

# RELIGION RECOVERY GUIDE

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JESUS PLUS NOTHING



This is a guide to invite and help you escape the damaging effects of religion. But, you can't "escape" unless you discover the alternative Jesus offers. He offers himself, rather than rules. He offers grace rather than shame and guilt. He offers an easy and light way of life together with him rather than the weary burden of religion.

Maybe you've never experienced the way of Jesus. Maybe you have, but keep falling back into a religious system. Maybe you grew up in a religious culture and have found it difficult to escape. Maybe you are ready to be free from the damaging effects of religion. This guide is designed to help you recover from religion and rediscover the relationship Jesus invites you into. Prayerfully begin or go deeper into the journey that leaves religion and embraces relationship. Ask God to help you experience this freeing way to God.



## **START HERE...**

Take 15 minutes to read and reflect on the key teaching about what Jesus offers. He never offered religion as a means to get to God. He offers himself. Read this as many times as needed. Pray over these words. Look carefully at each word, phrase, or sentence. Write your own personal paraphrase or prayer using the verses.

*Come to me, all you who are weary  
and burdened,  
and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you  
and learn from me,  
for I am gentle and humble in heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy  
and my burden is light.*

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

*Are you tired? Worn out?  
Burned out on religion?  
Come to me.  
Get away with me  
and you'll recover your life.  
I'll show you how to take a real rest.  
Walk with me and work with  
me—watch how I do it.  
Learn the unforced  
rhythms of grace.  
I won't lay anything heavy or  
ill-fitting on you.  
Keep company with me and you'll  
learn to live freely and lightly.*

Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG)

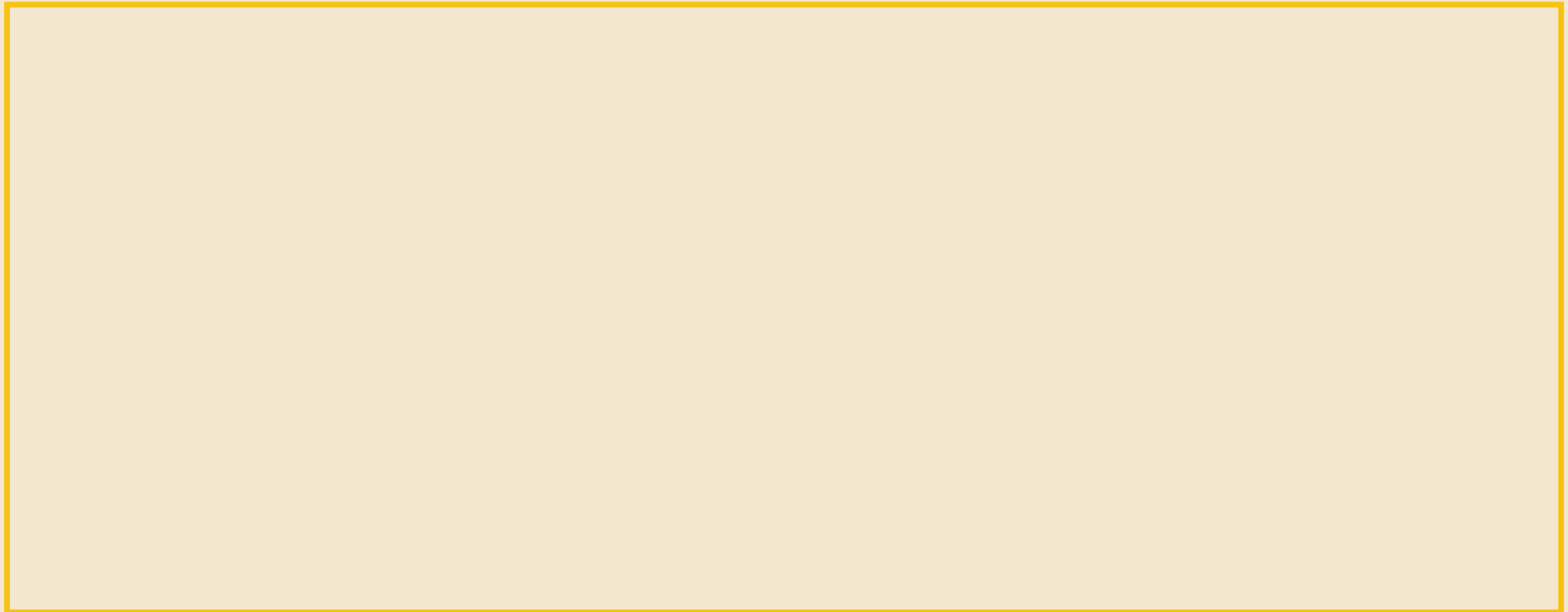
## REFLECTIONS ON MATTHEW 11:28-30

Jesus invites YOU to come to him. He invited “all,” no matter who you are. He invites the real you without pretense, not some idealized or future version of you.

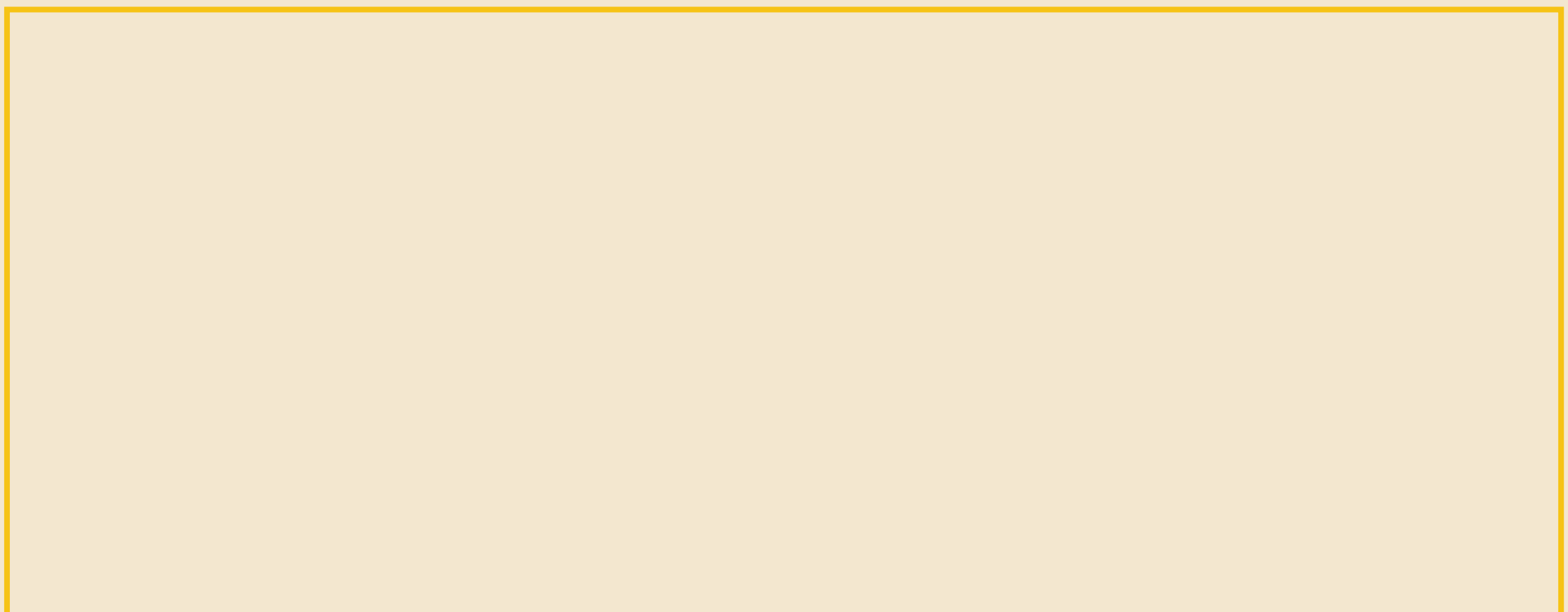
**In what ways are you weary, burdened, tired, worn out, burned out, depressed, anxious, failing, or sinful? Take this time to be honest and transparent. Lay it down before Jesus.**

Jesus' invitation is to come to HIM. It's like Jesus is saying - “Hey, I'm here. I'm available!” But we rush around in the busyness and chaos we allow, which distracts us from him. Jesus invites you to come, drop all your stresses, worries, and troubles and rest with him.

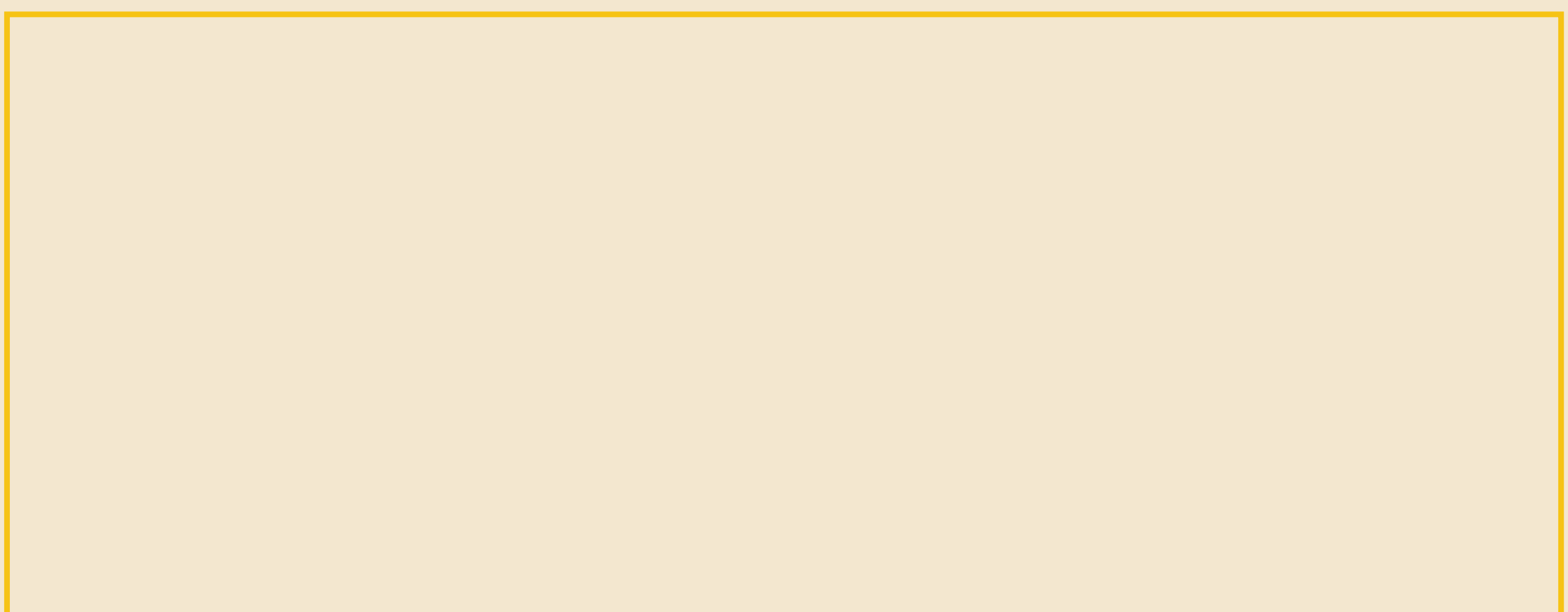
**When was the last time you came to Jesus and just rested?**



**What does it look like to “rest” in Jesus?**



**How will you make this a rhythm in your life?**



These verses in Matthew are some of the very best descriptions of Jesus. It's the only time he tells us what his heart is like.

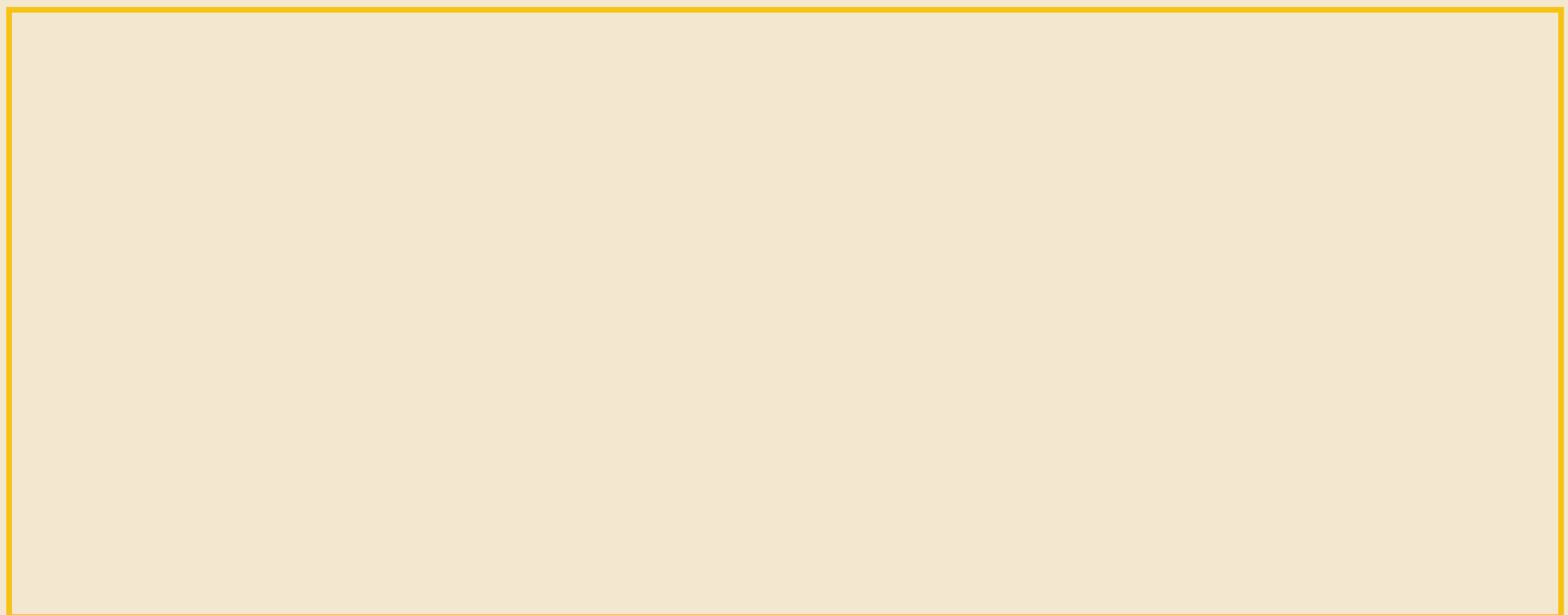
**What does it mean to you that Jesus is “gentle and humble in heart?”**

**Why does it matter to you that he's gentle and humble?**



**The core of what Jesus is inviting you is this: stop trying so hard.** There's nothing you can do to make yourself worthy of Jesus. Come as you are. Religion is the temptation to do things to make us acceptable to God (by following the rules and rituals). Jesus already paid the price for our sins and failures. That work is done. Jesus knows our weaknesses and how frail we are in this sinful body and world. So, quit trying to make yourself okay or good enough for Jesus (which we also try to do with other people). Right now, just spend some time with Jesus.

**What do you want and need to say to Jesus right now as you “sit” and “rest” with him?**



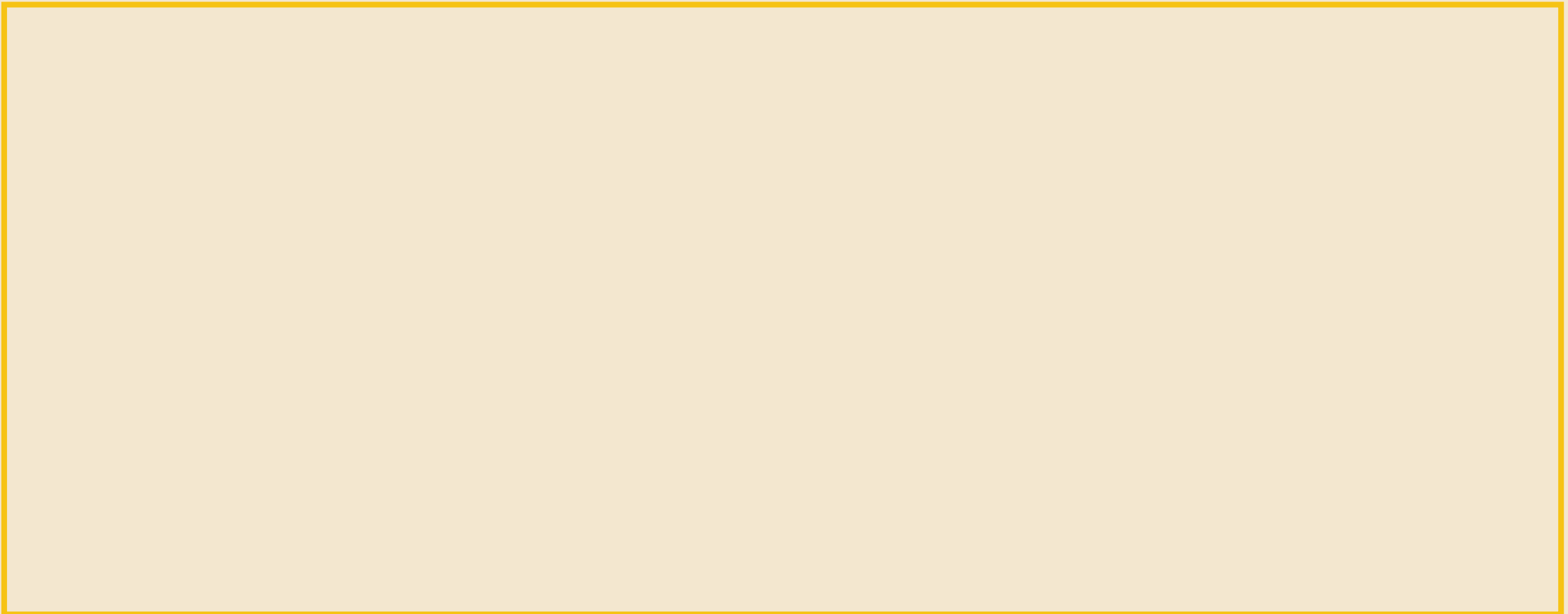


## **Jesus then invites us to take his yoke.**

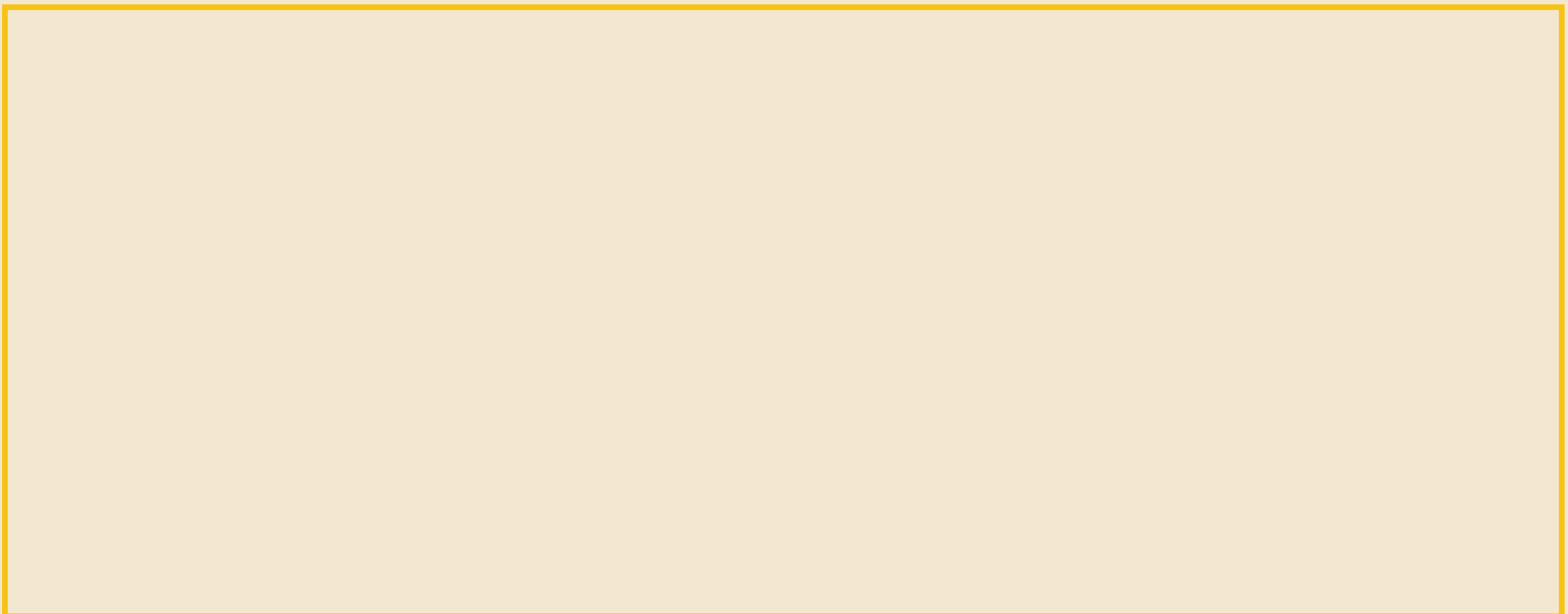
A yoke, used for work, seems like the opposite of rest! But it is HIS yoke. It is NOT hard, but actually easy. It's lightweight. Jesus' yoke is the way of Jesus. To be yoked with Jesus is to be on a journey of becoming like Jesus. So we come to Jesus as we are – broken people. But as we walk side by side, we learn of him and from him and become more and more like him. The yoke of the laws (some from the Old Testament and some from the Pharisees) were a burden. The yoke of Jesus is easy and light because it is the right kind of yoke that fits well on us, and it is shared with Jesus.



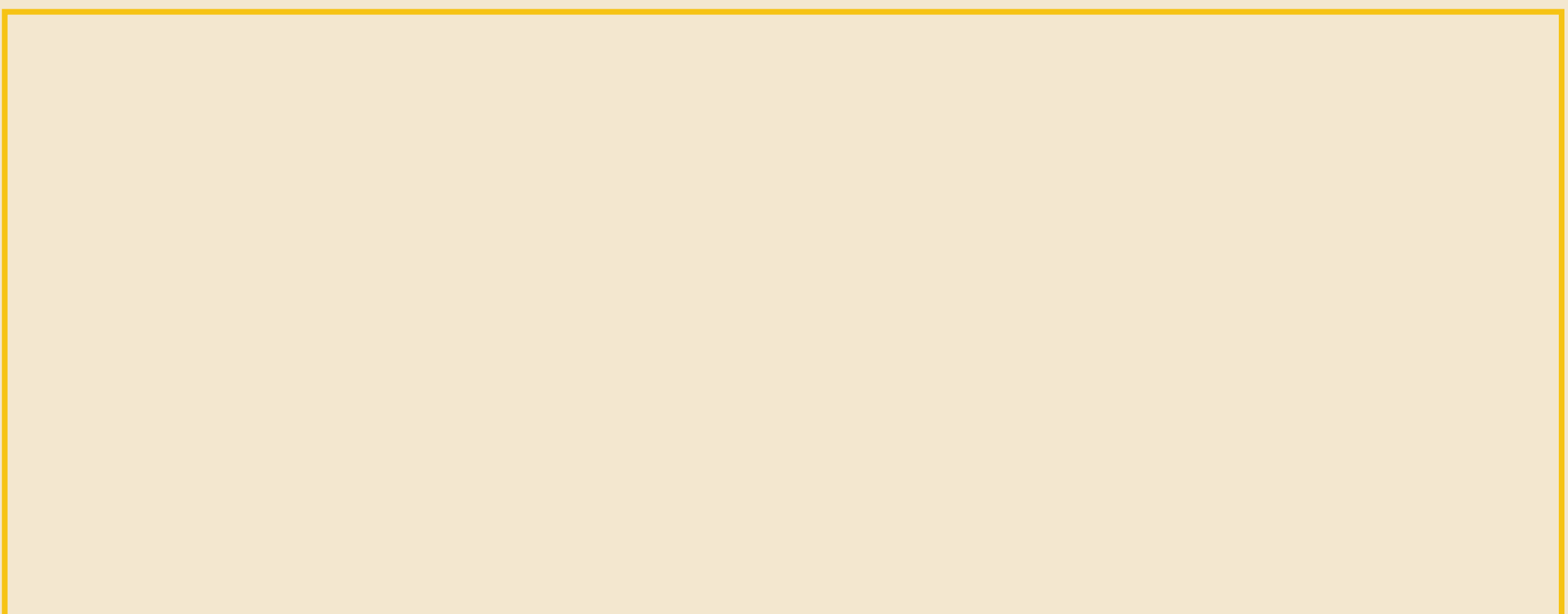
**How will you link up with Jesus to learn from him?**



**What do you desire to learn from Jesus at this time in your life?**



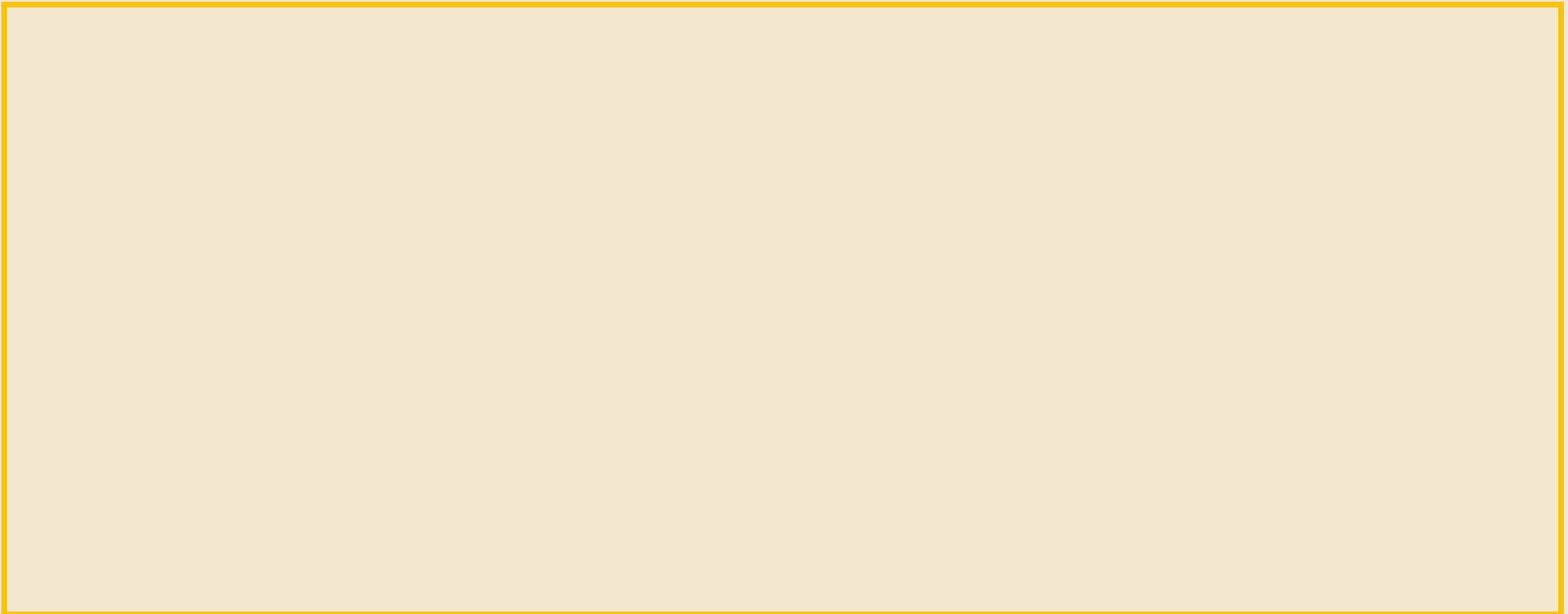
**How do you want or need to be more like Jesus?**



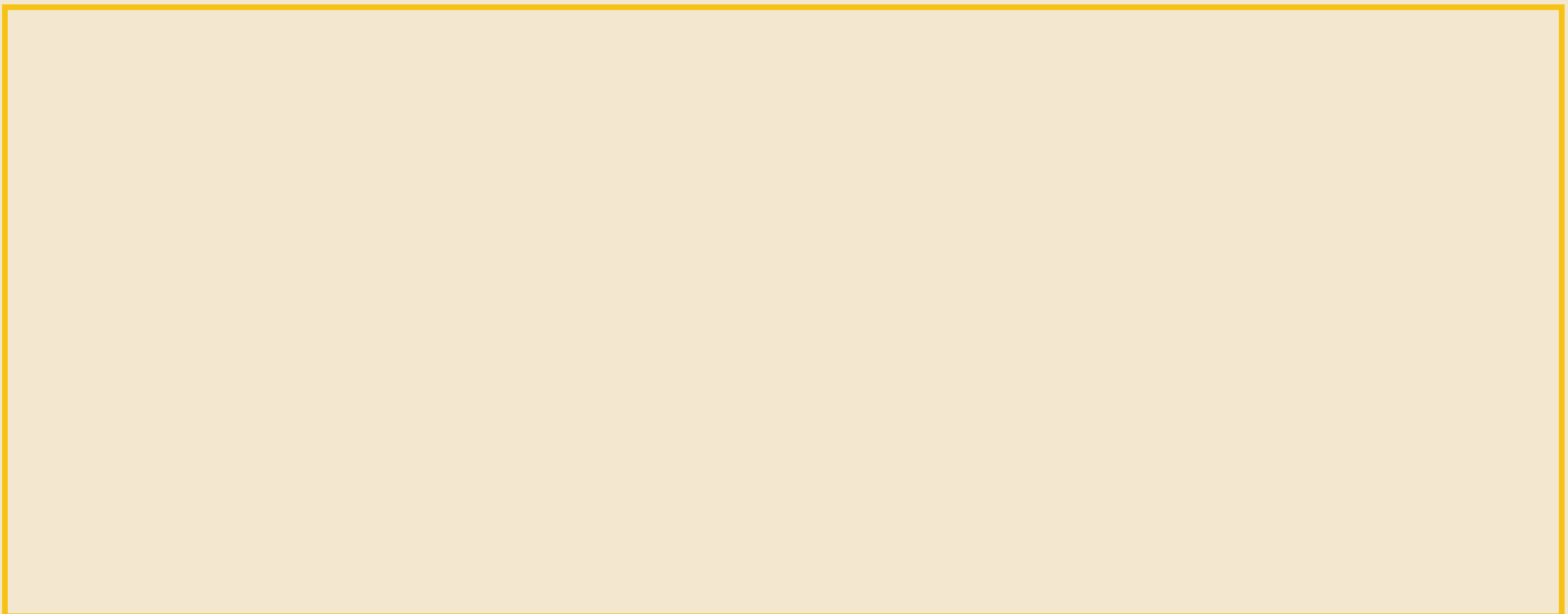
Jesus offered rest twice in the passage. The first was rest from the burden of religion and life. The second one he offers is rest for our souls. This is when, deep inside, we are at rest, at peace, content, satisfied, and fulfilled. This rest for our souls is anxiety and worry-free. This rest describes the shalom that God created in the Garden of Eden before the fall, and that will be restored when Jesus returns again. While our rest won't be perfect in this life, it begins now.



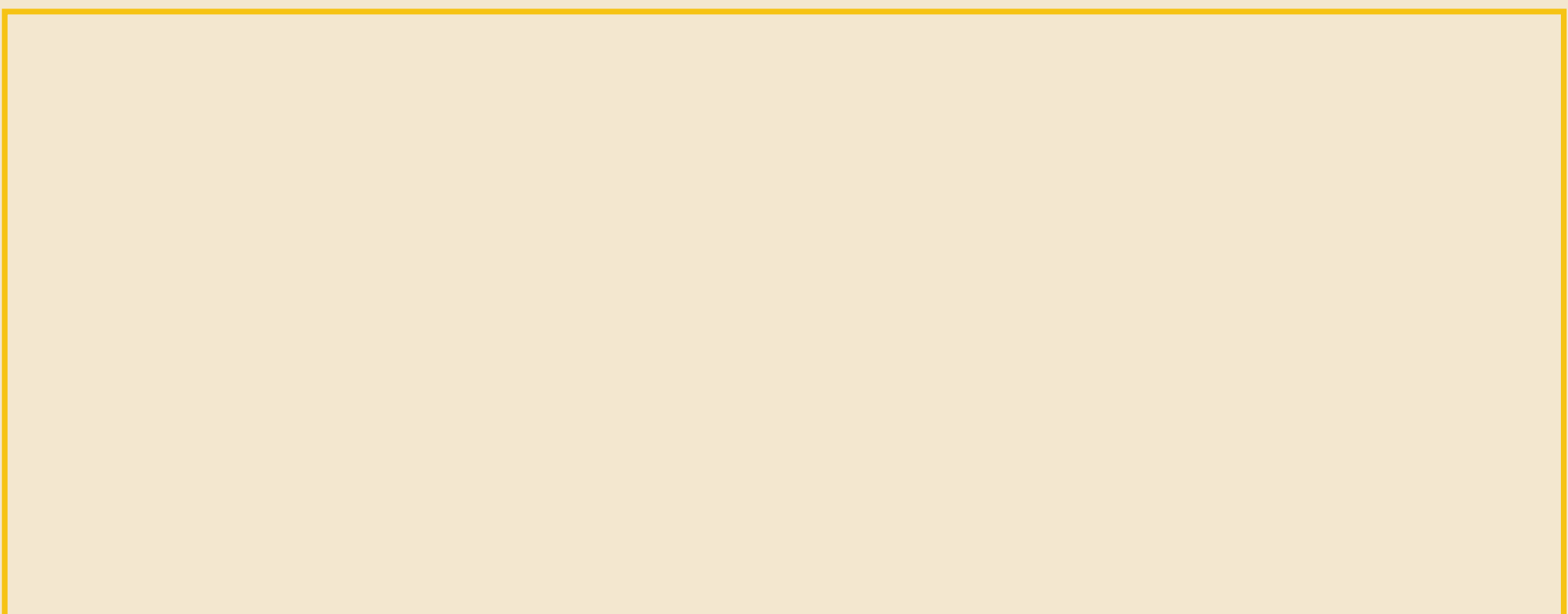
**In what specific ways do you desire rest for your soul?**



**In what way(s) do you wish you could quit striving?**



**In what area do you desire the peace of God that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7)?**



**Re-read Matthew 11:28-30  
and as you “sit”  
and “rest” with Jesus -  
tell him your  
concluding thoughts...**

# RESOURCES

## **Book about Matthew 11:28-30**

- *Gentle and Lowly - The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Suffers* by Dane C. Ortland

## **Books about Relationship over Religion**

- *More Jesus Less Religion - Moving from Rules to Relationship* by Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton
- *Repenting of Religion - Turning from Judgment to the Love of God* by Gregory Boyd
- *The Naked Gospel - The Truth You May Never Hear in Church* by Andrew Farley

## **Books about the Abuse of Religion and Its Leaders**

- *Toxic Faith - Experiencing Healing from Painful Spiritual Abuse* by Stephen Arterburn and Jazck Felton
- *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse - Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority* by David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen
- *A Church Called Tov - Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* by Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer

# PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

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