

#250 "Rest"

T.H.R.I.V.E. part 3

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We need to clearly understand what is meant by the concept of rest. First of all, rest is not laziness, for the Bible harshly condemns a refusal to labor in the Lord (Proverbs 6:10). Rest is not an attitude that checks oneself out from the gospel fight. It is not a dulling of the senses or the mind, for we are commanded to be sober in spirit and alert in our minds. Second of all, by rest we are not referring to the eternal rest of the soul, when we no longer have to struggle against sin and the devil. That rest is ours, and it is promised to us (Hebrews 4:1-3, Ezekiel 34:15). Just as God gave Solomon rest from battle in the Old Testament and gave Israel its promised rest (Exodus 33:14), so, too, will believers one day have rest from battle against the evil one. The fullness of this eternal rest is not ours yet because we are still fighting, and there is still work to be done. But we can take great hope that one day it will be ours, and we can be thankful for the promised future rest with God's presence in heaven.

In the meantime, we are still able to enjoy God's rest, just not in the sense of being totally free from having to concern ourselves with sin and temptation and tribulation. There can still be rest in the soul and peace in the inner man, even when life is full of difficulty and travail. Psalm 116:5-7 says, "Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate. The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you." There are times in life where we will be humbled and brought low. We will realize how helpless we are apart from the grace of God. Yet in those times, if we are willing to thank God rather than curse or blame God, we will have the opportunity to return to soul rest as we believe firmly in the compassion and grace of our God. He is able to preserve our souls. Our bodies may give out on us, for the outer man decays day by day. But the inner man can be renewed day after day by the grace of God as we trust in His Word, hold tightly to the future promises, and thank Him for dealing bountifully with us. None of us deserve anything. Naked we came from our mother's womb, but by God's grace, He has clothed us, strengthened us, fed us, sheltered us, given us relationships, given us redemption, and so many other things. When we are able to see God's abundant mercy and just how bountifully He has dealt with us, then we will have rest in our hearts. *The abundant life requires a belief in a God Who is not stingy, cruel, or unjust but rather in a God Who is righteous, bountiful, gracious, and full of love and compassion.*

Psalm 131:1-3 says,

"O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever."

Sometimes it can be tempting to demand answers and explanations from God for why bad things happen to His children in this life. But we are not commanded in Scripture to ask God why specific trials are allowed into our lives as if God needs our approval beforehand. Rather, we are commanded to consider it all joy when (not if) trials come our way (James 1:2-4). Our hope is that we will endure by God's grace and grow in character through the process. Sometimes we like to ring-fence God by drawing a line in the sand as far as what we will not allow to happen in our lives. We might be alright with taking a lesser paying job, but we are ready to conclude that God is not faithful or powerful if we lose our job. We might be alright with a diagnosis of the flu, but a diagnosis of cancer might not work for us. This is not the right way to live, and if we choose to put demands upon God, we will lose out on our rest. God is in control, and He does have a perfect sovereign plan. But we cannot know all the nuances of why God does what He does. What we do know is that trials are a chance to grow in sanctification, and if we are humble and refuse to have haughty eyes, as Psalm 131 says, then there will be a chance for us to grow. In fact, we will be assured of seeing God use all things for our good, namely, our sanctification (Romans 8:28-29). God's greatest objective is that we bring Him glory in this life, and He will allow trials into our lives if they will help us better abide in Him. *The question for us when trials come is not to wonder so much why they are here, for we should expect trials to be part of this life (John 16:33). Rather, we should be focused upon how we will respond to those trials so that God is honored and His kingdom advances.* Some things are too difficult for us to understand. There are aspects of God's will that are too big for us. We need to let go of trying to be as smart as God, and we need to compose and quiet our souls. **As deep a rest as an infant has against its mother is the type of rest that we can have in our hearts in Christ.** This will only be possible, however, if we hope in Him totally and believe firmly that He is with us, suffering with us during our travails.

Rest is not found simply in getting a lot of sleep or going on vacation, though that may help our physical bodies. Complete rest requires that our inner man is rejuvenated and restored as well. Psalm 46:10 says, "Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Striving against God certainly won't bring rest, but a refusal to trust God and to call to Him for comfort won't help either. We must recognize that what the soul ultimately longs for is Jesus Himself, an intimacy with His presence. If we keep chasing after the wind by pursuing the vain things of this world, if we allow ourselves to be distracted by worthless things, or if we lose our first love by drowning in Christian activities and forgetting Christ, we will lose out on rest. We need to relax, refocus, and turn our eyes upon Jesus. Jesus is not like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that we have to keep running faster to catch only to have it move farther away from us. He is no fantasy or myth, but He is near to us in our hearts. *He does not have to be chased after; He only needs to be drawn near to.* Sometimes we just need to make our minds stop racing and speak to God what is on our hearts and minds. We need to rejoice that He will always be there, and we need to be like John reclining upon Jesus' chest (John 13:23). There is love there, safety there, and a bond that will never end.

Psalm 37:7 says, "Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him." We are told in this same chapter in Psalms not to fret over the wicked person who seems to have an abundance, whereas the righteous seem to have little. The reality is that it is the righteous who have the abundance because the wicked will one day be cut off. We have the great hope of our future inheritance, and we also have the

presence of Christ with us in the present. Verses 23-24 say, "The steps of a man are established by the LORD, And He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, *Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand*" (italics mine). Some people think that in order to feel close to God that we need to have a sort of New Age out of body mystical encounter with Christ where we hear Him speak soothing words to us. This is not Biblical, for Christ has already spoken what we need in His sufficient Word. But it is also a superfluous, totally unnecessary idea anyway, something fit for the devil to conjure up. The reality is that the Lord watches over His own. Satan can never pluck us out of His hand (John 10:28-29). Our eternity is secure. But even now, He holds our hands with His righteous right hand. Though He allows trials into our lives, it is not as if Satan slipped one past Him or as though He was too busy to protect us properly. Rather, we can trust that all that He ordains into our lives is necessarily kindest, wisest, and best because God is good and loving through and through. There is a time to wait upon God, to call to Him, to endure, and to bring Him glory by perseverance and patience. **Whether in prison, in a hospital bed, or visiting the food pantry for the first time, God is holding your hand if you are His child.** We will not be given more than what we can endure by faith without succumbing to temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). We will not be hurled headlong as if God has lost His grasp upon us. God holds our hands, He hedges us in behind and before (Psalm 139:5), and He lays His hands upon us. He can do this because He established our steps and He knows our every move, thought, and step. He is intimately acquainted with all of our ways (Psalm 139:3). He knows what we need, and He promised to supply our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). Perhaps we need a trial to learn something, so we shouldn't ever accuse God of not meeting needs. We just need to trust that God knows better than we do what our needs actually are, and He will meet those perfectly.

When it comes to soul rest, the only constant that matters is that we have a merciful, compassionate God Who cares, Who provides, and Who delights in us because of Christ in us. When God feels far away, we must remember that He is holding our hands. **This is why we don't have to strive to attain rest, we just have to rest in His grasp. He'll never let go.**

Next up: Intimacy

What is T.H.R.I.V.E.? God has promised His children the abundant life (John 10:10), even when life is full of trials (John 16:33). Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, sometimes life feels like surviving more than thriving. Yet, even there, God provided for them bread from heaven and water from a rock. More importantly, He helped them learn that man does not live on bread alone but upon His Word (Deuteronomy 8:3). It is feasting upon the inviolable truths of Scripture that can enable us to endure. Even in times of earthly abundance, we will starve without the food of doing God's will (John 4:34). 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." This six part series will feed our souls so that we do not lose heart by strengthening the inner man despite what may be happening to us on the outside. To thrive is to live life fully alive.