Old Testament where God tells his people messages like this one. This mistake that the Israelites were making is common. Their worship to God only went as far as the religious traditions they practiced, but it did not change how they treated other people. They were, it seems, consistent in their festivals and sacrifices, but they were not fair or compassionate to the people around them. These people lived however they wanted and then thought they could convince God to approve of their lives by being religious.

We are not very different than those people; they made this mistake because it is an easy mistake to make. Instead of letting God's Word into your heart you take the most obvious or observable parts of following God and only do those. We can easily fall into only following the parts of God's will for us that don't demand much of us. Maybe it's easy to go to church on Sunday, but you don't treat the people around you with love or fairness. The question isn't how faithful you are in the ways that are simpler for you, but how faithful are you in the ways that challenge you to grow to be more like our Lord?

Thought for today: How can you deepen your relationship with God today? What is one way you could live out God's character to the people around you?

Deeper Question: These people in Amos had tricked themselves? Do we ever trick ourselves? How does that happen and how can you avoid it?

Prayer: Our God, thank you for being righteous and just. Please change our characters to reflect yours.