



World Day of Prayer

“I Will Give You Rest: Come”

Matthew 11:28-30

Prepared by WDP Nigeria

March 6, 2026

Bible Study

INTENTION

This program calls all to come closer to God and find rest in God. When we totally trust and have faith in God, our burdens become light, and we find rest. The program was written by a group of ecumenical Christian Nigerian women in response to the theme, *“I Will Give You Rest: Come”* (Matthew 11:28-30). We reflected collectively on this theme from the context of our experiences as Nigerian Christian women. We hope to inspire other women in the world to unite and pray as one people. As we trust God, our Burden Bearer, we become one body in Christ, receiving and bringing rest to the world.

INTRODUCTION

"Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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 will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

These words of Jesus come after a series of teachings and miracles in Galilee. Despite facing questions and doubts from various groups, Jesus continues to invite people to understand God's kingdom in a new way. His call to "come" and find rest is not just a momentary relief but an invitation to a new way of living in relationship with God.

The concept of a 'yoke' might seem strange to us today, but it was a common image in Jewish teachings. Often, it symbolized the law or religious obligations. However, Jesus offers a different kind of yoke - one that brings rest rather than burden.

As we delve deeper into this study, let's open our hearts to hear Jesus' invitation anew, exploring what it means to bring our burdens to Him and find true rest for our souls.

Discussion Question: What does the idea of "rest" mean to you in your current life situation?

Opening Prayer: Loving God, as we begin this study, open our hearts and minds to your Word. Help us to hear your invitation to rest anew. Guide our understanding and discussions, that we might draw closer to you and find the rest our souls need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MATTHEW 11:28-30 IN CONTEXT

To better understand Jesus' invitation to rest, this section will explore scripture passages that illuminate different aspects of rest. First, we'll look at how rest is woven into creation itself and God's commands for human flourishing. Then we'll discover how the wisdom tradition speaks of finding rest through learning and waiting on God. Finally, we'll see how Jesus redefines rest, shifting our understanding from rigid rules to liberating mercy.

I. Rest in God's Design

"On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation." (Genesis 2:2-3)

"Remember the Sabbath day and 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." (Exodus 20:8-10)

*"He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake." (Psalm 23:2-3)*

These three scriptures illuminate Matthew 11:28-30 by showing that rest is woven into the very fabric of creation, beginning with God's own example. The commandment to keep Sabbath reveals that rest is not just a suggestion but a divine mandate, essential for our well-being and relationship with God. The shepherd imagery in Psalm 23 shows that true rest comes when we allow ourselves to be led by God, trusting in divine guidance and care, just as Jesus invites us to learn from his gentle and humble heart.

Discussion Question: How might these three different images of rest - God resting after creation, the commandment to keep Sabbath, and being led to rest by a shepherd - help us better understand Jesus' invitation: "*Come to me... and I will give you rest*"?

II. Rest and Wisdom

*"Happy are those who find wisdom
and those who get understanding,
for her income is better than silver
and her revenue better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.*

*Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called happy.” (Proverbs 3:13-18)*

*“But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”
The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.
It is good for one to bear
the yoke in youth,
to sit alone in silence
when the Lord has imposed it,
to put one’s mouth to the dust
(there may yet be hope),
to give one’s cheek to the smiter
and be filled with insults.” (Lamentations 3:21-30)*

*“I directed my soul to [wisdom],
and in purity I found her.
With her I gained understanding from the first;
therefore I will never be forsaken.
My heart was stirred to seek her;
therefore I have gained a prize possession.
The Lord gave me my tongue as a reward,
and I will praise him with it.
Draw near to me, you who are uneducated,
and lodge in the house of instruction.
Why do you say you are lacking in these things,
and why do you endure such great thirst?
I opened my mouth and said,
“Acquire wisdom for yourselves without money.
“Put your neck under her yoke,
and let your souls receive instruction;
it is to be found close by.”*

*See with your own eyes that I have labored but little
and found for myself much serenity.” (Sirach 51:20-27)*

These scriptures illuminate Matthew 11:28-30 by connecting Jesus' invitation to the ancient Jewish wisdom tradition, where Wisdom herself invites people to come and learn. The passages reveal that finding rest involves actively pursuing wisdom and understanding, not just passive relief from burdens. Together, they suggest that Jesus' "easy yoke" is the yoke of divine wisdom, which brings both rest and understanding to those who seek it, even in times of hardship and waiting.

Discussion Question: In what ways does this connection between wisdom and rest challenge or deepen your understanding of Jesus' invitation to "take my yoke upon you, and learn from me"?

III. Jesus Redefines Rest

“One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?” Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”” (Mark 2:23-28)

“At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? How he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”” (Matthew 12:1-8)

These parallel passages illuminate Matthew 11:28-30 by showing Jesus' reinterpretation of rest - not as a burden of rules but as a gift of mercy for human flourishing. They demonstrate that Jesus, as "lord of the Sabbath," has the authority to invite us into an understanding of divine rest that prioritizes human need over rigid religious observance. These stories provide context for understanding Jesus' "easy yoke," suggesting that the rest He offers is liberating rather than constraining.

Discussion Question: How does Jesus' statement that "the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath" help us understand what He means by His yoke being "easy" and His burden being "light"?

REST FOR EVERY BURDEN

In every age, people have carried different kinds of burdens, each one weighing heavily on body, mind, and spirit. Through exploring four specific burdens - shame, systemic oppression, religious persecution, and poverty and despair - we discover how God's promise of rest speaks to the deepest struggles of our time. These burdens, illuminated through the stories of our Nigerian sisters in the worship service, help us understand both the weight of human suffering and the profound rest that God offers.

I. The Burden of Shame or Low Self-Esteem

So many of us carry the heavy burden of shame. Our societies often judge us harshly, telling us we are not good enough - as students, parents, or believers. This shame weighs us down, making it hard to find the rest our souls long for.

The Bible reminds us that in the beginning, God looked at all of creation, including humanity, and called it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Our worth does not come from what others think, but from the love of our Creator. When we come to Jesus and take up his easy yoke, we can shed the shame that has haunted us. Our faith frees us to embrace our identity as the beloved children of God.

Discussion Question: How can remembering our identity as God's "very good" creation heal the burden of shame that affects so many people across cultures and contexts?

II. The Burden of Systemic Oppression

Many in our world today face the crushing weight of systemic oppression - unjust social, economic, and political structures that relentlessly marginalize certain groups. This burden robs people of their dignity, agency, and opportunity to flourish. Whether it is the legacy of colonialism, the exploitation of the poor, or the oppression of religious and ethnic minorities, these dehumanizing systems can make it seem impossible to find true rest and liberation.

The wisdom tradition in the Bible, particularly books like Proverbs, directly addresses the burden of systemic oppression. These ancient teachings emphasize the importance of treating everyone fairly, caring for the vulnerable, and advocating for justice on behalf of the oppressed. Through exhortations against exploiting the poor, showing kindness to widows, and upholding ethical conduct in all social interactions, the wisdom literature promotes a vision of a righteous and just society. When we embrace this wisdom, we uncover the spiritual resources and moral clarity needed to confront and dismantle the unjust systems that oppress our communities. By heeding the God's invitation to "come" and find rest, we join the collective work of building a more equitable world where everyone can truly rest.

Discussion Question: How can the ethical teachings and vision of justice found in the biblical wisdom literature empower us to challenge and transform the systemic oppressions that continue to weigh so heavily on our world today?

III. The Burden of Religious Persecution

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:44 - "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" - speak to the heavy burden carried by all who face persecution, whether for their faith, ethnicity, or any other aspect of their identity. In a world that often marginalizes and oppresses those deemed "different," these teachings offer a radical call to respond with compassion rather than retaliation.

The path of love that Jesus models provides spiritual strength to those facing hostility and rejection. In the face of persecution, we can find rest in God - not by harboring hatred or intolerance, but by letting Christ's love flow through us. In making this choice, we find that our burdens truly do become light, and in God, we find our rest.

Discussion Question: How can Jesus' message to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" inspire and empower those facing persecution?

IV. The Burdens of Poverty and Despair

The biblical accounts of God's provision and concern for the poor and marginalized offer a powerful counterpoint to the crushing weight of poverty and despair. Psalm 23's imagery of being led to "green pastures" and "still waters" suggests a God who desires abundant life for all, not just the wealthy and privileged. This vision speaks directly to the realities faced by so many in our communities who struggle to make ends meet and find themselves overwhelmed by hopelessness.

Yet even in the face of daunting economic hardship, the Scriptures urge us to hold fast to the promise that "those who are cast down will be lifted up." Rather than simply coping, we are invited to live by faith, keeping our eyes fixed on the truth that God will open new doors and make a way where there seems to be no way. Though the path may not be easy, our steadfast trust in God can give us spiritual strength, community support, and vision to keep us dreaming and working towards a brighter future. In our struggles, we may be burdened, but we need not be broken - for we serve a God who desires to fill our lives with abundance.

Discussion Question: How can the biblical vision of God's care for the poor, along with the Scriptures' call to persevere in faith even in the face of economic hardship, inspire and empower us to address the root causes of poverty and despair within our communities?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, our Burden Bearer, we come before your throne of grace, hearts full of thanksgiving even in our weariness.

You see your children carrying heavy loads:
the burden of shame that makes us forget your proclamation of goodness,

the oppression that crushes our families and communities,
the persecution that tests our faith daily,
and the poverty that leads so many to despair.

Mighty God, you who created rest as a gift for all people, we praise you for your wisdom that leads us to peaceful paths. We rejoice that Jesus shows us true rest, not in heavy rules, but in justice, mercy and kindness.

Loving Father, give us the boldness to bring our burdens to you, the humility to learn from Jesus, our gentle teacher, and the strength to help others find rest. Make us vessels of your peace.

We trust you, for you are the same yesterday, today, and forever. Lead us beside quiet waters, O Shepherd of our souls. Restore our hope and guide us in right paths, that we might find rest for our journey.

In the mighty name of Jesus, who calls us to come and find rest, Amen.

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