

Jesus said 'Come to me and find rest' (Matthew 11v28)

NT: REST: ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.. (Mt 11v28-30 – NIV).

PEACE: ⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. ⁷ And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4v6-7)

WORK: ⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6v7-10)

OT: Thus says the LORD, "Stand by the roads and look; ask for the ancient paths where the good way is; then walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. (Jeremiah 6:16); The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing. (Zeph 3.17);

The stresses of life.

A scientist notices that the colleague working with him on a vital project is showing signs of stress, and he says 'Don't worry professor, you are a rock and some rocks are turned into diamonds under extreme pressure'. The Prof replied 'Yes, but the other rocks get crushed into dust'.

Who here would like less stress and more rest in their lives ?

Each one of us faces stress, anxiety or even depression in our lives at certain times, even for some, much of the time. Stress raisers come from all directions. Work, family, other relationships, finances, bereavement, health, waiting on test results, and a load of other stuff ! What are your stress raisers right now?

Does Jesus really want you and I to feel a high level of stress, and if not, what can we do about it?

Did he say... Blessed are those who take on the weight of the world? Blessed are those who live up to expectations of others? Blessed are the anxious?.

Uh – No ! He said ²⁸ "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** ²⁹ **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.** (Mt 11v28-29) Amen !

Rest for our Souls?

First I want to ask what does Jesus mean by saying we will find rest for our souls. What does this look like.

Tired and anxious people are often described as weary souls. I confess that understanding this role of my soul has been difficult for me.

I do though as many believe that the soul is that part of us that calls out to God, seeking that connectivity with our creator. No matter how much you achieve your ambitions, are wealthy, good-looking, famous or powerful, you can never have your soul truly at rest apart from Jesus in you, reaching out to his Father.

Dallas Willards also describes our soul as the deepest part of us, the part that brings together our will power (our intentions), our minds (thoughts and emotions) and our bodies (what we do) into **harmony**.

When our mind, will and body are pulling in different directions, then it brings anxiety. For example you have decided to give up smoking, that is your will, but your body craves nicotine, and wants you to carry on and have as many before, your mind is telling you just have the one.

Do you recognise this type of inner conflict in yourself or in others, as a source of anxiety?

God wants for our souls to be at rest, bringing our body, mind and will into harness. This is a soul free of inner conflict, a soul at rest.

Come to Jesus

So Jesus says "***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***" The first word is 'Come'.

Peter saw Jesus do a miracle and said to Jesus leave me, I am an evil man'. Jesus said Come, I accept you just as you are, warts and all. We will sort all your 'stuff' later.

You may well be tired and worn out, but whatever state you are in, Jesus invites you to come, make yourself available to him, and join in with what he's doing, kingdom work. As you are! No need to do a membership course first, or sort out your addictions first. Come to me, and then I will help you sort your 'stuff out', because any bad habits and destructive life-style that we have, will create internal conflict in us.. But first if you want 'rest' come.

Jesus is a **secure place to come**, as he is always there for you and promised that if you come to him, he will never leave you (**Mt 28v20**).

A small child is restless and creeps into his Father's bedroom to sleep. He climbs alongside Father and lies there in the dark. "Is your face turned towards me Father" asks the child. "Yes" his Father replies "My face is turned towards you". Knowing his Father was present and faced towards him, was enough to take away his anxiety and unrest, and allow the child to go to sleep.

Just knowing that you are not alone, and Jesus, is with you, is in itself a comfort. Jesus says Come and join me. You can not find rest without Jesus

Give Jesus Control

Jesus then says "Take my yoke upon you", and later adds "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"

A **yoke** was a wooden beam normally used, at the time of Jesus. between a pair of **oxen** or other animals to enable them to pull together on a load when working in pairs. It harnesses them to the plough. It was common to yoke an experienced animal, perhaps one that is very used to ploughing, to one that is a novice who will learn the way to work from the experienced one.

Jesus is saying, harness yourself to me, let me take control of your life. There is work to do together, that I have for you, kingdom work, but **I will take the heavier load** for you. All that 'stuff' that is causing you stress and anxiety, follow my lead, give me control, and we will deal with it and overcome it together. Jesus is saying that yoked to him, listening to his voice in prayer, following his lead, and being empowered by His Spirit, then you can achieve things and overcome things that you could never do in your own strength.

When we do that, when we come to Jesus, and give him control then he gives us what we need to find Rest.

Game of Cards

Imagine life is like a game of cards, and you have been dealt a hand. You arrange your cards so you know what you have got and are familiar with them, then you play one and you draw another from the deck, and you strengthen your hand. You are comfortable with what you have in your hand. Then suddenly you draw a bad card, or you even have to shuffle your cards back into the deck and draw a new hand. The pandemic has been like that for many. We are holding a very different set of cards than we were 18 months ago, and there is not a family in the UK unaffected by it, to a greater or lesser extent. Many have become far more anxious and it's not surprising.

What does **your** hand of cards need to look like, for **your** soul to be at rest. I am not going to attempt a full answer but recommend four trump cards to you, These are the four aces in the pack that Jesus can give us.

♠ **Ace of Spades: The Word of God**

Step 1 – Learn

The first Ace in the pack, requires us to do some spade work.

V29 - *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart*

As we give control to Jesus, and walk with him, he will gently teach us. He will show us more.

After the death of Jesus, Cleopas and his companion were walking along the 12km road from Jerusalem to Emmaus to Jerusalem. They were upset and anxious. Their souls were in conflict over what to do now their messiah had been killed. Then Jesus in bodily form, but in disguise, appears on the road beside them. They said Come to Jesus. He walked with them, took control of the conversation and taught them the scriptures, explaining why Jesus had to die. Later after they knew it was Jesus and he has gone they said ““Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk 24v32).

God Words is exciting stuff, and we have so much that Jesus can teach us from the bible, but also through books and blogs and seminars and sermons, and sharing with Christian friends. If we are going to learn we need to put the effort in, do the **‘spade work’**.

He is teaching us to be more like Him. We need the teaching if we are to find rest for our souls. Paul wrote **“Do not conform yourself to the standards of the world, but let God transform you inwardly, by a complete change of mind (Rom 12v2)**. It comes through submission, through prayer and through teaching. Ironically being disciplined in this way can be tough, but its worth it to become more like him, as the more like him we become the less inner conflict we will have.

One of my team at work regarded herself as a couch potato, and she got a phone app which became her teacher. It was called ‘couch to 5k’, and she did all the running routines asked of her, then after she could run 5K, she started training for her first half marathon. So is being a fit person ultimately more restful, than being a couch potato and then struggling with a number of health issues caused by your inactivity? I would say yes, but to find that place of rest as a healthy individual there are wrongs with your mind and body that need correcting by disciplined training and that brings you pain and discomfort.

Jesus is a gracious but relentless trainer, far more eager to see us be transformed than we are ourselves. We might think we’ve come far enough down our Christian path and really don’t want any more uncomfortable even painful situations. But He loves us too much to leave us where we are. We are not nearly as eager for our growth in holiness as he is. But the truth is, we don’t really know what’s good for us, but he does.

Step 2 – Apply

So Jesus says all you who are weary and burdened, anxious and stressed, come to me, give me control, and learn from me and you will find rest for your souls.

But what are we actually receiving from Jesus? What is our rest? We can’t just look at this passage in isolation. Rest is not the same as being lazy or doing nothing, although of course there needs to be time set aside for relaxation. After all we are taking on the yoke of Jesus, so there is work to be done. The apostle Paul actually said to the Church in Galatia that they should never tire of doing good. We need to apply to our lives what we learn in the word.

⁸ If you plant in the field of your natural desires, from it you will gather the harvest of death; if you plant in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit you will gather the harvest of eternal life. ⁹ So let us not become tired of doing good; for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest. (Galatians 6v8-9)

Paul picks up on an image Jesus used of the sower, who sows seeds, and from those that fall in good soil, there is a good harvest. If we put our efforts into selfish ambitions and life choices that the seed falls amongst weeds and life for the new plant is much more challenging. When we willingly enter into a life-style that has destructive elements, then 'rest' is hard to find. If you become addicted to smoking, caffeine, eating or whatever, then it starts to control your life and doesn't allow you a rest-break from it. We can definitely make our life more stressful by bad life decisions.

But Paul says if we 'sow to the Spirit', in other words make decisions that Jesus is prompting us into, doing things that our Father God will be pleased with, and allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us, then we will get eternal life. That doesn't just mean when we die, but we will experience life in its fullness now.

Paul says 'don't become weary in doing good', and we can hear that as saying 'don't become tired of doing good', or in other words keep going, keep going, keep going. Alternatively we can hear it as saying '**don't become weary when you are doing good**', or in other words, Keep doing good things but **let Jesus take the strain for you**. Ask him. Trust Him. Take time off too. Sabbath better. Recharge your batteries. Many great saints of God have got this wrong and worked themselves into an early grave.

To find rest, we need to learn from Jesus and apply it in our lives.

♣ **Ace of Clubs - Prayer**

We need to recognise that when we follow Jesus, we are also entering a spiritual battle, and one tactic of the enemy is to rob us of our rest. He can do this by lying to us, and by sowing fear into our lives.

In Peters letter [1 Peter 5v8], it says . [⁸ **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour**].

So much of our anxiety is over things that will never happen. Psychologists reckon that 95% of what we worry about doesn't happen. Of those that do, four out of 5 turn out better and often can bless us. So actually only about 1% actually do happen as we fear, and even then we usually find we can cope with it anyway. Don't fall for his lies. Reject the fear. Trust God.

Prayer is our weapon, our club, and we can use it to fight off spiritual attacks.

At the peak of the global Pandemic, my family was allowed a rare visit to my Dad in his nursing home, because we were told he was dying of Pneumonia and was now end-of-life. When I was there I then found out they had just got covid in the home for the first time. Me, my Mum and my sisters could all have contracted and all were vulnerable to it for different reasons. For 2-3 days I felt a spirit of fear come over me, for all our lives. I had to recognise it, and battle it in prayer, to restore my peace

I realised what was happening and prayed into. My Dad did catch Covid. I prayed more. Then miraculously he recovered from both his pneumonia and Covid, and though still ill with dementure, he got through it the sickness. None of his family caught Covid and we remained fine. It never happened. All along, I had nothing to be stressed about !

Although it sounds like a contradiction, If we are to find and keep the place of rest, then we need to battle away fear and attacks from the enemy with our prayer clubs.

♥ **Ace of Hearts - Peace**

Lets be honest, whilst finding the right rythm of life in ever changing circumstances it not easy. We give ourselves the best chance when we keep Jesus close, continually learn from his word, and protect ourselves and others in prayer. But we still expect trials and temptations to come are way. The bible

promises us this ! Stress raisers will keep getting through and troubling our hearts (e.g. James 1:2 & 1 Peter 4:12). In fact to some extent they are necessary to test and build our faith. What will we become under pressure – diamonds or dust?

But it is at these times, we need the Ace of Hearts, Gods Peace in our hearts, to help us find the place of rest in times of trouble.

When you are under attack, or in difficulties, to stay productive in that rhythm, of work and rest, you will need his peace. We may have found a rhythm of rest, but in that rest we can still need his Peace. And through prayer, invite it into our lives.

Gods peace is described by Paul, as beyond human understanding (Philippians 4v7). It is not the absence of noise. Gods peace is entirely different. It is a tangible force for good. I would even describe his peace as aggressive, for the way it tackles stress, anxiety and even depression. In most circumstances the peace of God comes by us praying for it, and the Holy Spirit bringing it and applying it.

Over the last 4 years I have prayed for many people who are sick, and a good proportion of them have illnesses which comes from stress and anxiety. In such cases I always pray for the Peace of God to come.

On my last trip to Macedonia, I was taking a small outdoor service, and there was one younger lady in a baseball cap, who I had not seen before. She seemed very agitated during the service, and once got up and smoked outside the gate. After the service, she was the last one I prayed for her. She seemed to have some mental issues, and the word epilepsy had been mentioned to me. As I listened to God, I felt that first she must commit her life to Jesus. Perhaps she had done this before when she was younger, and this was a recommitment, but she was pleased to do so, and prayed the prayer with me. On the foundation of her renewed faith in Jesus, I took a stand in prayer against the enemy and commanded all sickness in the mind to go, then I prayed for the Spirit and the peace of God to descend and fill her. It is normal at this point for people to feel a warmth, or something of the Spirit within them, and relax into a new peace, but they are usually still aware of their surroundings. However Sibil fell into such a deep peace, she was oblivious of everything and just stood there, hands in receive mood, totally full of his presence. The peace of God had won the day. I had just witnessed a wonderful transformation in her from her highly agitated state to one where she was completely at rest in God.

Do you feel that your rest is under attack today? Pray for the peace of God to come to you. Get others to pray for you. Find that place of rest in the storm, through the Peace of God.

◆ **Ace of Diamonds - Grace**

One more trump card. The Ace of Diamonds.

You can feel that all is going well in your game of life, your cards are okay, and then suddenly you are you are thrown into turmoil. You have gone in the wrong direction into a storm and you got flung into the sea. You played a card, knowing it was wrong and these are the consequences you weren't expecting.

If you have gone wrong then you need to call on our fourth trump card, the grace of God, my ace of diamonds. Often we won't find the peace and restoration we need, our soul will remain conflicted, until we confess to God what we have done wrong and then accept his forgiveness. This is the Grace of God. This is the diamond in the pack. This is why he died for us. We need to know we are forgiven and accepted, to find our rest.

You may have feelings of inadequacy, or guilt. Whatever mistakes you have made you are **not** defined by your past, but by your future. True rest includes accepting into your life the love of God and his promises over you, whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you have done, and whatever has been done to you.

When you come to Jesus, you don't have to qualify, or over-perform in anyway to be accepted by him. We all make mistakes, and that's okay. That is why we have the Grace of God.

You are a child of God, just as are you. Father God has chosen you and does not feel let down by you, even if you disappoint yourself and everybody else.

Why is that? If you are a good parent with a small child, then you will spend hours helping them to learn to walk even when they keep falling over. You spend ages teaching them vowel sounds, words and sentences even though they mostly speak garbage at first. We teach them to read and write and do their times table, even though it takes years of persistence and many, many mistakes along the way. We do it with love and patience and delight because they are our children, who belong to us, and who you have a wonderful love for, no matter how slow they are at learning, or how many mistakes they make.

He is the perfect Father, who knows us inside out, and extends endless patience, grace and mercy to us every day. He knows how weak-minded we can be, and expects us to mess up and fail. He is not ashamed to be known as my Father, and to own me as his child. Where others may look at me and see the bad in me, He can look at me and see the good. He is on my side, He is cheering for me, even before I do anything.

Injured in the line of duty?

It maybe that an unexpected storm has come into your life, and you ended up in the waves for no fault of your own.

There are three stages to go through now you are in the stormy sea, struggling, clinging and resting. In the struggling, you are in the water fighting on your own with the waves. You feel lost and hopeless. In the clinging phase, you are still in the water but holding on to the outside of a boat, you feel safe now, but all you can do is to cling on until you get your strength back. It may take a long time, until you have enough energy to pull yourself into back into the boat. It is only at then when you have both your hands free, that you can carry on living your normal rhythm of work and relaxation in your life.

I see Christians who give everything for Jesus, become sick, injured or exhausted, and when they are just clinging on, they still try and carry on their work!

You do not keep your troops on the front line when they are injured. We all need to be given enough time to recover sufficiently to get back into the boat. We have to overcome self-pride and the fear of letting others down to allow ourselves the time we need. If we do, then God will teach us new things during this time of recovery.

But also when we see others clinging on, we need to give them our grace, and allow our weary or injured brothers and sisters the time they need. We need to be patient and loving, praying for them and supporting them in their recovery, and helping them bit by bit back into the boat.

You are enough – you do not need to impress

I wonder how much of your weariness comes from trying to earn the acceptance of God or others, to live up to what you think they want from you, which is actually above and beyond what God has prepared for you.. Perhaps even from hiding the things in your life that you think they will disapprove of. It is all conflict to your soul.

I have heard of men that are made redundant but are so ashamed that this had happened, that they can not tell their family. So each day the husband will get ready for work, and drive off somewhere, only to return home at the normal time as if finishing the day's work. What a burden to carry. How much more difficult life is when you try to come across as some-one that you are not.

It is hard to be some-one other than who you are actually are, and you do not need to be. You are enough for God, whatever happens to you. Your price-tag, your value to God, is not in what you do, but in what Jesus paid for you on the cross. He gave his life for you, there is no price on that, You are price-less as you are.

There is great security and rest in knowing you are 'accepted' and 'loved' however you appear, and however you perform.

When Jesus was baptised, Gods voice was heard from heaven saying 'This is my dear son, with whom I am well pleased', and he hadn't done anything yet. He hadn't started his ministry. God loved him and was pleased with his son, before he had doen anything in public. He loves you in the same way.

Nothing new?

Jesus said "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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.*

You may reflect back on what I have said on this passage, and say there is nothing new in that Kevin. You have just told me the things I need to do anyway to lead a good Christian life.

Come to Jesus. Give him control of life. Read my bible and let his teachings sink in and change me, so I learn what is right and do what is right. Pray, and accept his peace, grace and forgiveness.

I knew that already Kevin. True, but there is no magic formula for rest, there are no short cuts. You may know all that I have said, but It is still the pathway to finding the rest we need for our souls.

The pathway to finding the rhythm of life we need between work and relaxation

The pathway to finding the strength we need to cope in the storm

The pathway to accepting ourselves as being okay for who we are, following Jesus obediently, but without the burden of trying to impress him or others.

You do not have to do any of this alone. He is always with you even in the darkest hour.

"Daddy, is your face turned towards me? Yes my beautiful child, my face is turned towards you"

Amen.