



Connecting With God For a Strong Finish

So we'll be Ready when the Time Comes

PART 2

How to Connect with God for Strength

CHAPTER 5

Resting for Strength Rest that Recuperates

Gordon MacDonald forecast an epidemic of weariness and fatigue. Years before widespread use of the internet with social media, email, and cell phones, he wrote:

The believing community has never been **so busy**, never had **so many voices** to listen to, never **so many choices** to make, never **so many ways to respond**. That, I believe, explains why we are facing the potential of a **wholesale exhaustion of the spirit**. To ignore that unique phenomenon is to invite spiritual disaster.”¹

MacDonald stressed that weariness, exhaustion, and fatigue are not a function of the body alone but of the spirit.² In “Restoring Your Spiritual Passion”, he advocates rest as a remedy if it touches our inner spirit—where we connect with God. MacDonald uses the phrase “proper rest” since “much of what we call rest today is amusement or leisure, a temporary patch over weariness.”³ Rest that truly recuperates affects

¹ MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, Nashville, Oliver-Nelson, 1986, pp. 117-118.

² MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, Nashville, Oliver-Nelson, 1986, p. 25.

³ Gordon MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, Nashville, Oliver-Nelson, 1986, p. 158 quoting French Catholic Priest Michael Quoist in “With Open Heart”, Crossroad, 1983.

the core of our being. MacDonald characterizes our need for rest in the Christian community as follows:

“Weary people. Action without passion. Words without substance. Perhaps we have touched one of the reasons so many people in our nation today claim faith but feel as if they make so little difference in their worlds. The passionless life shows itself in the numbers of marriages and family relationships crumbling because the energy to overcome the things that separate and divide is no longer there. In the place of what was once fresh and dynamic is a staleness and boredom, a feeling of being trapped, the occasional desire to run.”⁴

Addressing potential solutions, MacDonald quotes Michael Quoist who wrote “With Open Heart”. He states:

To recollect yourself is to recover all your scattered energies—those of the mind, the heart, and the body. It is to reassemble all the pieces of yourself flung in the four corners of your past or the midst of your future, pieces clinging to the fringes of our desires.⁵

Gordon Macdonald identifies three ingredients for what he calls “Proper Rest”.

- Safe places
- Still times
- Special friends (or uplifting relationships)

According to MacDonald, these ingredients facilitate the rest and recollection process because they provide opportunities to retune the heart, receive heaven's signals, and restore our spiritual passion.⁶

In “Little House on the Freeway”, Tim Kimmel offers three additional ingredients for what he calls “Genuine Rest”.⁷

⁴ MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, Nashville, Oliver-Nelson, 1986, p. 116.

⁵ MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, Nashville, Oliver-Nelson, 1986, p. 123.

⁶ MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, Nashville, Oliver-Nelson, 1986, pp. 124-204.

- Acceptance
- Affirmation
- Assurance

We rest better, knowing that God loves us and that He values our relationship. We want to be wanted and we want to belong. Rejection, strife, and discord interfere with rest as do criticism, fear, and condemnation.

Jesus invites us to Rest with Him

Connecting with Christ guarantees an opportunity to experience rest. He offers safe places, still times, and special friends and He provides long lasting acceptance, affirmation, and assurance. Jesus said:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden [burdened (NIV)], 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 shall find rest for your souls. (Mat 11:28-29)

God's Rest is Waiting

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience [those who fell in the wilderness in route to Canaan]. (Heb. 4:9 NIV)

The more we connect with God for rest, the less likely we are to miss the mark by seeking recuperation through substitutes such as entertainment and recreation.

The fear of the Lord leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble. (Pro 19:23 NIV)

⁷ Little House on the Freeway, Tim Kimmel, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, 1987, 1994, 2008

The Lord replied [to Moses], “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exo 33:14 NIV)

The American Disease

During the nineteenth-century a syndrome emerged in New England, which neurologist George Beard called “the American Disease” and later, “neurasthenia invalidism.”⁸ He attributed this syndrome to ever increasing pressure from “modern civilization”. Beard claimed that a strong Protestant work ethic in a climate of driving capitalism and extravagant materialism bred Christian workaholics. Symptoms included weakness, constant fatigue, nervous exhaustion, and various physical and emotional ailments.

Similar to the American Disease, Chronic fatigue syndrome has distinguished itself as a separate illness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS, is a debilitating and complex disorder characterized by profound fatigue that is not improved by bed rest and that may be worsened by physical or mental activity. Symptoms affect several body systems and may include weakness, muscle pain, impaired memory and/or mental concentration, and insomnia, which can result in reduced participation in daily activities.⁹

Figures compiled by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimate that, “one-quarter of all patients seeing general practitioners complain of prolonged fatigue.”¹⁰ Fatigue is a common symptom for many illnesses yet only a small fraction of fatigue patients meet the medical criteria for chronic fatigue syndrome.

⁸ Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 100-101.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); <http://www.cdc.gov/cfs/>; updated April 7, 2015

¹⁰ Diagnosis and Description of CFS: National Institutes of Health, September 1, 1999.

According to the CDC, diagnostic symptoms for CFS include post-exertion malaise lasting more than 24 hours, unrefreshing sleep, significant impairment of short-term memory or concentration, brain fog, muscle ache, joint pain, tender lymph nodes, recurring sore throat, headaches, dizziness, balance problems, and fainting.

In “How to Beat Burnout”, Minirth et al. found three-fourths of the ministers tested in their clinic leaning primarily toward workaholic and obsessive-compulsive tendencies. They identified “prime candidates for burnout” as:

...people who want to serve the Lord "full-time" with all their heart, soul, and mind. Christians in vocational ministry often find themselves on the edge or in the depths of burnout. Among young, zealous Christian workers, the desire to "burn out for God" is often considered even an admirable trait and goal. The realities of carrying that goal long term, however, can be disastrous personally and to a ministry.¹¹

God calls us to His side as co-laborers—to burn on rather than to burn out. Entering God’s rest prevents burnout. Nonetheless, “Too many Christian workers burn out long before their time, spending only half a career or less in Christian service” according to Minirth.

In “How to Beat Burnout”, one victim put it this way:

“The usual problem with burning out for God is that **you don't burn out, you just burn down to a flicker. Then you spend frustrating months and even years doing nothing but sputtering or flickering for God.”¹²**

According to Minirth, when a person considers doing as the means for being worthwhile, then work and productivity become a defining

¹¹ Minirth et al., How to Beat Burnout, The Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, 1986, p. 81.

¹² Minirth et al., How to Beat Burnout, The Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, 1986, p. 82.

source for satisfaction and significance. Minirth explains how parents reinforce this attitude and consequently, children grow up assuming:

their heavenly Father, too, is satisfied and pleased with them only when they are busy doing something for Him. They have inherited the **“mantle of Martha,”** who was **“tied up in knots over much serving,”** rather than assuming the easy yoke of Christ that was meant for them.¹³

Turning the Rat Race into a Relay¹⁴

God has charged us with a responsibility to *“carry each other's burdens”*.¹⁵ We are custom-built for relational teamwork. Where one person is weak or insufficient, another person contributes talent, strength, and expertise. Sharing the stress and strain of the moment reduces over-exhaustion.

Moses' father-in-law encouraged teamwork. He admonished Moses by saying:

*You and these people who come to you **will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.***
(Exo 18:18 NIV)

Jethro advised Moses to redistribute the weight of his leadership by teaching God's laws and then training trustworthy men to help adjudicate community-wide disputes.¹⁶ He assured Moses by saying:

*That will **make your load lighter,** because they will **share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain,** and all these people will go home satisfied.”* (Exo 18:22b-23 NIV)

¹³ Minirth et al., *How to Beat Burnout*, The Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, 1986, p. 85.

¹⁴ Michael Quoist loosely paraphrased, *“carrying each other's burdens”* as *“turning the rat race into a relay”*. Quoted by MacDonald in *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*, p. 123.

¹⁵ Galatians 6:2

¹⁶ Exodus 18:20-21, 23

Knowing Trumps Doing

Connecting with Christ refreshes our spirit and restores our soul. His grace and peace allow us to rest apart from our performance.

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Mat 7:22-23 NIV)

David entered God's rest as a sheep following his shepherd. He composed a refreshing ballad, which emphasizes recuperative rest.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your Rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23 NIV)

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