

Finding Rest in Prayer

Danielle Bean

Hi, I'm Danielle Bean. I'm really happy that you decided to join me here today for this session in the Pray More Advent Retreat. In this session, we're going to be talking about how we can seek rest, especially inside of prayer. So, appropriate, let's begin with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy spirit. Amen. Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of this time together. Thank you for the gift of the presence of each person participating here today, open our hearts to hear what you want to tell us in today's session. Remind us of your great love. Remind us that you want every good thing for us, and then help us to see the ways that you're calling us closer to you. Mother Mary be our example. Lend us your heart to receive Jesus as you do. Show us how to love Him like that. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, we're talking about seeking rest in prayer, that beautiful scripture passage where our Lord says to us, "Come to me, you who are weary and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Don't we love that? That's from Matthew chapter 11. We'll love the idea of that, but what does that mean? How can we actually do that? Are you weary? Are you weary in life? Especially during the season of advent, it's easy to feel where you're weary. We're spending time doing multiple things. Many of us are juggling many different responsibilities. We're preparing our homes and our families for the holiday season. We have extra activities on our calendar. Many of us are weary. And even inside of everyday life in ordinary time, we can grow weary. We're tired. We're doing so many things. And yet our Lord tells us to seek our rest in Him.

So, I'm going to share with you three different points today about ways that we can seek rest, especially inside of prayer. And the first point I want to share with you is the idea that prayer is not just another chore. Do you know this? Do you recognize this? I think it's really important because sometimes we tend to think of prayer, especially if you're busy as just another to-do on your check-off list. Like, okay, so now prayer time. I got to find some way to cram that into my day. I've already gotten this, that, and the other thing going on. And sometimes when I speak to groups at retreats, I can almost feel the tension in the room when I'm talking about prayer time, because they're like, "Oh my gosh, is she going to burden us with a guilt trip about not spending enough time in prayer?"

But what need to recognize is that prayer is for us. We're built for it. We're meant for it. We find refreshment and peace inside of prayer. It's not something that we do. We tend to think of it as something we do, and it feels like a burden. I know during a particularly trying time in my life we had an infant son who was diagnosed with a genetic life-threatening, incurable illness. And that was a very dark time for me. It was really hard for me to come to terms with that. And I found myself thinking I cannot possibly pray because I don't have anything to say.

And if you've ever felt that way, know that God doesn't want you to come to prayer because He needs to hear anything you have to say. He tells us in that scripture passage, "Come to me."

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Show up. Just be there. Prayer is not a to-do. You don't need to wow God with your eloquent words or do some kind of performance for Him. He doesn't need that. God doesn't need our prayers. We need to pray. That's why He teaches us to pray, because it's good for us.

So, if you think of prayer as just another chore and you can't possibly find time for it, and you feel burdened by the idea of prayer, rather than seeing it as a time of rest, I want to encourage you this advent, spend a little time reflecting on your attitude toward prayer. How do you think about it? Is it just putting in your time? Is it checking off a box? Or are you seeing it as something that you're built for, you're made for, a gift that you can give to yourself?

And I know, especially during busy times, it can be easy to think, okay, I need to just cross this off my list today. I can't possibly, even if you have daily time set aside for prayer, on a busy day, you might be very much tempted to cross it off. Well, let me tell you, one day recently, I had that same temptation. I woke up and there were so many things to do. I was actually fully dreading the day that lay ahead, because it was just multiple things, one on top of another on top of another. And I thought to myself that morning God would understand if I skipped daily prayer time this morning. God would understand if I rushed through perhaps and just did a quickie kind of version of prayers. And yet something inside of me said no. I'm going to take that time. I'm going to be deliberate about taking that time for prayer today, and I did. I made that effort. I sat down and I gave God my day.

This is so important to do. Even if you don't have time set aside for daily prayer session in the morning, at least spend a moment in your morning giving your day to God, giving your work over to Him. It's so valuable. So, I did that that day. I took the time, even though I didn't want to, even though inside I was running about a hundred miles an hour, wanting to get to all the things that I had to get done. I made that deliberate choice, and I spent that time in prayer, and then... This is so funny because this isn't going to happen every time. But then when I started my day, I was surprised when I went and then I opened my email, and there were like five or six different things that got moved, or rescheduled, or canceled altogether. And all of a sudden, I had a free morning, which I hadn't anticipated.

And it really made me laugh because I was like, God, how many times does He have to tell us, how many times does He have to show us He will not be out done in generosity? If we are generous with our time with the Lord, He's going to help us see how to make all those other things fall into place. He's going to give us that peace that can only come from connection with Him. We are built for it. Saint Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in you." How true is that? Do you have a restless heart? In what ways this advent might God be calling you to rest in Him, spend more time just sitting in his presence?

He doesn't say, "Come to me and put on a show." He doesn't say, "Come to me and give me an eloquent speech." He doesn't say, "Come to me and do anything." He says, "*Come to me and I will give you rest.*" Can you come to him this advent season with all the busy things you have going on in your life? And I get it, I get it. I know we're maxed out sometimes. Even though you might be feeling maxed out, even though you might feel like you don't have a moment, especially in those times when you feel like you don't have a moment, take the time and give it to God. Give your day to Him, Give your time to Him. Give your work to Him. He's going to bless

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those efforts that you are going to make at giving Him your day, giving Him your work. He's going to help you to see that prayer is not another to-do. It's not a chore. It's something that's for you, and you truly can find rest in it. You can truly find rest in spending that quiet time with our Lord. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to say anything to sit in His presence, place yourself in His presence, and allow yourself to be there.

All right, the next point I want to make about finding rest, especially during this advent season, is you probably need to be doing less stuff. It's just a fact. Most of us are doing too much stuff. Most of us are too busy. Have you ever noticed that in our culture, we tend to kind of wear busyness like a badge? I'll run into another mom at the supermarket and say like, "How are you?" and she'll be like, "Busy." And I'll be like, "Oh yeah, me too busy, yeah, busy."

Busyness is not a virtue. We shouldn't be wearing it like we're so proud that we're so busy. Well, what are you doing? Is it worth your time? We really should be very stingy about our calendars. We need to be very discerning about how we're going to spend our time as an individual, as a couple, as a family, in your work, in your social time. What obligations do you have that maybe don't make sense for you?

One of the side benefits of this time of COVID has been the opportunity. Especially for me, I've experienced this in my family life. When everything got canceled this past spring, we all had an opportunity to kind of reset. And when things started back up again a little bit, we're not quite normal yet, right? But when things did start back up, we had the opportunity to be discerning about that. Is that something we still want to be committed to as a family? Does that make sense? Do I want to go back to doing that thing? Is it valuable? So many times, we do things maybe, we take on a commitment because somebody asked us to, or we take on a commitment because everybody else is doing it, or we take on a commitment because we always have. But it really is important to stop and assess once in a while. Is this thing still serving me? Is this still how God wants me to be spending my time? Is this how God wants us to be spending our time as a family, as a couple, as an individual? How has God calling you to spend your time?

And sometimes we fill our calendar with so much activity and distraction that it does get in the way of that connection with God. It can get in the way of a healthy family life. It can get in the way of your married relationship. It can get in the way of deep and intimate friendships God might be calling you to have if you're just busy all the time with superficial stuff. So, you probably do need to be doing less stuff. Give yourself permission for that. And take the time to bring your calendar to prayer.

We can say we have all these priorities, but what really your priorities are, look at your bank statement and look at your calendar. Where are you spending your money? Where are you spending your time? Those are the things that are truly important to you. So, if you look at your calendar and it's full of a bunch of stuff you don't really care about, or that aren't really meaningful and aren't serving you, or your family, or your work right now, then be more discerning about that. Decide to cut some things out. Make that scary decision to not do the thing, to be less busy, to recognize busyness in itself is not a virtue.

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And God might be calling you to let go of some things. He might be calling you inside of this very busy advent season to do less stuff, even inside of the regular stuff that we do to prepare for Christmas. Are there things you always do that maybe aren't meaningful anymore? Stuff even you spend a lot of money on that maybe isn't very meaningful or purposeful anymore, be discerning about that. Maybe God is calling you to have a simpler advent and be less busy, do less stuff. So, consider that you probably need to be doing less stuff.

And the third point I want to make with regard to seeking rest, especially inside of our relationship with God, is that balance is a myth, at least the way we think about balance. For years, I had this idea of balance. Especially for me as a working mom, I had all these different responsibilities and all these different things I was juggling, and I would picture balance as everything is in its place, and I'm at peace in the center of it all, because all my obligations are met. Balance is kind of the stationary thing, not in movement at all.

But I heard a very helpful description of balance recently, which was imagine yourself trying to balance on a ball, standing on a ball. Well, you're going to be very much in motion, aren't you? You're going to be very much in moving from one side to the other, shifting your weight from one way to the other in an effort to maintain that balance. And that's what balance really looks like inside of our lives. We're going to be shifting our focus from one thing to another.

Yes, we all have many obligations, and different priorities, and different responsibilities, and balance is going to look like sometimes focusing on this one at the expense of that other one, sometimes focusing on this direction at the expense of that other thing, and we need to be realistic about that. We can't do all the things all the time all by ourselves. It's not true. Multitasking is a big lie. I think that sometimes, we women especially, will fall prey to this idea that, Oh, we're so great at multitasking. You know what? No, you're not. Nobody is.

Do one thing at a time, but that's actually what we do. When you think you're multitasking, what you're actually doing is, in a serial way, moving your attention from one thing to another, shifting your focus. Now I'm going to focus on this thing, and now I'm going to bounce back to this thing. Now I'm going to go to this thing. Do you know what that's costing you, spiritually, emotionally? It's very depleting. It's exhausting to live your life that way. So, this advent season, give yourself this gift of giving yourself permission to do one thing at a time.

Now, we all have multiple obligations. We all have many different kinds of things we need to be doing inside of every day. That's okay. Give yourself permission to do one of those things at a time. And now what am I talking about here? One day, a couple of years, I was at the grocery store, and I needed to be at the grocery store. There were multiple things we needed. And so, I was there shopping, and I realized, as I was shopping, I was super stressed out and feeling a lot of anxiety. And that was because I had running through my head all the other things I needed to be doing, stuff for work, stuff for the kids, stuff around the house, stuff for my own extended family. You've got your own list. It's advent. I know you've got a list that's running through your head.

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But I realized in that moment it wasn't serving anybody for me to be running that list through my head at that moment. I could allow myself, give myself the gift of doing just one thing at a time. Was my vocation requiring that I'd be at the grocery store shopping for these items at this time? Yes. So, it's enough. Give yourself permission to do one thing at a time and know that it is enough. If the one small thing you're doing, tying a kid's shoelace, or preparing a meal for your family, or doing some major project at work, whatever tiny little minutia, whatever little detail you are focused on inside of doing that work, is this what you're called to do right now? Is this part of your vocation? Is this important for you to do right now? Yes? Then give yourself permission to focus on it. Give yourself permission to do that one thing. Focus on it.

Years ago, my daughter Gabby was talking to me once, and I was busy, and I was scrolling through my phone, and she just kept saying, "Mama, mama, mama," and just trying to get my attention. And I was like... I didn't even take my eyes off of the screen, and I was like, "Go ahead, I'm listening, I'm listening." And Gabby said, "No, no, mama. I want you to listen with your eyes." Ouch. She was so right. I needed that reminder, and maybe you need it today. Because whether they're telling you or not, the people in your life want you to listen with your eyes too. They want you to do one thing at a time. They want you to focus on them. If you're with your family and you're working with your family, focus on your family. If you're at work and you're focused on your work, focus on your work.

Our work and our relationships will only benefit from us giving it devoted attention in that way. And yet that means maybe you're going to have to assess how you're spending your days, how you're spending your time. Decide what your priorities are, and then look at your days. Look at how you are spending your time and decide where that can fit in, where it makes sense. Have a plan for that. And what you get at the end is that feeling of peace that we all want, the feeling that all the things are in their place, that motionless ideal of balance that I used to imagine, that doesn't exist. That actually comes from having things in their place, knowing I'm at work now and I'm focused on work, I'm at home now and I'm focused on my family, I'm working with my women's group at my parish and this is the work I'm focused on right now. Know that, whatever it is that you're doing right now. If it's part of your vocation, then it's God's will for you in that moment, and you can embrace that. Give yourself that gift this advent season of doing one thing at a time and doing it well.

So those are the three points that I wanted to share with you here today. So just to recap here. First of all, recognize that prayer is not just another to-do. It's not just another chore on your list. And then second of all, know what that you probably need to be doing less stuff. Think about that. Give that some real thought and attention this advent season. And then the third one of all, know that multitasking is a myth, and give yourself that permission to do one thing at a time. And then my prayer is that you truly will, through focusing on those things, begin to see the rest that God wants you to have in Him, making space in your life for that connection with Him that we were all built for, that your restless heart will find rest in Him.

Thank you for being here with me for this session today. I pray that God will continue to bless your advent journey.