

# How to Rest

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*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*  
Matthew 11:28

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How’s that going for you? I think about my life and the lives of people I talked to this week. Our days fill up with errands and activities, and then you see something scary news on Facebook. You disagree with someone you love. And you didn’t get everything done. When your head hits the pillow, is your heart at rest?

## Restless Hearts

This Bible passage is like pure good news, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** That’s nothing but a generous promise. But I also like to listen to other people’s sermons on this passage, and every single preacher included a different quote, not from Jesus but from the church father St. Augustine. And this is not good news. *“Our hearts are restless, Lord.”* Isn’t that true? Jesus offers rest, but we are restless. So what gives? Well, for the next 15 minutes, our goal is to understand how we can rest.

If your heart is a bit restless, you’re not alone. History is full of what I’ll call epic rest-fails. And we can learn about our own restlessness from studying their rest-fails.

## Solomon’s Epic Rest-Fail

One epic rest-fail is King Solomon. He was the third king in the ancient kingdom of Israel, great David’s greater son. Can you imagine him at the end of his long reign, an old man standing atop one of the great towers of

his palace, looking over the now great city of Jerusalem? He remembers the transformation he made in that city. He inherited from his father some shacks with a wall. He'll pass to his son a city clothed in marble and jewels and gold, the center of a vast commercial empire. His personal achievements were impressive too. He was so wise that other rulers would set aside four months of their time and travel thousands of miles just to hear his teaching. He achieved everything professionally. He was the best version of himself personally. If a person's heart could find rest by accomplishing enough, Solomon would have found it.

But he didn't. As the old man sees everything he's done, he thinks one word: "Meaningless. It's all meaningless." The full quote is, "**When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind.**" (Ecclesiastes 2:11) How long do you have to chase the wind before you catch it? How much do you have to achieve before your heart is at rest? As Solomon lay his head on the pillow, after all his accomplishments, his heart was still chasing 100 miles per hour. Know the feeling?

## Hamilton's Epic Rest-Fail

I recently got to see a different rest-fail in the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical, *Hamilton*. It's a Broadway biography of one of America's founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton. One of Hamilton's defining characteristics is his restless pursuit of respect. He starts at the bottom, a poor, orphaned immigrant. But as one lyric says, "Alexander Hamilton began to climb, non-stop."<sup>1</sup> He comes to America, earns a degree, becomes George Washington's right-hand man, then secretary of the treasury, becomes famous, marries a renowned family. He's on the \$10 bill. And on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the number one trending term on twitter was #hamilton. If a person's heart could find rest by being loved by others, Hamilton would have found it.

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<sup>1</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda, Lyrics to "Non-Stop." *Genius*, 2015, <https://genius.com/Leslie-odom-ir-lin-manuel-miranda-phillipa-soo-christopher-jackson-original-broadway-cast-of-hamilton-and-renee-elise-goldsberry-non-stop-lyrics>.

But he didn't. No matter how famous Alexander gets, he's restless. In one song, his wife sings, "We don't need a legacy. We don't need money. If I could grant you peace of mind... that would be enough."<sup>2</sup> But do you what Alexander sings over and over? "I will never be satisfied."<sup>3</sup> Imagine that man laying his head on the pillow, so many people love him, and his heart was still chasing 100 miles per hour. Know the feeling?

## Luther's Epic Rest-Fail

One more rest-fail for you. Five hundred years ago, there was a man named Martin Luther, who was restless. And his plan for finding rest was to be pure. He went into a monastery, became a monk, and spent his life fasting, praying, studying, working. He figured his restlessness was about his relationship to God, so if he did everything God wanted, he would find rest. He was the very definition of obedience. If a person's heart could find rest by morality, Luther would have found it.

But he didn't. He wrote, "Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners... I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience."<sup>4</sup> As young Martin lay his head down on the cold stone floor, having tried his best to live rightly, his heart was still chasing 100 miles per hour. Know the feeling?

## Our Rest Fails

St. Augustine was right. "Our hearts are restless, Lord." Yours and mine too. Personally, my rest-fails look like a modern-day King Solomon. So I think if I can find the right schedule, if I can get more done, if I can finish my to-do list, then it will be better. And my nights are restless because I don't get it all done. Maybe your rest-fails are like Hamilton. You want likes on social media. You want the respect of people at the office. You

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<sup>2</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda, Lyrics to "That would be enough." *Genius*, 2015, <https://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-and-phillipa-soo-that-would-be-enough-lyrics>.

<sup>3</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda, Lyrics to "Satisfied." *Genius*, 2015, <https://genius.com/Original-broadway-cast-of-hamilton-and-renee-elise-goldsberry-satisfied-lyrics>.

<sup>4</sup> Luther's Works Volume 34, Career of the Reformer IV (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1960), p. 336-337

want to be loved by your friends and family. And your restless nights are filled with what you could have done, what you should have said. Pretty much everyone is a modern Martin Luther. Every Christian thinks, "If I were better at obeying God, then it would be better." And our restless nights are filled with guilt and regret. I don't know what your heart is chasing, but I know that if you're a human, your heart is restless.

You know there's a second half to St. Augustine's quote. "Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they find rest in you."

## Jesus' Rest Is Different

If you're a bit weary from chasing, listen to Jesus. "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**" The Greek word for "rest" is *pauso*, like our English word "pause." See what Jesus is offering? When your heart is chasing 100 miles per hour, Jesus can reach in there and push pause.

That was a radical idea. The people Jesus was talking to, they'd heard about religious rest before. They'd heard that rest comes from God's laws. If you work enough, obey the commandments, offer the right sacrifices, you'll find rest. And Jesus said no. Rest isn't a goal you achieve; it's a gift you receive when someone else does the work.

That's why only Jesus can give you rest. Because only Jesus did enough to be at peace. Jesus lived 33 years on this earth, that's like 12,000 nights his head hit the pillow. How many nights did he think, "I didn't do enough."? How many nights did he think, "I wish I wouldn't have said that."? How many nights was he feeling guilty about breaking God's laws? 0. Because he did everything right. Jesus achieved what we've been chasing. So with his dying breath, do you know what he said? "**It is finished.**" (John 19:30) The rest we've been working for, he achieved.

And what does he do with his completed work? He gives it away. "**Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:29)

Some students, before a test, stay up all night studying. They're restless. And if someone offered them a study guide, that might make their work more efficient, but it's still more stuff to study. But what if someone showed that student a test paper with their name on it, and an A+? Then that student could rest because the work is done. Jesus is not offering you help. He's offering you his life. It is finished. You can rest.

## Rest Like a Baby

Now how do we get his rest? To learn that we are going to have to study someone much different from Solomon or Hamilton or Luther. Those guys were brilliant. Solomon- the wisest man on earth, Hamilton- one of the most learned Americans ever, Luther was good at everything.

But Jesus says, **"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children."** (Matthew 11:25) As long as I depend on my wisdom or my learning, I'll miss Jesus' rest.

But little children or "babes," as the old translations say, have an advantage here. You know what babies are really good at? Nothing. If a baby is hungry, she needs mom to feed her. If a baby has a problem, even as small as a dirty diaper, she needs dad to help her. Babies are dependent on others for everything. And that is a serious advantage for finding rest.

It's an advantage for us too. When your heart is chasing 100 miles per hour, Jesus has promised that he can push pause in there. But you could miss it. If you come to him like king Solomon with your hands full of all your accomplishments, if you come to him like Alexander Hamilton with your mind full of brilliant ideas about finding peace, if you come to him like Martin Luther clinging to all your hard work and obedience, then you won't have a hand free to receive his rest. But if you come to Jesus like a baby, nothing in your hand, nothing to contribute, then all you'll have is his work, his perfection, and you can rest.

## How to Rest in Jesus

Now practically, it's interesting how this usually plays out. Often a person will have a concern that makes him restless. Behind that concern is a terrifying truth. And behind that terrifying truth is a beautiful one that gives rest. And the only way to get to the rest is to confront the terror. I'll give you a few examples and then say Amen.

Often I'm restless because I think I won't get everything done. And behind that restlessness is a terrifying truth: maybe I'm not that productive. Maybe I'll never figure out how to accomplish great feats. Maybe I'm less like King Solomon, and more like a little child. And behind that terrifying truth is a beautiful one: even if I don't accomplish much, Jesus says, **"It is finished."** I can rest. And then go back to my to-do list without all that pressure.

I've got a friend who is restless because he wants other people to admire him. And behind that restlessness is a terrifying truth: Maybe he's not that admirable. Maybe he'll never be as charming or well-liked as he wants. Maybe he's less like Alexander Hamilton and more like a little child. And behind that terrifying truth is a beautiful one: Just as he truly is, without any self-improvement, the Lord of Heaven and Earth likes nothing more than him. He can rest. And then go back to his relationships with nothing to prove.

Maybe you're restless from guilt and failures. And behind that restlessness is a terrifying truth: Maybe you're not as pure as you ought to be. Maybe you're not a great example of justice and faithfulness. Maybe you're less like Martin Luther and more like a little child. And behind that terrifying truth is a beautiful one: **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8) Because of Jesus, you're innocent. You can rest. And then return to your life of obedience, guiltless and joyful.

That's why Jesus said, **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."**

Amen.