

Too exhausted to read the Bible (or pray)...

Most kind and loving people have admirably low expectations for mothers of young children. People constantly reassure me that my failures are okay, whether it's that I forgot to bring something, do something, answer an email quickly, or even if it's something more important: "Nobody can be perfectly patient all the time." "I didn't read the Bible for *years* when we had littles." "They won't remember the bad times." "The important thing is that you're trying." "God knows what we need even when we're too tired to pray."

Even great pastors like D.A. Carson and Martyn Lloyd-Jones [are hasty to reassure us](#) of the legitimacy of our struggle, the impossibility of being a mother of young children and a devotee of Scripture at the same time.

There is much kindness in such reassurance. I have no doubt that it is well-meant.

But while pithy reassurances are comforting, they aren't necessarily biblical or helpful. My heart is *bleak*; I am not strong enough to stop burying myself in the Word of God. And letting go of my desperate hunger for it is not what Scripture teaches us to do.

God didn't tell David to stop writing psalms while he was on the run for his life. Job, in the midst of his incomparable affliction, tells us (23:12) that "I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food." The prophets were persecuted, starved, locked up, and dumped into muddy wells, yet God continued to call them to very active servanthood. In Scripture, we see so many situations that were so much worse, so much more time-consuming, so much more emotionally demanding than motherhood, and yet there was no message to those people saying "okay, maybe you'd better cut back on the morning prayer time."



In fact, one of the most stunning examples of hardship in Scripture I can think of—Jesus in the desert—is also one of the clearest. When Satan attempts to get Jesus distracted by His physical needs, Jesus answers him very clearly, pointing out that hunger isn’t satisfied by “bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Though His hunger was physical (v. 3) and acute, His most necessary food is spiritual!

This is us, too. When we are exhausted from a lack of sleep, we need “rest for our souls” (Matthew 11:29). When we “eat the bread of anxious toil,” we need the blessing of the sleep God alone provides (Psalm 127:2) to ease that anxiety. When we are struggling with impatience from relentless toddlers, what we need is not a momentary break, but the fruit of the Spirit which is *patience* (Galatians 5:22). When we are sad and downcast, we need the joy of the word of God to lift us up (Psalm 119:2).

Our physical and emotional challenges require *spiritual* solutions.

J.C. Ryle, in [his little pamphlet](#) about the importance of Bible-reading, specifically addresses those who struggle to find the resources to read the Bible, and his words are convicting and ring true:

You are the man that is likely to “get little comfort from the Bible in time of need.” Trials come at various times. Affliction is a searching wind, which strips the leaves off the trees, and exposes the birds’ nests. Now I fear that your stores of Bible consolations may one day run very low. I fear lest you should find yourself at last on very short allowance, and come into the harbor weak, worn and thin.

You are the man that is likely “never to be established in the truth.” I will not be surprised to hear that you are troubled with doubts and questions about assurance, grace, faith, perseverance, and the like. The devil is an old and cunning enemy. Like the Benjamites, he can “sling a stone at a hair and not miss” (Judges 20:16). He can quote Scripture easily enough when he pleases. Now you are not sufficiently ready with your weapons to be able to fight a good fight with him. Your armor does not fit well. Your sword sits loosely in your hand.

You are the man that is likely to “make mistakes in life.” I will not wonder if I am told that you have erred about your own marriage—erred about your children’s education of spiritual things—erred about the conduct of your household—erred about the company you keep. The world you steer through is full of rocks, and reefs, and sand bars. You are not sufficiently familiar either with the search lights or your charts.

You are the man that is likely to “be carried away by some deceptive false teacher for a time.” It will not surprise me if those clever, eloquent men, who can “make the lie appear to be the truth,” is leading you into many foolish notions. You are out of balance. No wonder if you are tossed to and from, like a cork on the waves.

All these are uncomfortable things. I want every reader of this paper to escape them all. Take the advice I offer you this day. Do not merely read your Bible “a little,” but read it a great deal. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). Do not be a mere babe in spiritual knowledge. Seek to become “well instructed in the kingdom of heaven,” and to be continually adding new things to old. A religion of feeling is an uncertain thing. It is like the tide, sometimes high, and sometimes low. It is like the moon, sometimes bright, and sometimes dim. A religion of deep Bible knowledge, is a firm and lasting possession. It enables a man not merely to say, “I feel hope in Christ,” but “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12).

I have seen this in my own life over and over again. I have seven children, and, oh, they are small. They are relentless. If you are a mommy of small or needy children, you know what I mean. I understand why wise men like Lloyd-Jones and Carson think we mommies don’t have the time to read Scripture.

But what happens when I stop?

The well dries up. See, when I *do* find time to be in the Word every day, there’s this fresh ever-bubbling source of spiritual nourishment that is continually applicable and new. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy; God still uses it. He promises in Isaiah 55:10-11 that His word is like rain:

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

Even when I'm doing a lousy job of reading—when the words begin to blur together because I'm so tired, when my brain is so fried that I would have zero insights to offer to a group study, when I'm distracted by screaming toddlers—still God's word does not return to Him empty.

Truly, it is amazing. As I write this, I am exhausted. Baby seven was born three days ago after a difficult and long build-up to final labor—which was itself a very rough time—and our days since then have been consumed with more medical appointments and stresses, and I am at the point where I can barely remember what day it is. I'm a wreck. But I have been able to read the Bible passage that is [programmed to arrive in my email inbox](#) every day, and spend a little bit of time praying (albeit fairly incoherently!), and in return, there have been many—three or four—incidents every single week of the past month when something I have read *right now* has been immediately applicable to my life. Either it has served to encourage me, or been relevant to a spiritual conversation I've been having with someone else, or it has provided a great example of a principle I'm trying to illustrate to my children... in short, even my very bad Bible comprehension right now is bearing a lot of fruit, and it has been a powerful testimony and encouragement to me of the inherent *usefulness* of reading Scripture.

Even in the midst of my exhaustion and physical struggles, the time and energy that I invest in the Word are amply repaid, over and over again. And not just in little soundbytes of encouragement here and there. So often God enables my feeble mind to snag on some item in the text that I hadn't noticed before, and make tiny little gains in spiritual knowledge and understanding. Scripture feeds me in the *now*, when I desperately need it, and it builds up spiritual food-stores that God will continue to use and grow for His glory in the future, too. Though I feel like I have the I.Q. of a turnip and struggle to comprehend some of the Bible's

longer sentences, time in God's word and time in prayer *bear fruit*.

But if I don't find that time? If I decide I'm too tired, or that it can't possibly be worth the effort to even try? *Nothing* happens. There are no fresh spiritual insights floating into my brain, no recent flash of biblical wisdom to share with those around me, no encouragement waiting to shore up my soul. There's no growth. The things of godliness are not lurking in my mind ready to help me deny sin and pursue righteousness; they're buried deep in somewhere that I've been "too tired" to think about recently. I may still retain the head knowledge that being impatient with my children is wrong, but it's been a while since I've been reminded of the consequences of that kind of sinfulness. God's justice and fearsomeness are not freshly impressed on my mind. The well—the very well which gives us life and leads us to holiness—is running dry. The Christian cannot live like this. The Christian *Mommy* cannot live like this.

The times when we don't have the energy or motivation to spend time in God's Word is the time we most *need* to do so anyway. The person who is the too parched with thirst to drag themselves to the stream is the person who most needs a drink; the person fainting with hunger who can't contemplate the effort of cooking a meal is the person who most needs nourishment.

So, when you are too exhausted to read the Bible, read it anyway. It will give you life. Find a way, find a time, because God's word is more essential than food, and times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord. *He* is the answer to our exhaustion and inability, and He is faithful!