

R E S T

CREATING
SPACE FOR SOUL
REFRESHMENT

HEATHER NELSON



P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

A Series

DEEPAK REJU

Series Editor

- Addictive Habits*, by David R. Dunham
After an Affair, by Michael Scott Gembola
Anger, by Robert D. Jones
Anxiety, by Paul Tautges
Assurance, by William P. Smith
Chronic Illness, by Esther Smith
Contentment, by Megan Hill
Depression, by Edward T. Welch
Doubt, by Elyse Fitzpatrick
Engagement, by Mike McKinley
Fearing Others, by Zach Schlegel
Forgiveness, by Hayley Satrom
Grief, by Bob Kellemen
Hope, by John Crotts
Marriage Conflict, by Steve Hoppe
Money, by Jim Newheiser
A Painful Past, by Lauren Whitman
Parenting & Disabilities, by Stephanie O. Hubach
Patience, by Megan Hill
Perfectionism, by Lou Priolo
Pornography, by Deepak Reju
Rest, by Heather Nelson
Shame, by Esther Liu
Singleness, by Jenilyn Swett
Toxic Relationships, by Ellen Mary Dykas
Wayward Children, by Stuart W. Scott

© 2024 by Heather Nelson

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)*. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Scripture quotation marked (NASB) is from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The Scripture quotation marked (NIV 2011) is from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Nelson, Heather, author.

Title: Rest : creating space for soul refreshment / Heather Nelson.

Description: Phillipsburg, New Jersey : P&R Publishing, [2024] | Series:

31-day devotionals for life | Summary: "Life is tiring, but it's hard to stop hustling! Heather Nelson invites us to explore God's grace to us, discover the holiness of rest, and practice restorative rest in our lives"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024023703 | ISBN 9781629959801 (paperback) | ISBN 9781629959818 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Rest--Religious aspects--Christianity. | Relaxation--Religious aspects--Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4597.S5 .N47 2024 | DDC 242/.2--dc23/eng/20240610

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024023703>

Contents

How to Nourish Your Soul 9

Introduction 11

What Is Rest?

Day 1: The Beginning of Rest 17

Day 2: Rest Is a Mark of Freedom 19

Day 3: The Priority of Sabbath 21

Day 4: The Sign of the Sabbath 23

Day 5: Sabbath Rest Is Refreshing 25

Day 6: Sabbath Rest Is a Delight 27

Day 7: The Priority of Physical Rest 29

Day 8: An Invitation to Busy Disciples 31

Day 9: A Spiritual Posture 33

Day 10: Living within Our Limits 35

How to Rest

Day 11: Sleep 39

Day 12: Come to Jesus 41

Day 13: Learn from Jesus's Easy Yoke 43

Day 14: Repent of Unbelief 45

Day 15: Turn from False Gods 47

Day 16: Remember the Futility of Earthly Toil 49

Day 17: Refuse Swift Horses 51

Day 18: Remember God's Compassion 53

Day 19: Remember the Lord's Goodness 55

Day 20: Trust in God's Provision 57

Day 21: Cultivate a Posture of Humility 59

Day 22: Be Still 61

Where to Rest

Day 23: Rest in Green Pastures 65

Day 24: Rest beside Still Waters 67

Day 25: Rest in God's Good Ways 69

Day 26: Rest at Jesus's Feet 71

Day 27: Rest in Grace 73

Day 28: Rest in Quiet Trust 75

Day 29: Rest in God's Love 77

Day 30: Rest in the "Already and Not Yet" 79

Day 31: Rest in Heaven 81

Conclusion 83

Acknowledgments 87

Notes 89

Recommended Resources for Growth 91

How to Nourish Your Soul

A *LITTLE BIT EVERY DAY* can do great good for your soul.

I read the Bible to my kids during breakfast. I don't read a lot. Maybe just a few verses. But I work hard to do it every weekday.

My wife and I pray for one of our children, a different child each night, before we go to bed. We usually take just a few minutes. We don't pray lengthy, expansive prayers. Usually we're brief and to the point. But we try to do this most every night.

What do you see in these examples? Although they don't take long, these practices are edifying, hopeful, and effective.

This devotional is just the same. Each entry is short—just a few tasty morsels of Scripture to nourish your hungry soul. Add it to your daily Bible reading. Read it on the subway or the bus on your way to work. Read it with a friend or a spouse every night at dinner. Make it part of each day for thirty-one days, and it will do you great good.

Why is that?

We start with Scripture. God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

Our study of Scripture is practical. Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read these devotionals, you'll see the word *you* because Heather speaks directly to you, the reader. Each reading contains at least one reflection question and practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you reflect on the texts, answer the questions, and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

Our study of Scripture is worshipful. Are you weary because of the frantic pace of your life? Maybe you feel like there's too much to do and you never get a proper break. Every weekend, you run to your typical refuges—streaming video or sleeping late on Saturday morning. It's good to take a break, but you don't emerge truly rested. These substitute refuges don't fully deliver on their promises. Dig a little deeper, and you find obstacles to rest in your own heart. Unbelief and a blindness to God's goodness serve as barriers. What can you do? Where can you find the rest that you need?

This is why God's Word matters. You need a Savior who is merciful and long-suffering toward your weary soul. You can't find true rest on your own. Jesus invites you, "Come to me." What does your study of the Word lead you to? Worship of him. Christ reminds you, "I can give you rest." Every time you feel exhausted, it's a reminder that you can't survive this life on your own—you need Jesus to help you. You look to a Savior who offers a compassionate word as he invites you to find true and lasting rest. As you study your Bible, you will learn that God has a lot to say about rest. He offers you a more restful life this side of death and, even more, an eternal rest in glory.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. It will help remind you of God's goodness and power and promises whenever you desire rest. So work through it this coming month, and then come back to it a year from now, to remind yourself about what God and the gospel teach us about cultivating a life of true rest.

This devotional starts you on a wonderful journey that will help you find more rest for your life. After you finish reading (and rereading) it, if you want more, you'll see more resources listed at the end of the book. Buy them and make good use of them.

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

Introduction

REST? MAYBE YOU love the concept but have a hard time putting it into practice. Perhaps you're in a season of life when the demands on your time have increased and rest seems like an unrealistic luxury. Or maybe you've been immersed in a difficult calling, whether ministering to others, caring for an aging parent, raising young kids, leading a company, or a combination of the above. Rest feels elusive. You aren't sure how you'll find the strength to keep loving and serving.

We live and serve in a weary world. Life is tiring, and rest is far too often a luxury. Throughout Scripture, God invites his people to rest so that we can live truly fruitful lives that we lay down in love for others. Yet not only does he invite us to rest, but he also empowers us to rest through the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

Throughout our time together in this devotional, we'll explore the exact nature of the rest that God invites us to enjoy (see Ex. 20:8–10; Ps. 62:5; Heb. 4:9–10), investigate why rest is holy (see Gen. 2:3), and learn with Mary about what “one thing is necessary” (Luke 10:42). Most importantly, we'll figure out how to practice rest in a way that is uniquely our own. As we transform our perspective, our pace, and the pattern of our days, we will become not only hearers of the Word but doers as well (see James 1:22–25).

A change of *perspective* means learning to rest and abide in Christ instead of pursuing a works-based salvation. A change of *pace* comes from trusting God and resting in him to provide instead of hurrying and hustling out of worry and fear. Finally, a change of *pattern* means setting aside regular hours, days, and weeks to rest from our usual labor.

My Story: Burnout and the Absence of Rest

In 2016, I found myself in a season of vibrant ministry on all fronts. The publication of my first book was bringing long-held desires to fruition, I had speaking engagements around the country and a busy and full counseling ministry at a local church, and all the while I was raising energetic preschool-aged twins and investing in the women's ministry of our church. In the middle of this very fruitful period, Deepak Reju called to ask me about contributing to the 31-Day Devotionals for Life series. Everything in me wanted to say yes, but I had begun a downward spiral that was propelling me into a dark season of burnout and depression.

There was a crucial element missing from my apparently fruitful ministry, and that was rest. I had yet to learn the habit of rest, nor did I understand my freedom to rest in the *finished* work of Jesus. My theology proclaimed Jesus Christ's all-sufficient work of salvation, but I lived with an inward pressure to work harder and produce more, unwittingly attempting to add to Jesus's redemptive work in my church, my family, and my community. I fell apart as I lived under the weight of a heavy yoke I was never meant to bear. After failing to heed the warning signs, I arrived at a place physically, emotionally, and spiritually where I was unable to do anything but the most basic activities for daily life.

As God pruned away what I considered to be "my fruit," I learned anew how little is required to abide in Jesus as he holds me with grace and love. I learned that Jesus's yoke is easy and his burden is light. Friends and relatives surrounded me, cared for me and my family, and helped to ease us back into wellness. Now I work as a part-time biblical counselor and writer, manage our home, and parent our adolescent daughters. I rest more regularly, though not perfectly, and I'm just now—six years later—engaging in this writing project.

God met me in a difficult season and taught me to trust him more as I learned the beauty of rest. He invited me and drew me

to come to him for true rest—soul rest that came through physical and emotional rest too. This wife-mom-counselor-writer-speaker-friend is learning the value of weekly and seasonal periods of rest, the importance of saying yes and no in ways that honor the boundaries God has given me, the joy of restorative sleep and regular physical exercise, and the refreshment of a good old-fashioned afternoon nap. I hope and pray that in our thirty-one days together, you'll join me in laying down the heavy burdens you're carrying as we come to Jesus for true rest.

How to Read This Devotional

How can this devotional be most helpful to you? Simply reading the material for each day will have some value in your life, for God's Word never returns void and always accomplishes the purpose for which God sends it (see Isa. 55:10–11). And yet Scripture teaches from beginning to end that God's Word is never intended *only* to be read and ingested. Its purpose is to equip us “for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). Don't read this devotional without also committing to implement rest in your life. Use the practical suggestions at the end of each meditation to make a start by putting its lessons into practice.

If I were sitting across from you in my counseling office or over a cup of coffee, I'd lean in and tell you that *small beginnings can produce big change*. Think about faith the size of a mustard seed, which Jesus proclaimed was enough to move a mountain (see Matt. 17:20). When I was a mom of newborn twins, I wanted to observe a weekly day of rest. All I could come up with was to take a break from doing laundry on Sundays. And here's the thing: God, who sees what's done in secret, who knows the direction of your heart, will multiply even the smallest decisions such as these. So, even right now, take one minute to settle your heart, take a deep breath, and pray for God to remove whatever hinders rest in your life.

Here's a brief overview of where we're headed in this devotional:

- We'll begin by looking at *what rest is* in days 1 through 10, seeking to define a biblical pattern and practice of rest. Here we'll see the significance of the Sabbath in particular.
- In days 11 through 22, we'll turn to the next practical question that arises: *how to rest*. In this section, we will examine how to appreciate the gift of sleep, how to exchange our burdens for Jesus's easy yoke, and how to turn away from what hinders rest. We'll see that God's compassion welcomes us to the rest we need.
- Finally, we'll meditate on *where to rest* in days 23 through 31. As we conclude, we'll see that all our rest foreshadows the eternal rest that awaits us with Christ in heaven.

Are you ready to begin? Let's say yes to Jesus's beautiful invitation to rest and trust him more fully and deeply to produce his good work through us as we rest and abide in him.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28–30)

WHAT IS REST?

DAY 1

The Beginning of Rest

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen. 2:2–3)

EXCELLENT STORIES HAVE compelling beginnings. The story God tells in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, has a *very* good beginning. There is nothing, and then there is everything. Over six days, God speaks the entire cosmos into being—it is the most productive workweek imaginable. But what happens next is striking. God stops. Into his pattern of daily work, he weaves an entire day of rest. It’s a holy pause.

Did God stop because he was tired? The work of creating an entire universe exhausted him, and he needed to catch his breath? Absolutely not. This is the God who needs “neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps. 121:4), who is all-powerful and all-creative, who possesses a well of infinite resources and strength from which to draw for all eternity. No, God rested because he knew the creatures he had made in his image—including you and me—would need rest.

Adam and Eve, the first humans, were given the work of tending the garden of Eden and stewarding all God had made. Even before sin brought futility and frustration into their work, God gave them a day of rest to replenish and refresh them. It was to be a holy pause in which they could remember and worship the God who provided for their every need—even, and *especially*, their need for rest.

As we begin to define rest, we consider the purpose of the very first rest. God’s rest was the cessation of “his work that he had done” (a phrase repeated for emphasis three times in these two verses). It signaled an end to his work of creation.

But we also see that God's rest established a pattern of rest for his creatures. God is infinite; we are finite. *God* didn't need to rest: God chose to rest, knowing that *we* would need to rest. We worship a God who knew we would need to take breaks from our work.

What work fills this season of your life? A job may be the first thing that comes to mind, but work isn't limited to paid employment. Work is anything you do with some degree of necessity that involves your sustained effort. This may include studying in school, managing your home, tending your land or yard, parenting children, caring for your parents or your spouse, and volunteering in your church, school, or community. What will your rest be? At its simplest, rest is pausing from this work.

Reflect: What pattern did God establish for work and rest in the creation week?

Reflect: Consider the difference between you as *creature* and God as *Creator*. How is God's day of rest a gift to his creation?

Act: Define your work during this season. What is requiring your effort?

DAY 2

Rest Is a Mark of Freedom

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. . . . On [the seventh day] you shall not do any work." (Ex. 20:1–2, 10)

WHEN ADAM AND EVE disobeyed God's good command, the pattern of work and rest he had set for them was disrupted. Sin, death, and futility entered the world, and work became painful and difficult (see Gen. 3:17–18). Now, in the book of Exodus, God explicitly lays down the pattern once more. Six days of work are to be followed by one day of total and intentional rest.

Consider the context in which God restores this pattern. He has just miraculously rescued the people of Israel from centuries of slavery under harsh Egyptian taskmasters. Shortly before their escape, Pharaoh had increased their workload so that it was impossible for them to meet their work quotas (see Ex. 5:16). He had no intention of allowing his slaves to snatch physical rest.

Now God reassures his people, whom he has rescued from bondage, that he will be a very different king over them. The commandments he gives them are part of their "freedom charter."¹ For these freed slaves, a day of rest is a welcome relief. Rest is something they *get* to do.

God's people experienced an even greater exodus when God, through Christ, rescued us from our slavery to sin. If rest was part of the Israelites' freedom charter, how much more so is it to be part of ours? Rest is a mark of the freedom we have as God's people. I'm convicted of the many times I've complained that I have "too much to do" when offered an upcoming day or season of rest. We wear "busy" like a badge to indicate our worth, when the reality is that it's a chain that is keeping us enslaved.

Freedom to rest isn't only for your individual benefit. Yes, you have been rescued from slavery to sin through God's grace, and meditating on this spiritual reality will bring you much joy and rest. But no party is complete without other people. We are to extend the grace of rest to those in our households, those in our workplaces, those passing through our communities, and even the livestock that labor in our fields. This is comprehensive, because our freedom is meant to overflow into a large-scale community-wide rest. I don't know what this will look like for you, but I invite you to consider together with your community how to experience and extend rest out of a heart that rejoices in our collective freedom.

Reflect: Think about rest as a mark of your freedom. How might that change your attitude to rest and the way you pace your days?

Act: Make a list of all those in your home and workplace. How could you invite them to rest? In what ways could you free them to rest? (For example, as a parent, consider not requiring chores for your kids on Sundays, or, as an employer, consider not expecting communication from employees on their days off.)

DAY 3

The Priority of Sabbath

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.” (Ex. 20:8–10)

TODAY’S PASSAGE WAS WRITTEN to the Israelites as they journeyed from Egypt to the promised land. In it, God establishes a day of rest for his people called the *Sabbath day*. It is an echo of creation’s order. Because God rested from his creation work on the original Sabbath, we too are to rest fully from our work one day out of every seven.

The command to observe the Sabbath is the fourth of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:1–17. It’s the hinge commandment that transitions from commands for honoring God to commands for honoring neighbor. The order communicates God’s priorities. For us to honor him as God above all others (see Ex. 20:1–6), we must remember the Sabbath and pause from our labor for one day a week. In resting from our work, we remember that we creatures are not God, and we find strength in God to obey his commands to love our neighbors (Ex. 20:12–17).

I’ve never heard a Christian argue that honoring parents, abstaining from murder, or refraining from idol worship is irrelevant today. But Sabbath observance? We often see it as legalistic—a relic of the Old Testament law that’s been replaced by Jesus’s law of grace. I wonder if that’s because this commandment offends our Western productivity culture more than any other. Many think it’s inconvenient, unproductive, or just unrealistic to keep a whole day of rest.

In the agrarian culture in which the Israelites lived, not tending the land for a day could have a potentially irreversible impact.

When it was harvesttime, it was “all hands on deck” all day, every day. But God commanded his people to rest even during these times—and not only his people but also their servants, livestock, and guests. By doing this, they set apart the Sabbath from other days and kept it holy.

Sabbath rest isn't optional for God's people. It has been commanded by God, whose holiness and steadfast love are magnified through our Sabbath remembrance. His commands are not burdensome—they are meant to bring life. No other religion or god calls us to worship by ceasing from our work rather than by adding to our burdens. When we rest from the work that consumes the other six days of each week, we are re-created and refreshed. God's goodness shines in the gift of Sabbath rest.

Reflect: Have you treated the fourth commandment as optional? Why or why not?

Reflect: What benefits might Sabbath rest bring not only to you individually but also to your community?

Act: God doesn't command what his grace won't supply (see 2 Cor. 9:8). Where will you specifically need grace to observe the Sabbath day this week? Ask God for this grace, and then take a step of obedience this Sunday.