

“As a mom who has graduated two daughters from our homeschool, I can say with confidence that living the kind of homeschooling—the kind of resting in God—that Sarah discusses has paid off enormously in our home. *Teaching from Rest* is an encouraging, humble, honest, and gentle book. It is a gem.”

—Karen Edmisten, karenedmisten.com, author of *Deathbed Conversations*, *After Miscarriage*, *The Rosary*, and *Through the Year with Mary*

“*Teaching from Rest* will fill even the most frantic, overwhelmed homeschooling mom with a deep sense of peace.”

—Jennifer Fulwiler, conversiondiary.com,
author of *Something Other than God*

“In this book, Sarah helps us breathe deeply, focus on the children we have in front of us, and plunge back into our calling with renewed vision and passion. *Teaching from Rest* is about letting go of our anxiety without giving up on diligence. Yes, we can do it!”

—Mystie Winckler, simplyconvival.com,
author of *Paperless Home Organization*

“Sarah Mackenzie is winsome and wise, a real ally for teachers in the trenches. *Teaching from Rest* is profoundly helpful for home educators at any stage. It’s been a blast of light in our family, and a rich resource for our homeschooling community.”

—S.D. Smith, author of *The Green Ember* and *The Black Star of Kingston*

“This book offered me both spiritual and practical inspiration and the reminder that God’s definition of success is not completion of a particular curriculum, but rather, faithfulness to what He’s called me to.”

—Trina Holden, trinaholden.com, author of *Your Real Food Journey*

“In *Teaching from Rest*, Sarah beautifully reminds us that we will never be able to give our children the ‘perfect’ education. Instead of crumbling under the weight of our attempts to do so, we can let the burdens fall off our tired backs.”

—Jamie Martin, simplehomeschool.net,
author of *Give Your Child the World*

“*Teaching from Rest* is a quarterly read for me because that’s how often I need a shot in the arm—not just for spearheading my kids’ education, but for parenting. This book does just that. Sarah reminds me that I’m made to do this job of sharing the journey with my children, pointing the way as I forge my own path of learning. Her words are balm in a desert that taunts us with a need to be perfect at all times. *Teaching from Rest* reminds me to take care of myself so that I can pour out that needed passion from true, inward authenticity.”

—Tsh Oxenreider, author of *Notes from a Blue Bike: The Art of Living Intentionally in a Chaotic World* and founder of theArtofSimple.net

“Reading *Teaching from Rest* was truly transformational to our entire homeschool year! I’d been feeling weary and burnt out as a homeschool mom and Sarah’s words breathed life into my tired bones and fresh inspiration into our days. The benefits and blessings we’ve reaped in our home since implementing Morning Time have been amazing. It’s so wonderful to be starting the homeschool day with anticipation instead of dread and to have my kids eager to learn and begging for more. Thank you, thank you, Sarah! We are eternally grateful to you!”

—Crystal Paine, New York Times bestselling author of *Say Goodbye to Survival Mode*, founder of moneysavingmom.com

“Restful teaching is elusive to any mama, much less us type-A types. *Teaching from Rest* is the reminder I need that I am not in control, nor should I be. If I put my trust in [God] and lean not unto mine own understanding everything is going to be all right. That is why this one is required reading *at least* once a year.”

—Pam Barnhill, edsnapshots.com, author of *Plan Your Year*

Teaching from Rest

A Homeschooler's Guide to
UNSHAKABLE PEACE

Sarah Mackenzie

Foreword by Dr. Christopher Perrin





Teaching from Rest:
A Homeschooler's Guide to Unshakable Peace

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For Andy, who knows me best and loves me anyway.

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Foreword

Sarah Mackenzie writes that “curriculum isn’t something we buy,” but rather “something we teach.” I think she is right. In fact, I know she is right. Of course, we do use the word “curriculum” to mean the published resources we use to . . . to what? Well, to teach mathematics, Latin, or history—that is, to teach our curriculum.

Let’s get this straight. Our curriculum is the course that we travel. In Latin, *curriculum* means “a running” or “a racecourse.” Figuratively it means one’s career—one’s life course. In the classical tradition, curriculum meant a course of training in the liberal arts and the great books. When we use the word “curriculum” to refer to Singapore or Saxon Math, we are extending the meaning of the word to cover the resources we use to teach our curriculum. Both uses of the word are legitimate; the trouble is we know one use of the word and have forgotten the other. So Sarah is right to break the spell of our amnesia and tell us that curriculum is not something we buy, but something we teach.

She brings this up because she knows that we have not only forgotten the meaning of the word, but with it have forgotten the aims of education. She knows that we are tempted to follow closely, even slavishly and with a great deal of anxiety, the specifications of a published resource (our “curriculum”). We cover material, we rush to keep up or catch up, and what is lost in the process is a love of mathematics and our perception of its truth, goodness, and beauty. We instead simply get through the book. Ah, yes, let’s just get through it.

Sarah can write about this so well because she is a convert. There was a time (a matter of years, we suspect) in which she was that anxious educator and parent, checking off boxes, covering material, and getting through books. But now she is not the same. She still uses books and resources to teach her children, but those books serve her and her curriculum; she no longer serves them. She knows better, by knowing

the primary meaning of “curriculum.” She has recovered the aims of education and she has learned how to rest—even as a parent-educator. She now aims at the cultivation of wisdom, virtue, and eloquence in the souls of her children.

This is heartening to me, because I travel the country speaking about the *scholé*—restful learning—approach to education. Over the years, I have found that several homeschooling educators have resonated with this approach, recognizing it as wise and true and setting out to change. They have surpassed me. Sarah is one of these educators, one who did more than attend a few lectures and read a book or two. She has contemplated the tradition of restful learning and has implemented it with her children, blessing them in the process. Her blog posts at AmongstLovelyThings.com are evidence of this. Her conversation confirms it. This book proves it. She has learned something vital about cultivating the souls of her children, seeking their wisdom and virtue and keeping published resources in their esteemed place as helps and aids, which is to say, as published resources. She is the teacher of her children, along with the great books. Published resources help her. One result: She has more responsibility but also more peace.

I say this as someone who publishes such resources, and as someone who struggles to practice what I preach in regard to restful learning and resting generally. I have preached before I have practiced. Sarah has practiced and now preaches. We will all do well to hear her words and observe her life.

Christopher A. Perrin, PhD
Classical Academic Press

Preface

When I sit down to write, sometimes I don't really know what I'm going to say. I start anyway, and almost inevitably the words start coming and I have to try to keep up with them. As I write, I wonder about the woman who might be encouraged by my words—who may find just a small bit of hope in them. I wonder how they will bless her; I hope that they will reach her. And that is why it is especially humbling to realize that the message is actually meant for *me*.

Usually within the preface, the writer discusses why he or she is the right person to be writing the book. In this case, I'm telling you why I *shouldn't* be writing it. I did not see this book coming. The message within it came first as a blog series, and even then the words were given to me through my incessant pleading.

I write this book as the mother of six, three of my children under two—the smallest of them identical twin boys. It seems almost paradoxical that right now—when I am more sleep deprived than I've ever been in my life—I'm writing about rest. On the one hand, it makes no sense. On the other, it makes all the sense in the world. This book sprang from an insatiable thirst for the unshakable peace that God promises those who follow Him. I long to live from a place of rest, to teach and mother from peace rather than anxiety. I'm quite certain that God desires that for all of us—His beloved daughters called to the educating and raising up of little hearts and minds.

I am just like you. I homeschool my kids, wash dishes, pile laundry, trip over Legos, obsess over the curriculum, think too much about which book we should read next, about whether I am doing enough or doing any of it well enough. I worry. I falter. I cave in to my fears and fret about what the neighbors think. I refuse to let God have His way with my kids, our family, and our homeschool, and I cling ever tighter to my illusions of control.

It was Andrew Kern from the CiRCE Institute (CirceInstitute.org) who first alerted me to my anxiety-riddled ways. I was watching an interview of him on YouTube when he stopped me in my tracks. He said, “The most important thing a homeschooling mother can do is to teach from a state of rest.”

At the time I was pregnant with twins. I had a child who was barely a year old, three older kids to teach, a home to run, and the idea sounded, well . . . absurd.

Right, I thought, at this very minute there is dinner to cook, laundry spilling into the hallway, the toddler getting into the bathroom cupboards (again), one child having a meltdown over handwriting, another making paper dolls instead of doing math, and a third shooting Nerf darts at my head. All this and I got five hours of (interrupted) sleep last night because the baby has an ear infection.

I didn’t understand what he meant by “rest.”

He didn’t mean teach your calm children in a calm manner on a calm afternoon. He didn’t even mean teach on a full night’s sleep (thank goodness). He meant that we ought to enter into God’s rest and then serve Him wholeheartedly—not out of anxiety, but out of love and trust.

Over the course of the next year, I swallowed whole anything I could find about rest. I scoured the Internet and the Bible and every book that fell across my way. In the process, I discovered the work of Dr. Christopher Perrin from Classical Academic Press, who was also talking about restful teaching and learning—about *scholé*. Dr. Perrin was influential in my understanding of slow, sane education. My desire to teach my children from peace grew and grew. You can view Dr. Perrin’s video on *scholé* at ClassicalAcademicPress.com and learn about homeschooling groups pursuing “restful learning” at ScholeGroups.com.

I would be remiss not to thank Andrew Kern and Dr. Perrin for their influence on my own personal state of rest. To Rebecca James—

thank you for believing in this project and in my ability to tackle it. Your confidence and encouragement helped me keep on.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my beautiful friends Pamela Barnhill and Mystie Winckler, who believed in this project and offered endless help and counsel from the moment it was just a vague idea. Thanks also to Elizabeth Foss, Angela Fredericks, Meghan Kunzl, Rosalie Nourse, Sheila Rahn, and Natalie Schroeder. You have been to me what Mary was to Elizabeth in her day of need. The insight and practical help you gave was invaluable. I thank God every time I remember you.

We ought to enter into God's
rest and then serve Him
wholeheartedly—not out of anxiety,
but out of love and trust.

To Andy and my beautiful big kids: thank you for putting up with the madness. For letting me shriek with glee when the words came to me like a rush, and for giving me space to hone them when they trickled out with much time and effort. Your support of my labors has meant the world to me. I hope all that time I disappeared to a coffee shop to write this book will be redeemed through His grace. I do everything for you . . . but sometimes I forget to tell you that.

For the readers of my blog, *Amongst Lovely Things*: All I have for you is heartfelt thanks. Your words of confidence and admonition spurred me on. You inspire and challenge me every day. The community we have built together brings me great hope and lifts me up when the days feel heavy.

Here is the bare truth: Not an hour passes without the enormity of the task I have taken on bringing me to my knees. This work of homeschooling and raising hearts and souls and bodies is hard. It is more than I can do in my own strength. Even so, more than anything else, I desire to teach and mother in a way that pleases God. Some days that feels like feeding the five

thousand. But He is not asking me to feed the five thousand; He just wants me to bring my basket of loaves and fish and lay them at His feet.

I have no business whatsoever sounding like someone who has this figured out. I'm writing this book anyway because the message keeps rattling around in my heart and I won't be able to shake it free until I learn to embrace it: *Our hearts are restless until they rest in You, O Lord.*¹



This work of homeschooling and raising hearts and souls and bodies is hard. It is more than I can do in my own strength.

1. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1983), book 1, n.p.

Introduction: I Shouldn't Have Written This Book

In the book of Philippians we are told to be anxious over nothing, yet we are anxious over everything.

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6–7)

We worry that our students will be “behind,” that they won’t score well on the SAT, get into a good college, or read enough of the Great Books. Our souls are restless, anxiously wondering if something else out there might be just a little bit better—if maybe there is another way or another curriculum that might prove to be superior to what we are doing now. We choose anxiety as our guide instead of humbly submitting to God and letting Him guide us.

We all know the story of Mary and Martha, I’m sure (see Luke 10:38–42). Jesus was staying at their house, and Martha, anxious to please Him and make Him comfortable, was bustling about—doing and doing and doing. Her sister, Mary, was sitting at the Lord’s feet, listening attentively, beholding, soaking in.

We can picture Martha in her frustration with her sister, right? “Don’t just sit there! Do something!” And yet the Lord gently admonishes Martha’s busyness. Mary, after all, has chosen the needful thing. The contemplative way. The being and becoming over the doing and the checking off. I can almost hear him inverting the message to me—turning my obsession with productivity on its head: “Don’t just do something; sit here.”

As homeschooling moms, we are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. If we choose the good portion, it will not be taken from us.

We are called to work. That part we have down, more or less. We homeschooling mothers are quite adept at spinning our wheels, working dawn to dusk to make sure our children have everything they need. We toil tirelessly to create lesson plans and assemble curriculum that will ensure our children know everything they need to know before they fly our coop.

We worry. We fret. We know, deep down in the core of our being, that we are not enough. That what we offer is a pittance compared to the task before us. We feel small and insignificant because we *are* small and insignificant.

The heart of this book is about remembering what our true task really is, and then throwing ourselves in completely. Giving our all. The raising of children, the teaching of truth, the sharing of life, the nourishing of imagination, and the cultivating of wisdom—these are all His anyway; we are merely His servants.

In the midst of all the doing, we forget the needful thing. We may sit at His feet; we may begin our day with prayer, Bible reading, and supplication, but is our teaching and mothering transformed by it? Do we really trust Him? Do we live each day from a state of rest?

God doesn't call us to this work and then turn away to tend to other, more important matters. He promises to stay with us, to lead us, to carry us. He assures us that if we rely on Him alone, then He will

provide all that we need. What that means on a practical level is that we have to stop fretting over every little detail. We need to stop comparing. We've got to drop the self-inflated view that *we* are the be-all and end-all of whether the education we are offering our children is going to be as successful as we hope it is.

After all, our job is not to be successful—success itself is entirely beside the point. It's faithfulness that He wants. God is good! He isn't going to let us pour out our hearts for our children only to be left choking on the dust of our mistakes.

Can we seek Him first? Can we live and teach from a state of rest? My prayer is that we will. But we must approach the Holy Spirit every single day, asking Him to lead us and to quiet our anxious souls so that we can really bless our children—not with shiny curriculum or perfect lesson plans, but rather with purposeful, restful spirits.

The true aim of education is to order a child's affections—to teach him to love what he ought and hate what he ought. Our greatest task, then, is to put living ideas in front of our children like a feast. We have been charged to cultivate the souls of our children, to nourish them in truth, goodness, and beauty, to raise them up in wisdom and eloquence. It is to those ends that we labor.

We toil because we long to be like the man in Psalm 1, who is “like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (1:3).

The heart of this book is about remembering what our true task really is, and then throwing ourselves in completely. Giving our all. The raising of children, the teaching of truth, the sharing of life, the nourishing of imagination, and the cultivating of wisdom: These are all His anyway; we are merely His servants.

The first edition of this book was available as an e-book only. After receiving feedback from the readers of the e-book, I put much thought

and care into revisions for this second edition. The material has been reorganized and added to, and it is my utmost prayer that these changes bless and encourage you. Teaching from rest is a lifelong journey. I'm not sure we ever really arrive, but the way we encourage and build each other up along the way has the ability to shape our lives and the lives of our children for eternity.

I'm so glad to hook arms with you for this journey—may God's most abundant blessings be yours now and always.

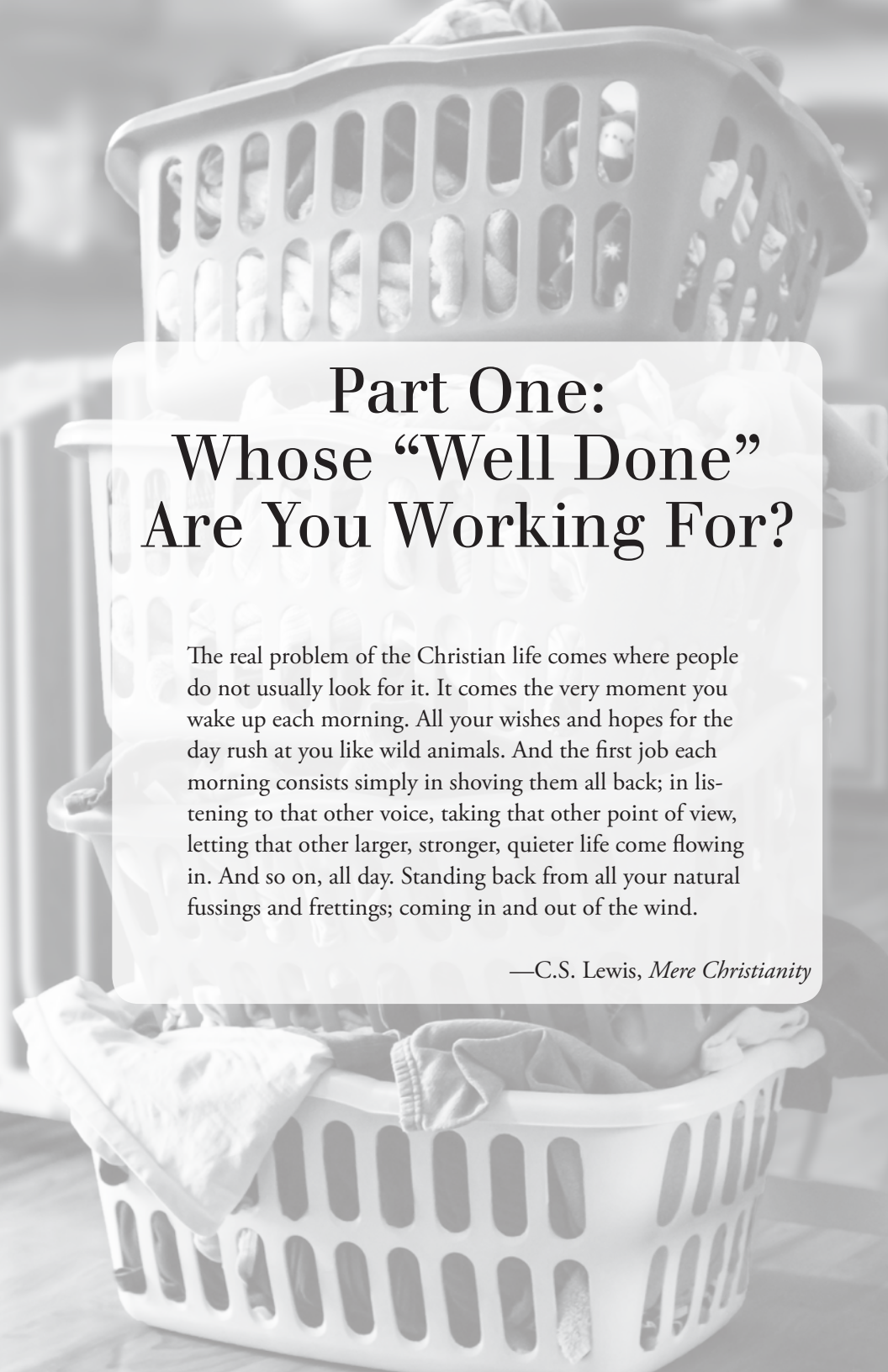
Before You Read This Book

You may want to get your hands on the companion set of *Teaching from Rest*—it contains a printable journal and a set of audio files. The companion journal will help you work through the principles discussed in these pages. You can print it out and use the commonplace area to copy out any passages or quotes that you don't want to forget. The journal prompts included will help you dig out ideas and live them out in your home and heart.

The audio companion is a collection of recorded conversations between myself and the educator-mentors whom I respect most. This is delivered as a set of MP3 downloads. It includes:

- *Teach from a State of What?!*
with Andrew Kern
- *Scholé: Changing the Way We Think about School*
with Dr. Christopher Perrin
- *Let's Get Real: Mothering from a State of Rest*
with Brandy Vencel
- *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*
with Cindy Rollins

You will find all of the companion materials at ClassicalAcademicPress.com.



Part One: Whose “Well Done” Are You Working For?

The real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in and out of the wind.

—C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

The Cake under the Couch

Everything that happens each day in the little universe of our work and our family, in the circle of our friends and acquaintances, can and must help us to find God's providence. Fulfillment of the divine will and the knowledge that it is being done is a source of serenity and gratitude.

—Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*

Rest begins with acceptance. Or, perhaps more accurately, with surrender. There will always be more you can do. You will never complete your tasks entirely, because just on the horizon is tomorrow, and tomorrow the to-do list starts anew. It is so exhausting—sometimes even demoralizing—to realize that our work in raising up and teaching our children is never really done. But we must remember that we were never intended to finish it.

In *Holiness for Housewives and Other Working Women*, Hubert Van Zeller tells us, “The whole business of serving God becomes simply a matter of adjusting yourself to the pressures of existing conditions. . . . This is the first lesson for the Christian wife and mother today: to let go of what may once have been—and under other circumstances might now be—a recollected self, and take on, with both hands, the plan of God.”¹

Rest begins with
acceptance. Or,
perhaps more
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surrender.

What are those existing conditions? What is keeping you from speeding through the reading curriculum, flying through the math book, checking off the lesson plans, and maximizing efficiency? Usually the

answer is: people. Can you hit the pause button on your frustration long enough to realize that people rank infinitely higher than anything else on the list? Have you considered that God may have scooted these people into view for the very purpose of slowing you down?

1. Hubert Van Zeller, *Holiness for Housewives and Other Working Women* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1997), 14–15.

When a person interrupts what you are doing, you [ought to] recognize a representative of Christ. When the dog is seen getting under the sofa with tonight's dessert, you at once assume that God wants you to put aside the half hour you have been looking forward to (which you meant to spend with a book in church or doing the stations of the Cross) to make another dessert.²

Whatever is getting in the way of your plan for the day—the toddler's tantrum, the messy bedroom, the sticky juice leaking all over the fridge and into the cracks of the drawers, the frustrated child, the irritable husband, the car that won't start, the cake the dog dragged under the couch . . . whatever that intrusion into your grand plan for the day is, it's also an opportunity to enter into rest. C.S. Lewis once observed:

The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's "own," or "real" life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life—the life God is sending one day by day; what one calls one's "real life" is a phantom of one's own imagination.³

We can't really rest in God's care until we trust that He *will* indeed care for us. And that means I can't teach from rest unless I trust Him with my kids' education too. I am not meant to take on this task of teaching and raising my children in my own strength, and neither are you. We are, however, meant to recognize every facet of our day as coming from the hand of God. It all passes through His fingers first, and He uses it to make sure that we lean hard on Him.

Surrender your idea of what the ideal homeschool day is supposed to look like and take on, with both hands, the day that it *is*. Rest begins with acceptance, with surrender. Can we accept what He is sending today?

2. Van Zeller, *Holiness for Housewives*, 31.

3. C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (New York: Mariner Books, 2003), 499.

Rest Is Not Ease

It's important to remember that rest is not ease. This isn't idealism. It isn't simple and peaceful in the sense of being easy or gentle. Teaching from rest is meaningful learning and growth—but without the anxiety and frenzy so common in our day. Contrary to what you might think at first when you hear “teaching from rest,” teaching from rest will take diligence, attention, and a lot of hard work.

Unshakable peace does not come from getting through a certain amount of material over a specified amount of time, but it also doesn't come from throwing in the towel and giving in when things get hard. Peace comes from recognizing that our real task is to wake up each day and get our marching orders from God. It comes from diligence to the work He hands us, but diligence infused with faith, with resting in God's promises to guide and bless us.

Teaching from rest doesn't mean that we let our children dictate the curriculum, that we ignore timetables altogether and decide we don't care if our children ever get into college or pass their exams. *Rest is trusting that God's got this, even if I'm a mess, even if I'm not enough, even if I mess up every day. Because I do.*

We have this desire to give our kids what we call an academically “rigorous” education. Andrew Kern and Christopher Perrin both taught me a bit about that. In my conversations with them for the audio companion to this book (available at teachingfromrest.com), I asked them how we could pursue a rigorous education while retaining a sense of rest. What I didn't realize at the time was that the word “rigor” comes from the Latin *rigor*, *rigoris*, which means “numbness, stiffness, hardness, firmness, roughness, rudeness.” *Rigor mortis* literally means “the stiffness of death,” which I think we can all agree is not the goal of homeschooling our children!

Don't aim for a rigorous education, Kern and Perrin both told me. *If we are aiming to order our children's affections, learn to love what is lovely, join in the great conversation, and cultivate a soul so that the person is ready in*

every sense of the word to take on the challenges around the corner and on the other side of the college entrance exams; work toward “diligence” instead.

“Diligence” comes from the Latin *diligere*, which means to “single out, value highly, esteem, prize, love; aspire to, take delight in, appreciate.” What we are really aiming for in giving our children a rigorous education is not just doing hard things, but cultivating a habit of focused attention. The word “student” comes from the Latin *studium*, meaning “zeal, affection, eagerness.” A diligent student, then, takes delight, eagerly and with great zeal, in what he loves.

Through a restful diligence we work at the right things in the right way at the right time—as God gives us that wisdom. We are diligent about the things we love, and we can love what must be done because we have been blessed and loved by a God who even enables us to love our enemies. Surely if we can love our enemies, then we can love the laundry, or Latin, or math studies. When we are diligent, even our mundane daily tasks can be offered up to God as gifts of love and sacrifice.

As Laura Ingalls Wilder reminds us, “The true way to live is to enjoy every moment as it passes, and surely it is in the everyday things around us that the beauty of life lies.”⁴

So what does this mean as I am entrenched in my actual day? What happens when my child throws down her pencil and her eyes well up with tears because she just doesn’t get the math lesson today? (This happens in my home quite a bit!)

When I focus on being diligent rather than rigorous, my measure for success is not, “Did I check off lesson 97 today?” I *am* going to want to check off lesson 97 at some point. But if I can’t do it today because my child is not achieving understanding, I don’t need to fret and worry and wring my hands. I’m not tempted to push her through to the next lesson because we must! keep! up!, and I certainly don’t put the math book on the shelf and shrug it off either.

4. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: Farm Journalist: Writings from the Ozarks*, ed. Stephen W. Hines (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2007), 88.

When my child does not understand a math lesson, it should not disturb my state of peace. After all, God intends that study and work involve challenges that we face and overcome, so we expect difficulties from time to time when teaching our children. Now it's time to troubleshoot, problem-solve, and come alongside her. When she doesn't understand the day's lesson, it isn't a setback; it's just God showing us our marching orders for the day. My child doesn't need me to fret and fear; she needs me to love and guide her with grace.

Teaching from rest means we don't panic when things don't go according to our plan—in fact, we plan for plans not always to work well. When I take on the challenge of this day with both hands and trust that we are right where He wants us, that's when I experience unshakable peace. Not when the work is all done, the lessons all checked off, the SAT aced, and my child sent successfully to college, proving that I did my job well.

In fact, unshakable peace is not tied to my success at all. It's tied to faithfulness. We rest in knowing that if our children grow up to ask us why we did what we did—why we focused on cultivating wonder and curiosity, on learning hard things such as Latin and algebra, why we didn't fill up our days but focused on living well and gazing on Him—we can answer them with confidence.

In his landmark book *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton tells us that secular culture is made up of virtues run wild, and we see this tendency clearly when it comes to our teaching.⁵ If studiousness is a virtue worth cultivating, I find that I am drawn toward vice on either side of it. On the one hand, I am drawn to steamroll over my kids, to lord over them with checklists and grade levels without regard to their nature as unique persons made in the image of God. On the other, I am drawn to negligence or carelessness. I comfort myself with adages about children learning all the time and, hoping that my child will encounter an idea

5. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Lexington, KY: Ortho Publishing, 2014).

for himself without my interference, fail to form my student's affections out of fear that such work is coercion or manipulation.

Rest is the virtue between negligence and anxiety, but many of the homeschooling moms I have met, myself included, find themselves more likely to fall prey to one camp or the other. When we are weak in virtue, we inch toward vice. A curriculum that leaves no room for the soul to breathe will suffocate, but so will the absence of purposeful and intentional teaching. If we are doing our children a great disservice by shuttling them through a set of books and plans without consideration for their souls, we are doing them an equal disservice by ignoring their formation and leaving our children to form themselves.

Let's really think about this. If our children are images of God (and they are), then we aren't meeting their needs or tending to their real nature when we swing like a pendulum to either the vice of anxiety or the vice of negligence.

I spent some of my early homeschooling years parked in an overly relaxed mode of teaching. It wasn't laziness, exactly—I went in quite intentionally and thought it to be a great gift to my students to allow them to bloom on their own terms. What I found, however, was that the nature of my children was not nurtured by my best intentions. My neglect in their formation reaped exactly what one might expect—laziness, carelessness, and a self-centered view of learning. I thought I was meeting my kids where they were. I wrongly figured that if wisdom began with wonder, then I as a teacher ought to step out of the way completely. In an effort not to stand between my student and his learning, I failed to build a bridge at all between the child in front of me and the man God intended him to become.

The Greek historian Plutarch once wrote, "The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting."⁶

6. Plutarch, "On Listening," in *Essays*, trans. Robin H. Waterfield, ed. Ian Kidd (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 50.

Modern translations of Plutarch's maxim tell us that education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire, but we must remember that a fire does indeed need to be lit and then stoked, or else it will burn out.

Teaching from rest is not the absence of work or the abdication of our responsibility to form and shape our students. In Luke 6:40 we learn that a student, fully formed, will become like his teacher. Clearly, then, a teacher cannot form and train a student by staying in the shadows.

Rest, therefore, is not the absence of work or a failure to consider and carry out a plan. It is work and leisure, properly ordered. It is doing the right thing at the right time, realizing that our task is to hear God's call and follow His commands, and then to trust that God will be God—to be at rest even while at work.

Much of our anxiety in homeschooling could be sidestepped by simply acknowledging who we are trying to please. It sounds simplistic, but consider that your day—what you prioritize, what you don't—will likely look different depending on whether you are doing it all for His pleasure, or doing it all (or only some of it) to please Grandma, the neighbor, or anyone else.

Who am I trying to impress, anyway? What ends up on my list of essentials may not look remarkable to the state or to anyone else, but I just have to keep reminding myself: That doesn't matter. I cannot serve two masters, and neither can you. Whose "well done" are you working for?

Why Your Daily Grind Is Holy Ground

Most of my own frustration comes from forgetting what my real task is in the first place. He's called me to be faithful, yet I'm determined to be successful. For example, I have a tendency to think (and teach) as though I have been charged with the task of successfully

raising lifelong learners. I judge my success or failure in my teaching either by the tools my child has in his academic toolbox at the end of a school year, or by whether she still enjoys school, pursues knowledge, and chooses to read stacks of high-quality books in her free time.



What I forget is that whether or not she does any of these things is not an effective measuring stick for whether I've been doing my job. God is not demanding I be successful on my own. He's calling me to be faithful and to trust Him for the results, which may not look like what I was expecting. Success in God's eyes may not always look like the success we were seeking, but if we are faithful, we will know His peace and rest in our studies and efforts. What more success could we want?

Faithfulness is showing up every day to do the work He has called us to. Whether or not things turn out in the end as I'm hoping they will (for my children to have a strong faith, humble and compassionate hearts, a love for learning, and an academic skill set that helps them seek out knowledge and truth every day and everywhere) is not actually within my span of control. It's not my assigned task. He isn't asking me to succeed on the world's terms. He's asking me to faithfully do the work.

Consider St. Monica, the devoted mother of St. Augustine of Hippo. Despite his mother's prayerful and devoted care, Augustine grew

to be a wild and ruthless young man—throwing himself into sin with reckless abandon. He broke his mother’s heart and turned against the faith she had tried to instill in him at every turn.

Her long-suffering prayers were not laid waste. Her son did eventually convert and even became a doctor of the Church—arguably the most influential church father of all time. Yet if Monica had judged the success or failure of her mothering based on her son’s behavior at age twenty, she would have considered herself a failure.

Do you see? We must drop the self-inflated view that we are the be-all and end-all of whether the education we offer our children is going to work out. We are too quick to feel both the successes and the failures of our job as homeschoolers. Our kids test well on the SAT and we pat ourselves on the back. They are miserable writers and we scourge ourselves for failing them. But He never demands that we produce prodigies or achieve what the world would recognize as excellence. Rather, He asks us to live excellently—that is, to live in simple, obedient faith and trust. He asks us to faithfully commit every day to Him and then to do that day’s tasks well. He’s in charge of the results.

The success we seek is not the same success that the world seeks. All true education begins in wonder and ends in wisdom—as Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain so eloquently describe in *The Liberal Arts Tradition*.⁷

That writing assignment on the plan today? Do it well. That math lesson that your child struggles over? Sit down next to him, and do one problem at a time, slowly and carefully. Smile a lot. Lavish him with love. Because whether or not he becomes an excellent writer or a proficient mathematician is not your business to worry over. Your business is that single assignment today and loving him through it.

We all long to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21, 23). Our task is to love God with all of

7. Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian Classical Education* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2013).

our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to do it in front of and with our kids (see Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37). To do it when we rise up and when we walk along the way (see Deuteronomy 6:7). Each and every one of those little moments are part of something beautiful you are making for God—you are building a cathedral.

Build a Cathedral, Cultivate a Garden

Once you have realized you are in the presence of God, cast yourself down with deep reverence before him and acknowledge your unworthiness to appear in his majestic presence, asking for all the graces you need to serve him well, knowing that in his goodness he longs to grant them to you.

—St. Frances de Sales

Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life.

—Charlotte Mason, *A Philosophy of Education*

It is easy to forget that teaching is holy work. The building up of the intellect—teaching children to really think—does not happen by the might of human reason, but rather by the grace of God. On an ordinary day, you and I likely have a set of tasks we’ve scheduled for our kids. But it’s more than math. It’s more than history. It is the building up of our children’s minds and hearts, and we can only do that if we realize that this is how we thank Him for the graces He so lavishly pours upon us.

I tend to get lost in the details of large-family life when I’m right in the midst of it. It takes a certain fortitude, after all, to look at a pile of dishes and see it as the makings of a cathedral. The daily mundane is holy ground because the ordinary tasks of a monotonous Monday are where we meet our Maker.

The builders of medieval cathedrals knew what it meant to work their entire lives to please God without ever expecting to see their work completed. Many cathedrals would take more than a hundred years to build—more than the span of a man’s lifetime. I once heard a story of

an artisan who worked tirelessly for many years to carve a beautiful bird into the wood of a portion of the cathedral that would be covered up. When someone asked why he was working so hard on something that no one would see, he replied, “Because God sees.”

God sees your little wooden bird too. Just as the artisans and carpenters of old built beautiful cathedrals for the glory of God, so do you. Yes, you—you who work tirelessly day after day over a geography lesson, a math test, a laundry pile, a kitchen sink. Those are the moments wherein you build cathedrals for God.

We are doing the small, difficult tasks day by day, one stone at a time. The cathedral builders toiled for years of their lives without knowing whether they would see the finished cathedral—the holy place to which they had given their lives. A homeschooling mother acts on similar faith—adding one small brick at a time—wondering if it makes a difference, if anyone will ever notice, if those small quotidian tasks will ever add up in a meaningful way.

At the end of our lives, He is going to look into our hearts. What is it He will find there, I wonder? Will He find that we used the geography lesson, the dreaded math test, the teetering laundry pile, and the boiling-over pot of soup to draw closer to Him? Did we use these gifts to teach our children to lift their eyes heavenward? Were the tedious details of a homeschooling day offered up as a way for us to love Him, or were they merely gotten through, checked off, and accomplished? Did we even realize that every Monday, every Thursday, every ordinary day, we were standing on holy ground, building a cathedral far more glorious than what we could dream up on our own?

No task is too trivial, no assignment too small. Educating our children is an offering of love we make to the God who was so gracious to bestow them upon us in the first place. Every moment of the daily grind in raising and teaching and loving on them is hallowed, because we do it for Him and because there would be no point of doing it without Him.

So what does that look like in the context of an actual day? That is the question I hear most often in regard to teaching from rest—and indeed, it is one I ask repeatedly myself. If we are called to teach from rest, yet our families and homeschools all look slightly different, where is the common ground? How does God’s rest manifest on a Tuesday afternoon within the walls of my ordinary, slightly chaotic home?

Rest looks like stewardship. Consider a garden—a raised bed right outside your kitchen window, perhaps. The Master Gardener has charged you to plant it with seeds, to cultivate the soil, to tend to the plants and help them to flourish. He did not throw some seeds at you and tell you that you were responsible for the miracle of turning them to ripe, plump vegetables. He placed the seeds into your palm, patted your fist lovingly, and asked you to tend them well. To steward them. To help them grow.



Remember your place, then. You cannot make the plants grow or bear fruit. You can only plant the seeds. You can water them, and steward them. You can cultivate the soil (education is an atmosphere!), thin them (a discipline!), and water them (a life!). It is only by our cooperation with the grace of God and the laws of nature that the seed becomes a plant and bears fruit. We don’t need to have anxiety about when the plant will grow, about how quickly it will come to fruition—our part is to steward it and do what we can to make sure it has the ability to grow rightly.

We only receive grace for reality. God does not bestow grace on us for all of the things that we think might go wrong in the future—for the possibility that a child will fail the SAT, will not have the tools he

needs for a college education or a bright future, or even, more immediately, for the likelihood that this math lesson will end in tears.

No, we are given grace for right this moment—for reality. We must operate within that reality and within the laws of nature as we steward our garden. We can fret all we want that God will not turn our tomato seeds into cucumbers, but to what end?

Be encouraged. Those seeds our Lord has tucked into your hand can bear great fruit in the kingdom of God—but it takes something from you. It takes a reliance on providence, a commitment to faithful stewardship, and a state of restful trust. Cultivate your garden.

Bring Your Basket

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
(Matthew 11:28-30)

Is there a part of you that is a bit cynical about that verse? Does the yoke feel easy and the burden light? It doesn't to me. Most days I wake up and can barely stagger out of bed under the heft of my load.

Just like the disciples, I see this huge throng of people to feed—this seeming impossibility. The shaping of souls and raising of children, the mopping of floors, washing of dishes, bandaging of scraped knees and hearts and worries, the teaching and admonishing and loving and doling out of myself. It's all too much. There are six children in this home; there is one of me. I fall to my knees and I cry out to God. We're a throng of hungry people in the desert, and I'm supposed to feed them. On an ordinary Monday, I am in need of a miracle of biblical proportions.

It isn't that I have nothing, exactly. I have my little basket. I can read aloud pretty well. I'm good at organizing things on paper. I can make a decent pot of chili and I know how to push a vacuum. I love my children with all of my being and I have a real desire to watch them grow to love and serve Him. I don't really have any idea how I'm supposed to tackle everything ahead of me in this day, this year, this decade when that's all I've got. It's just a couple loaves of bread and a few fish.

Apparently, that's all He needs.

We are weary because we forget about grace. We act as though God's showing up is the miracle. But guess what? God's showing up is the given. Grace is a fact.

If you are being asked to feed a multitude with a tiny basket of loaves and fish, then bring your basket. He starts with that. Just like the crowd in the wilderness, which had been faithfully following Jesus for days, sitting at His feet, savoring His words, seeking Him earnestly, we do the same. We bring our basket—whatever talents, skills, abilities we have—and we seek Him with everything we are. He works the miracle.

We should count on the five loaves and the two fishes. By themselves they won't make much of a meal for so many hungry people at the end of a long day, but they nevertheless play an indispensable part in the working of the miracle.⁸

Remember your true task. Surrender everything. Bring your loaves and your fish, even if you think them completely insufficient. They are insufficient. You are insufficient. But His grace is not. God is not limited by objective reality. His yoke is easy and His burden light.

It All Starts with Prayer

I suspect that all of our attempts to teach from a state of rest are futile unless prayer is the cornerstone. We've got to start there. An

8. Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, vol. 4 (London, Scepter, 2010), 299.

indispensable part of bringing our basket, prayer puts aside “doing” in favor of “being” and “becoming”: being in His presence and becoming more like Him.

When we begin the day by offering it up to God, we acknowledge that no matter what comes our way, we are doing it all for His pleasure. We remind ourselves that He is who He says He is, and that nothing matters except pleasing Him. Whether or not our children bicker all day, whether or not we get through the lesson plans, whether or not we barely hang on while everything falls apart around us—none of it matters except that we offer it up to God. And then all of it matters, but in a whole new light.

It’s important that we not allow ourselves to be intimidated by prayer. Rather than worry about how long we pray or how many times we have to bring our minds back from wandering, we show up, sit at the foot of the cross, and put aside our own wills in order to give ourselves completely to His will.

Aspirations

An aspiration is a short prayer sent up throughout the day. Aspirations are excellent for ordering our minds toward Christ when we’re in the thick of things. Use them when you begin to feel your day spinning out of orbit and then keep sending them up as you muddle through. You can use any short prayer or Scripture—just commit it to memory and start saying it throughout the day.

Here are a few to get you started:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Jesus, my God, I love Thee above all things.

Jesus, I trust in You.

My God and my all.

My Lord and my God!

God, come to my assistance. Lord, make haste to help me. (*This one is my personal favorite*)

O Lord, increase my faith.

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Daily prayer doesn't have to be a long, drawn-out ritual. During some seasons of our lives, it simply *can't* be a long, drawn-out ritual. It can happen while you take your shower and get dressed for the day, while you prepare breakfast, or while you nurse the baby first thing in the morning. The key is that it happens every day.

Prayer before Study

Consider printing the *Ante Studium* ("before study") of St. Thomas Aquinas and praying it as a family at breakfast. Taking a few minutes to pray this together may help everyone—teacher and students both—approach the day mindful of the eternal nature each ordinary home-school day presents.

Ineffable Creator,
Who, from the treasures of Your wisdom,
have established three hierarchies of angels,
have arrayed them in marvelous order
above the fiery heavens,
and have marshaled the regions
of the universe with such artful skill,

You are proclaimed
the true font of light and wisdom,
and the primal origin
raised high beyond all things.

Pour forth a ray of Your brightness
into the darkened places of my mind;
disperse from my soul

the twofold darkness
into which I was born:
sin and ignorance.

You make eloquent the tongues of infants.
Refine my speech
and pour forth upon my lips
The goodness of Your blessing.

Grant to me
keenness of mind,
capacity to remember,
skill in learning,
subtlety to interpret,
and eloquence in speech.

May You
guide the beginning of my work,
direct its progress,
and bring it to completion.

You Who are true God and true Man,
who live and reign, world without end.

Amen.⁹

Before we attempt to live a day well, teach our children, or tackle our to-dos, *first* we put the whole thing at His feet. We beg God to use us to fulfill His purpose, and then we see that every frustration in the day ahead is an answer to that very prayer.

9. Thomas Aquinas, "Prayer Before Study," Aquinas College, last modified April 29, 2013, <http://www.aquinascollege.edu/prayer-before-study-exams-spring-2013/>.



We recognize all the small moments throughout our day for what they are—the makings of a cathedral of timeless beauty, the planting of seeds that will bear fruit in their season.