



## Discussion Guide

### Invited by Jesus—Matthew 11.28-30

#### Getting Started: 10 minutes

- What would be the most restful experience you could imagine?

**Setting the Stage:** *Jesus is inviting us, inviting us into rest. Sounds great! Who wouldn't love a bit more rest? As necessary as it might be for some of us, Jesus isn't inviting us to take a nap. He is inviting us to share in his life, the life he shared with the Father. He is inviting us to the life God has always intended. There's just one thing. Jesus' invitation is also an invitation to surrender, to approach him on his terms, to become part of his life rather than simply making him part of our already hectic life. Simply put, life is available but only if we are willing to give up the one we already have. Jesus offers us a trade, our life for the one we were meant to live. So which one will it be?*

**Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes** (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Matthew 11.28-30.
- What is the invitation of Jesus? What does his invitation entail?
- Jesus invites people to come to him so that they might find rest. How might people define rest today? What are the main ways they seek to achieve it?
- In what ways is the rest Jesus promises similar or dissimilar to that which people seek today? What about the ways to obtain rest? (**Note:** You may wish to consider the Group Notes for additional insights.)
- Jesus invites people to come to him to find rest. Is this a simple or difficult request? Can you elaborate?
- What might it take for someone to respond to Jesus' invitation?
- Spend some time considering Jesus' invitation in the following way. Have someone slowly read Matthew 11.28-30. The rest of the group should close their eyes and imagine Jesus is speaking directly to them. Pause and sit with the invitation. Allow it to soak in for a few minutes. After a few minutes, read the passage again and listen once more. Sit and listen for the invitation Jesus is personally extending to you.
- What invitation did Jesus personally extend to you? In what ways might you respond? How might we as a group support you in this response?

#### Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

## Group Notes

### *Invited by Jesus: Matthew 11.28-30*

#### **Context and Background**

**Matthew:** The Gospel of Matthew is the first Gospel in the New Testament and one of the most influential in the early Church. Some of the most familiar sayings of Jesus are found in Matthew. This Gospel is perhaps best known for containing the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In this passage, Jesus takes on the role of a new “Moses,” one who provides a code of conduct for God’s people and promises to lead them on a new exodus out of spiritual bondage. Some have claimed that this Gospel was written as a polemic against Judaism. Those who hold this view point to the instances where Jesus is portrayed as a new “Moses” and passages where he debates with Jewish leaders as support, arguing that Jesus was trying to supplant Judaism with Christianity. However one need not understand this to be Matthew’s approach. Jesus was a good and observant Jew, something Matthew takes pains to point out. Further, Jesus was the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies. Jesus was not trying to supplant Judaism. Rather, in Matthew, Jesus appears as one who comes as the fulfillment of what God has been doing through the Jewish people. In this role, Jesus seeks to reorient his own people to come on board with God’s original intentions for them, intentions revealed in his life and ministry. In a modern context, Matthew provides a compelling invitation to God’s people to join him in what he is doing in the world by both being the people God desires and engaging in the work God has for them.

**Rest:** The concept of rest is central to the grand story of Scripture. In Creation, God instituted a day of rest and instructed his people to honor this day by turning aside from their normal duties so that they might be with him (Genesis 2.2-3; Exodus 20.8-11). As we follow the story of Scripture forward, we discover that God gave this day of rest as a sign to instruct people of his intended life for them. God promised to turn the day of rest into a life of rest with the giving of the Land of Promise to Joshua and the people of Israel (Joshua 21.43-45). God intended that people enjoy an ongoing life with him. The author of Hebrews emphasizes this point by reminding us that the rest God intended should not be equated with the giving of the Land of Promise. The rest God intended was something much larger than land. It was ongoing life with God (Hebrews 3-4). The story of Scripture also reveals a tragic irony about God’s intended rest; that is, people seem to resist God’s intentions and purposes for rest. The Psalmist makes this point as he reflects upon the Exodus journey as does the author of Hebrews (Psalm 95; Hebrews 3-4). We hear echoes of this resistance in Isaiah (Isaiah 55.1-7). It seems that God’s desire has always been to grant people rest, an ongoing experience in which people share his life. However, the reception of this rest depends on the willingness of people to surrender to God. To receive rest, people have to approach God on his terms to share in his life rather than asking God to become part of their lives (Isaiah 55.1-7; Matthew 11.28-30). It is this willingness to surrender and approach God on his terms that seems to be the sticking point for most, a sticking point that leads to the failure to achieve true rest (Psalm 95; Hebrews 3-4). However, the promise is that those who would surrender to God will find that they experience true rest, a life that shares God’s own life (Matthew 11.28-30).

#### **The Text**

**Jesus’ Invitation (Matthew 11.28-30):** In our passage of Scripture, Jesus invites people to come to him so that he might give them rest. The invitation to rest is actually an invitation to a shared life with God, something revealed in the grand story of Scripture as part of God’s ultimate intentions for people (See *Rest*). What is important to note is that this rest—a life that shares God’s own life—is promised upon the condition that people come to Jesus. To receive rest, a person must first come to Jesus and in response he will give them rest. However, Jesus qualifies this coming as a coming marked by complete surrender. Those that come to him cannot come with their own terms and agenda. They must approach Jesus without pretense or vestiges of self-direction. Jesus asks for complete control of the relationship. Those that come to him must take up his yoke and learn from him. Here Jesus makes use of both an agricultural and educational metaphor. The yoke worn by oxen was understood to place the oxen under the full control of the one plowing. Likewise, the concept of learning is drawn from the disciple-teacher relationship, one in which the teacher literally became the master of the student. Jesus promises that those who would come to him in complete surrender would receive rest, a life that shared God’s own life. It is important to note this has always been God’s promise. Those that come to him in surrender find they receive true life from God (Isaiah 55.1-7). It is also noteworthy that the grand story of Scripture teaches that people naturally resist approaching God in complete surrender (See *Rest*). The present context is no exception to this trend. When we consider the context of Jesus’ invitation we notice that it comes in the midst of a series of rejections of Jesus. People are not willing to approach Jesus on his terms in surrender (Matthew 11.7-19—rejection of God as seen the ministry of John the Baptist; Matthew 11.20-24—rejection of Jesus in the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida; Matthew 12.1-14—rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders). The pressing question that surfaces in the present context concerns the underlying reasons for peoples’ resistance to approaching God in surrender. We need to be clear that the resistance is not to God. People are genuinely interested in God and in the present context in Jesus. The sticking point seems to be the issue of complete surrender. People are willing to have God be part of their lives. They are less willing to surrender and have their lives become part of God’s life. In the former instance they remain in control and God is limited. In the later, God becomes everything. What lies behind this desire to remain in control? Jesus seems to indicate that the issue is that of God’s trustworthiness. People do not seem to believe that God is fully trustworthy, that he is completely good, loving, and trustworthy. Jesus points to this distrust as he asserts that he is gentle and humble, and that his yoke is easy and light. In other words, Jesus is saying, “You can trust me enough to surrender to me.” The inability to trust God fully has deep roots in the story of humanity, appearing first in the Garden as the main reason for rejecting life with God (Genesis 3.1-5). It is in facing this mistrust and choosing rather to trust God that one finds the ability to surrender which in turn leads to rest.