

### 3. The Root of Restlessness (3Q 2021—Rest in Christ)

**Biblical Material:** Matt. 10:34–39; Luke 12:13–21; Phil. 2:5–8; Luke 22:14–30; Matt. 23:1–13; James 3:16.

#### Quotes

- Knowing that we are fulfilling God’s purpose is the only thing that really gives rest to the restless human heart. *Chuck Colson*
- I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. *Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre*
- All of them had a restlessness in common. *John Steinbeck, East of Eden*
- Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. *Oscar Wilde*
- Almost every sinful action ever committed can be traced back to a selfish motive. It is a trait we hate in other people but justify in ourselves. *Stephen Kendrick*
- Self-absorption in all its forms kills empathy, let alone compassion. When we focus on ourselves, our world contracts as our problems and preoccupations loom large. But when we focus on others, our world expands. Our own problems drift to the periphery of the mind and so seem smaller, and we increase our capacity for connection—or compassionate action. *Daniel Goleman*

#### Questions

Why was Jesus, and his mission, so divisive? How can we truly see ourselves and our problems? How do our concepts of God feed into our sense of restlessness? How can we allow God to give us the same humble, selfless attitude as Jesus? What is the real issue with thinking of ourselves first and foremost? How would you define the root problem?

#### Bible summary

Jesus speaks of the division his message brings, which is like a sword, not peace. He concludes by saying “If you try to save your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life because of me you will save it.” Matthew 10:39 FBV. Luke 12:13–21 is Jesus’ parable about the man who grew rich and built bigger barns, but was not rich towards God. Instead, we are to have the same attitude as Jesus, who emptied himself, and humbly came in human form (Phil. 2:5–8). Luke 22:14–30 is the story of the Last Supper and the disciples’ argument as to who was the greatest. Jesus points to sinful selfishness as the root of our restlessness and evil as he speaks bluntly to the scribes and Pharisees in Matt. 23:1–13. James writes, “Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition you’ll also find confusion and all kinds of evil practices.” James 3:16 FBV.

#### Comment

The root of restlessness is part of our broken relationship with God; the sense we have of separation and loss; a recognition that we are not people we were meant to be. The reason we cannot truly rest is because we are in conflict—the inner conflict with ourselves, and with others, because of our sinfulness. As Augustine of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions*: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

We will always be restless, trying to find some solution to that gnawing feeling, until we accept that we are sinful, self-centered beings. We find the answers in making God and others our focus, not ourselves.

Sin is selfishness, it is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), it is loving ourselves more than loving God and His principles of truth and right. We, like the Pharisees, can become fixated on making sure we don't break the rules as the way of being good. But this attitude really gets in the way of what God wants to do. Striving for technical obedience while wanting to go your own way makes it hard for God to intervene and help. For the self-righteous see no need of any help. For, as Jesus said so pointedly to those who saw themselves as being righteous, he came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. The tragedy is that all of us are sinners, yet some do not recognize that fact.

God is not concerned with sin as an "offense" to himself but rather because he knows what sin will do—kill us. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and wants to save all his children. Of course, if we choose to go our own way in rejection of God, then our freedom-loving God will allow us our choice. But not before giving us plenty of warnings, and telling us where our choice will lead. When the end comes for his unrepentant rebellious children, they will die, and God will weep over each one that he loses.

God wants more than anything to remove our sinfulness. "Jesus came to take away sins, and that there is no sin in him" (1 John 3:5 FBV). As he dies, Jesus, who was made to be sin who knew no sin (see 2 Corinthians 5:21), is our healing, life-giving Saviour. Through the transforming power of God we are made new. So why should we want to go back to the life of sin and death? We are created anew. So why should we ever want to go back to a life of sin?

The attitude of lawlessness that is the true character of the anti-christ, has no place in the life of the true child of God. Lawlessness is not simply the rejection of the rules of law, but the God of law who shares with us what is for our very best. God is not some kill-joy who wants to keep us from anything good, as the Devil insinuated in the garden (see Genesis 3:5). Rather the law is given to us to help us understand what is truly good for us—it is God's best counsel for us. Jesus comes to answer the Devil's defamation of God, to counteract the misrepresentation of what really is good, and to expose the whole demonic scheme that turns lies into truth and truth into lies. "That's the reason why the Son of God came—to destroy what the devil has done." (1 John 3:8 FBV).

The lawless spirit of rebellion that has been so deceptive and confusing will eventually be revealed so that no one will be in any doubt as to its real character. Sin is shown for what it is: totally destructive selfishness. The Devil even transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), the last great trick that fools everyone who doesn't know God as he really is.

### **Ellen White comments**

It is a sad thing to be discontented with our surroundings or with the circumstances which have placed us where our duties seem humble and unimportant. Private and humble duties are distasteful to you; you are restless, uneasy, and dissatisfied. All this springs from selfishness. You think more of yourself than others think of you. You love yourself better than you love your parents, sisters, and brother, and better than you love God. {3T 334.2}

If you become restless, as did Abraham and Sarah, and work up plans of your own in order to bring about God's promises, a condition of things which you deem desirable after your own ways and ideas, you will find that it will result in sorrow, misery, and sin. {2MR 336-7}