

#174 “Rest Despite the Stress”

by Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

“One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.”

-Ecclesiastes 4:6

Part of living in a cursed world marred by sin, filled with sinful people, and oppressed by the prince of the power of the air (Satan) is that we will regularly and frequently encounter stressful situations. In fact, life can be so stressful that it can begin to negatively impact us emotionally and spiritually, sometimes even severely. We can get stressed when we have too much to do and even when we don't have anything to do. Stress comes when we most expect it, when we least expect it, and when we don't even know where it is coming from. Such is the reality of being human. One day all the pain and sorrow and frustration will be gone, but in the meantime, stress will take its toll on us, and there is nothing we can do to avoid it entirely. Surely, we can avoid sinning and doing foolish things which can only increase our stress burden. But there are things outside of our control, things that we just can't resolve. For example, we can't force a person to receive Christ. We can't make God heal a disability. We can't force our leaders to use wisdom and honor in their decision-making. We can't force employers to create work out of thin air. We are human, weak, not all-powerful, and not God. Therein we will always have stress to deal with. However, for those who know Jesus Christ, we will always have a safe haven, a place of perfect rest.

The antithesis of stress is rest. Biblical rest is a deep inner peace, contentment, and joy that transcends circumstances and allows us to be refreshed internally. This rest is not a mystical trance-like state that temporarily lowers our blood pressure and allows us to escape into a dangerous spiritual world. Rather, it is safety in the storm. It is having Jesus on board when the waves crash and the wind howls. Rest is admitting that we are but sheep who need a Shepherd (Psalm 23:1), for only in and through Christ can we have no lack. Admitting our insufficiency and trusting in His sufficiency is central to being at rest.

Rest will elude any person who lives with a double-minded attitude. Rest will evade any who harbor sin and evil intent in their hearts. Rest will never come to those who seek it in some place other than the Rock of Jesus Christ. All other pursuits- money, early retirement, perfect health, a minute of media fame- is sinking sand. Only Jesus can provide what we are looking for, for only He is fully in charge, fully powerful, and perfectly loving. The only true safe haven is found in being in lockstep behind our Savior, following our closest Friend wherever He may lead.

There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18). When we are convinced entirely of Jesus' love for us, the fear and the stress can be released unto His care as we cast our cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). We can endure for as long as He calls us to endure because we know that He is with us, even in the dark times, even when we go through the valleys that feel and smell like death (Psalm 23:4). Jesus' presence alone can drive out fear because He has told us that He is good, right, and holy. He will never

leave us, and we can never be separated from Him (Romans 8:38-39). Thus, in His presence is fullness of joy because we are at home with Him. In fact, He makes His home in our hearts (1 Corinthians 6:19). This eternal relationship with the Sovereign of the Universe is our only hope for enduring the stress that this life brings. As God said to Moses in Exodus 33:14, “And He said, ‘My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.’” Even in the dark times, we are still in His shadow (Psalm 91:1).

Jesus never promised that He would make our lives stress free, for He said we will have trouble in this life (John 16:33). However, even as we go through the tribulations of this earthly life, He leads us into green pastures and beside quiet waters (Psalm 23:2). His pastures are green, lush, life-giving, and life-sustaining because He is our energy, our food, our sustenance, and our life. He leads us to still waters, waters that refresh and replenish, that cool and cleanse. He restores our souls (Psalm 23:3). A proper understanding of the restoration of the soul is central to enduring stressful times. The restoration of the soul is not found by becoming better at getting what we want, becoming more proficient in influencing people, or advancing in some selfish cause or agenda. The restoration of the soul is not a mystical encounter experienced on a yoga mat or New Age life class. God restores our souls by sanctifying all of its aspects. He calms our minds by enabling us to take sinful thoughts captive and to think upon what is good, right, and pure according to His Word (2 Corinthians 10:5, Philippians 4:8). He refines the desires of our hearts by reminding us that, unless we seek His kingdom first, we will be all out of balance (Matthew 6:33). He shapes and bends our wills so that we stop fighting and resisting the work of the Spirit in our hearts and finally humbly surrender and obey (Acts 7:51). So if we want rest, we must think right, desire the proper things, and obey. We must also be taking in the nourishment of the Scriptures. Psalm 19:7 says, “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul.” If we want our souls restored, we must be in the Word and allowing the Spirit to conform us to its truth.

Rest is a Biblical principle (Nehemiah 8:9-12, Genesis 2:2) and a privilege (Hebrews 4:1-10). Rest gives us renewed perspective, fresh direction, and a fired up passion and energy. But a vacation, holiday, or celebration will not restore the soul unless we turn to the presence of God by surrendering to Him in complete obedience and humility. We must feast upon His Word. Let us enter His rest so He can restore our souls and give us strength for the stress tests yet to come.