

## The Way of Love: REST

Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration.

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:27*

*Blessed are you, O Lord ... giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent. – Book of Common Prayer, 113*

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness - within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

# Just Accept It

by Julie Raymond Chalk



**I**n the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says to us, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (11:28).

Perhaps this is the most well-known quotation in all of Scripture regarding God’s invitation to rest. Who among us, especially when feeling undue stress, has not invoked this verse as the promise of our dreams – indeed, as a prayer for relief from our exhaustion! We have all experienced times in our lives that were marked by heightened responsibilities, increased pressure, and seemingly endless demands on our time, our bodies, and our souls. This promise from Jesus can be the relief for which our spirits long and our bodies crave.

The Way of Love challenges us to embrace rest as a critical part of our physical, emotional, and spiritual lives by “receiving the gift of God’s grace, peace, and restoration.” While God’s grace, peace, and restoration are amazing things I want in my life, I find that the challenging part of this definition is in the word “receive.” Yes, God has promised us the most wonderful gifts that we could imagine (and even those we can’t) – gifts that not just help us in our daily lives, but gifts that provide a richness to our lives and relationships that we couldn’t possibly imagine. Why is receiving them sometimes so very difficult?

When we consider the opposite of the word “rest,” we think about words like weariness, stress, tiredness, undue demands, and exhaustion. Instead, I would like to suggest that the opposite of rest is actually resistance – resistance to God’s gifts, God’s provision, and God’s will and/or plan for our lives. I have found that rest isn’t as much about getting caught up on sleep or taking a vacation or delegating some of our responsibilities (though it may include these things), as it is about surrender – surrendering to what IS, accepting what is happening, and trusting that God is in control. Only when we can surrender and trust, can we then actually receive God’s gifts of grace, peace, and restoration that the Way of Love talks about.

Years ago my family planned a trip to Monhegan Island, about 12 miles off the coast of Maine. It’s known for its cliffs, forests, picturesque harbor and village, and exquisite scenery. We had chosen the perfect summer day and had arrived at the ferry dock with plenty of time to spare. The “ferry” was actually a smallish mail boat, and, because I have a long history of motion sickness, I had taken my medication to preclude becoming sick on board.

Because of the beautiful weather, we hadn’t anticipated the high seas, and I started to feel sick as soon as we got out of the harbor and onto the open ocean, despite taking my medication. Of course, everyone has lots of suggestions when a companion is turning green around the gills: “Look at the horizon! Stand in the bow! Keep the wind in your face! For heaven’s sake, don’t go inside to use the restroom – you’ll just feel sicker!” I tried to follow all of this advice, but just became more ill, losing my breakfast, and miserable until I set foot on the island.

We had a glorious visit, with a beautiful hike through the woods, a picnic on the rocks, and vistas exceeding our expectations; however, my day had a dark undercurrent of dread as I knew that I would have to get back on that boat to return to the mainland (possibly the longest 95 minutes of my life). When the time came, and I climbed aboard for the return trip, all of my seasickness returned in full force. In my heart I cried out to God for relief. What I heard was, “Surrender, give in to the waves, relax.” With God’s help, I was able to do just that. Instead of staring at the horizon fighting every wave that we cut through, I let go. I started to feel the up and down of each wave, becoming one with the vessel. I closed my eyes and allowed my body to accept the movement I found myself previously only enduring. While the lightheadedness remained, the nausea gradually dissipated, and I was able to get back to shore with much greater ease and peace in my soul and body.

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When God calls us to rest, I believe that this surrender, this giving up the fight with our surroundings, this letting go of the resistance to the challenges in our lives, is what He is calling us to do.

Matthew 11 continues with the words in verses 29-30, "Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light" (Today's English Version). I would guess that most of us have felt that the load we find ourselves carrying doesn't often seem light, and the yoke around our necks certainly doesn't feel easy. For many years I believed that the yoke described here is the yoke worn by one person with a heavy bucket hanging from each of the yoke's wooden arms. Later I realized that the yoke mentioned may actually be the kind used by a pair of oxen, where the load is shared with someone else. Perhaps when we do share this yoke with Christ, we find our loads lighter and our burdens easier. Indeed, verse 29 promises that we WILL find rest if we take (accept, surrender to, release ourselves to) God's yoke (His will and plan for our lives). "By resting, we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness." (The Way of Love)



I recently experienced an unexpected month-long illness during which activity became impossible and rest became essential to my treatment and recovery. I found myself resenting this unanticipated intrusion into my plans and routine and resisting the need to surrender to the situation. God reminded me of my trip to Monhegan Island and the need to let go, to allow myself to experience what was happening in my body, and to accept things just as they were, "riding the wave," if you will. Only then could I get better. Indeed, only then, could I "receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration," as the Way of Love calls us to do. *R*



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For Discernment and Reflection

- What practices restore your body, mind, and soul?
- How will you observe rest and renewal on a regular basis?
- With whom will you commit to create and maintain a regular practice of rest?