

Advent Spiritual Exercise

Letting Go

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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

There are many things that vie for our attention and devotion. It is easy to develop a hurried heart, stuffed schedule, and cluttered soul. It's common for people to feel weighed down by family relationships, financial pressures, the demand of work, the load of worry and burden of regret. Rather than carrying the weight of these things, God invites us to let them go and to only carry what he has for us. God's desire is that we would be spiritually free, unencumbered and focused. Because of his work on the cross, Jesus makes this possible.

We often hold onto the wrong things, seeking to satisfy our needs that are ultimately met in Jesus. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus invites us to recognize our need “Come”, release the burden, “Take” and receive his freedom “Learn”. The result is a lighter and easier load because Jesus carries it with us. Use this spiritual exercise as a symbolic way to surrender and let go.

Begin by sitting down and closing your eyes. Become aware that God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are with you. In God's presence make a fist with each of your hands and place them on our legs. Ask Jesus to help you identify what are the things that you are clinging to. What is it that steals your rest? What is God inviting you to let go of so that you can receive from him? Clench your fist as hard as you can, until it hurts. Let your closed fist represent the thing, the burden, the sin that you are holding on to. Now raise your arms so they're hovering just above your legs. Continue to name the worries, or burdens you are carrying. Hold this position for a minute if you can. The word forgive in the Bible, means “to release” and the word resentment means, “to feel again”. Perhaps you have been feeling a hurt and carrying a burden over and over, again and again. But it is time to let it go.

Now hear Jesus invite you, by his grace, to open your hands. Slowly release your fists, opening your hands with you palms face down. Imagine your hands releasing those things you have identified and letting them drop. Let this be a physical sign of your desire to spiritually release the burden to Jesus and your openness to receiving the power and grace of God. When we release our quest for control and certainty in our world and relationships, we open up capacity for intimacy. Our posture can shift from grasping to receiving.

Finally, take your hands and flip them over in a posture of receiving what God has for you. Cup them together like you were going to take a drink from a spring or pool of water. Let this be a reminder to you of God's abundant love and provision. Imagine the water pouring into and flowing over your hands. Offer God a prayer, telling him you are open to receiving whatever he has for you. Go back and forth between these three postures as many times as you need throughout your time. As you do you can pray one of these prayers:

“Lord, I confess that my tendency is to hold onto what I have. I cling to my time, my resources, my energy, my knowledge, and my attention. I confess, O Lord that I cling tightly in fear to what is truly yours. Forgive me, O Lord. I release these things to you. Teach me to live in the restful rhythm of your grace and love. Amen.”

“God, I acknowledge that I spend too much time desperately trying to hold onto what I believe to be mine. I confess that I often fight against you – your plans and your will. I confess that these hands do not reflect how you lived, and how I have experienced you. Instead, I choose to open my hands up to you. I choose to trust in you and seek your voice. I surrender all I have to you today. Amen.”

“Jesus, you are worthy of my praise and my undivided attention. Help me to focus my eyes on you. I receive the forgiveness and freedom that you made possible by going to the cross for me. Holy Spirit, show me where I am burdened and tired and give me your power to let go of anything that's holding me back from the life that you have for me. Place the yoke of Jesus on me that I might learn from him how to live in abundant freedom. Amen”