



World Day of Prayer.

“I Will Give You Rest: Come”

Matthew 11:28-30

Prepared by WDP Nigeria

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Worship Service

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INTENTION

This program calls all to come closer to God and find rest in God. When we totally trust and have faith in God, our burdens become light, and we find rest. The program was written by a group of ecumenical Christian Nigerian women in response to the theme, *“I Will Give You Rest: Come”* (Matthew 11:28-30). We reflected collectively on this theme from the context of our experiences as Nigerian Christian women. We hope to inspire other women in the world to unite and pray as one people. As we trust God, our Burden Bearer, we become one body in Christ, receiving and bringing rest to the world.

SYMBOLS

The following symbols can be used on the altar space for the worship service:

- Colorful African Fabrics

These vibrant textiles embody the rich tapestry of Nigerian cultures, each pattern and color telling a story of heritage and identity. They represent the resilience and creativity of Nigerian people, who weave beauty and meaning into everyday life. Like these interwoven threads, we are reminded of how our diverse stories come together in the fabric of our shared humanity and faith.

- Green and White Colors

The green and white of Nigeria's flag symbolize unity in diversity and hope for the future. Green represents the lush land and agricultural wealth, while white signifies peace and unity. These colors remind us of our call to be stewards of God's creation and peacemakers in our communities, working together for a future where all can flourish.

- Mourning Cloth

The mourning cloth represents the burden of systemic oppression that is described in the story of Beatrice, a Nigerian widow.

- Backpack or Schoolbooks
A backpack or schoolbooks represent the burden of religious persecution that some children face, particularly described in the story of Jato, a mother in northern Nigeria.
- Grains of Rice
Grains of rice symbolize the interconnected burdens of poverty and despair, highlighting the relationship between economic hardship and mental health struggles as described in the story of Blessing.
- Rocks or stones
These rocks or stones represent the heavy burdens people carry, symbolizing struggles like poverty, oppression, and injustice. They also remind us of Nigeria's rich mineral resources, which have been both a blessing and a challenge. As Christ promised to lighten our loads, these rocks call us to consider how we can transform burdens into opportunities for growth and positive change.
- Olive Oil in a Glass Jar or Bottle
This oil symbolizes Nigeria's complex history with crude oil, reflecting both potential for prosperity and the weight of global exploitation. It represents the challenging balance between economic development and environmental stewardship, reminding us to pray for global equity, and for innovative solutions that allow all nations to thrive sustainably.
- Candles
These candles symbolize hope in the face of despair, and the light at the end of the tunnel that many Nigerians hold onto in difficult times.
- Calabash Bowl
The calabash bowl is associated with women farmers in Nigeria, who often use it to gather and sell crops. It symbolizes how God provides sustenance, nourishment and respite amidst the struggles of life.

OPENING SONG OF PRAISE - *Keleya*

Keleya, keleya nobuez,
keleya keleya nobuez,
kele Jisu nobuez,
Jisu I di nma.

Praise God, praise God, He's the King,
Praise God, praise God, He's the King,
Praise Jesus, He's the King,
Jesus, you are good.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray

God, our Burden Bearer, we come before you in praise and adoration! You are the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. In you we live and move and have our being.

We have gathered trusting your promise that where two or three are gathered in your name. And so, we welcome and celebrate your presence in our midst.

We commit this worship into your hands, praying that you will come among us. Help us be open to the Spirit that you are releasing upon us and let your presence saturate this place.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF WELCOME

Welcome, dear friends, to this gathering of people from various communities across the globe. We come together on this day to lift our collective voices, united in prayer and action

Our theme, *I Will Give You Rest: Come*, draws inspiration from Matthew 11:28. It serves as a heartfelt invitation from Jesus to all who are burdened and heavy-laden. And so, you are invited to come, just as you are. Bring all that weighs you down, so that you may find rest.

Christian women from Nigeria are calling out to you, wherever you are in the world, beckoning you to come and find rest for your souls. As we worship together, may we share each other's burdens and find renewed strength in our unity. May each of us find a sense of belonging here, as we are united in the embrace of Christ's love.

HYMN OF INVITATION – *Art Thou Weary*

The hymn, *Art Thou Weary*, is well known around the world, including in Nigeria. It is cherished and sung by all denominations throughout the country.

Our sisters from WDP Nigeria have beautifully reworked the lyrics to this beloved song, bringing it to life in ways that resonate with our present circumstances. Let us sing it together, responding to its timeless invitation to come and find rest for our weary souls.

Are you burdened, are you weary, do you feel oppressed?

"Come," the Voice of Love invites us to find rest.

Are you lonely, are you grieving, feeling pain, distress?

In our sisterhood of faith, you will be blessed.

Refrain

Praying, hoping, singing, loving, will we find our rest?

Faithful people rise together, answer "Yes!"

Is there hope when vio'lence looms and terror grips us tight?

Yes, our prayers unite us, shining in the night.
Is there rest for weary siblings, those who live in fear?
Yes, for Christ's yoke, it is easy, light to bear.

When we come with heavy spirits, where can we find peace?
In the arms of Love, anxiety will cease.
Can we thrive despite the poverty that holds us down?
In God's kingdom, we are honored, we are blessed.

[This hymn can also be sung in Yoruba or Igbo]

CHIOMA'S BURDEN

NARRATOR: In an elementary school in Nigeria, a child named Chioma grapples with the weight of self-doubt, struggling to keep up with her classmates. This short play reminds us that even the youngest among us carry burdens. And it reflects how each of us has experienced a lifetime of challenges—different at each stage but ever present.

(Dupe and Godiya are in class. The bell rings for break time.)

DUPE: Godiya, it's break time! Let's go see Chioma.

GODIYA: Okay, let's go!

(They walk over to Chioma, who is hunched over her desk, looking upset.)

GODIYA: Hi Chioma! Are you okay?

DUPE: You look sad. We came to play, but you seem upset.

CHIOMA: (sniffling) My teacher said I'm no good at anything. You two are in the new class, but I'm still stuck in grade 4. I can't even do this easy math problem!

(Chioma starts crying harder)

CHIOMA: And now my dad says he won't pay for school anymore if I fail again!

GODIYA: Don't listen to those mean words, Chioma! You were great in nursery school. You can do well again!

DUPE: That's right! Did you know I used to be called the "slow kid" in grades 1 and 2? But then I got better!

CHIOMA: (wiping tears) Really? How?

DUPE: My parents prayed for me. And my mom taught me a special prayer. Want to try it?

CHIOMA: Okay...

DUPE: Repeat after me: God, I am your child.

CHIOMA: God, I am your child.

DUPE: I am smart.

CHIOMA: I am smart.

DUPE: I can learn and grow.

CHIOMA: I can learn and grow.

DUPE: Amen.

CHIOMA: Amen.

GODIYA: Chioma, remember that Jesus is your friend. He can help with all your problems.

DUPE: Yeah! If you're feeling bad or scared, just talk to Jesus. You will feel better.

CHIOMA: (smiling a little) Thanks. You two are great friends.

(The three girls hold hands)

ALL TOGETHER: Thank you, Jesus, for being our friend and helper!

(They hug and laugh)

NARRATOR: Two months later...

HEAD TEACHER: Everyone, give a big clap! Chioma is now second in the whole class!

(Everyone cheers)

DUPE: (hugging Chioma) See? Jesus helped you when you asked. He took away your sadness! And that helped you focus on learning!

CHIOMA: (beaming) You're right! I feel so much better now. Thank you, Jesus!

ALL: Hooray for Chioma!

(They all clap and cheer)

Reprise the refrain of “Art Thou Weary.”

SCRIPTURE READING - *Matthew 11:28-30 (NRSV)*

Let us now turn our hearts and minds to the words of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew. Let us hear these words as a gracious invitation from the very heart of God.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."

You are now invited to respond with the words found in your bulletin:

Leader: Come to Jesus, all you who are weary.

All: We come.

Leader: Come to Jesus, all you who are carrying heavy burdens

All: We come.

Leader: God will give you rest.

All: God will give us rest.

Leader: Take on the yoke that Jesus offers. It is easy. It is light.

All: We receive this yoke.

Leader: Learn from the one who is gentle and humble in heart.

All: We are here to learn.

Leader: You will find rest for your souls.

All: Thanks be to God.

STORIES & PRAYERS

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we have now heard Jesus inviting us to come. To bring our burdens. And to find rest for our souls. And so, we open our hearts now, to listen to three stories of our Nigerian sisters. These testimonies reflect their experiences. And they mirror the struggles faced by many around the world.

There's a proverb used in Nigeria that says, "The pain of one is the pain of all." As we hear these stories, let's remember that what affects each of these women also affects us.

We'll hear of widows overcoming oppression, mothers finding courage to send their daughters to school, and daily challenges testing people's faith - experiences that resonate across cultures and borders.

These stories aren't meant to bring despair. Rather, they show how God truly gives rest even in the most difficult situations. May the Holy Spirit speak through these testimonies, inspiring us to lift our voices in prayer with all who carry heavy burdens worldwide. We are one body in Christ. When one part suffers, we all suffer. But when one finds rest in Jesus, we can all rejoice!

Let's open our ears to hear, our hearts to feel, and our minds to understand. The God who invites us to come and find rest is the same God who will use these stories to stir us to powerful, faithful prayer, uniting us across continents in compassion and hope.

THEME SONG – *Come Unto Me*

Come Unto Me is a song that was composed especially for this World Day of Prayer service. Let us sing together and hear this call from the heart of God.

Are you down and feeling lonely,
are you weary and oppressed,
you don't have to be discouraged,
Jesus says "Come unto me."

Refrain:

Come, come unto me, (2x)
come, you who are weary, and I will give you rest.
Come, come unto me, (2x)
Come, you who are burdened, and I will give you rest.

Tell your brother and your sister that the Saviour is a friend.
He offers you his shoulder, lean on him and you'll find rest.

BEATRICE'S STORY: The Burden of Systemic Oppression

My name is Beatrice. I became a widow at the age of 28 when my husband was killed in a communal clash. The day I lost him, I lost more than just my partner. I lost my place in society. Suddenly, I was alone with three young children, facing a world that seemed to have turned its back on me.

The struggles I've faced as a widow in Nigeria are overwhelming. Poverty hit us hard. I lost our main source of income and struggled to find work as a single mother. My in-laws, who I thought would support us, instead treated me with suspicion and tried to take away the little property my husband left behind. There were days I didn't know how I'd feed my children or pay their school fees.

But in my darkest moments, I found strength in my faith and in the community of other widows. I remember attending a support program organized by my local church. They asked for 50 widows to attend, but hundreds showed up. That day, I realized I wasn't alone in my struggles.

What has inspired me most is the resilience and faith of my fellow widows. Despite our hardships, many of us remain committed to Christ, finding solace in knowing Jesus as our Burden Bearer. I've seen young widows with small children serving tirelessly in the church, their faith unshaken by their circumstances.

One widow in our community, after losing her husband, started a program to support other widows. She encouraged people to donate clothes, rice, and money to help us. Her actions inspired me to do the same. Now, I use what little resources I have to support other widows, and together, we're stronger.

Through it all, we remain loyal to our families and the memory of our husbands. While widowers often remarry quickly, we focus on raising our children and keeping our families together. It's

not an easy path, but with faith and community, we find the strength to carry on. Our burden is heavy, but we are learning to lay it at Jesus' feet, finding rest in His promise.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Let us pray:

God, you are the Great Burden Bearer. We come before you as your children, from all corners of the world. We lift up our voices, joining with Beatrice and all our siblings who carry the heavy loads of systemic oppression.

God of Compassion, we know that you see us. You see the discrimination faced by so many - women, widows, minorities, the poor. Some are overworked, breaking their backs in factories, fields, and homes, while others cannot find work to feed their families. Gracious God, intervene for us all!

Thank you, Gracious God, for the resiliency and resourcefulness of all who remain faithful amidst difficult circumstances. Inspire us by their example and move us to build a better world.

Most powerful God, we have seen your hand move before. You parted the Red Sea for your people. Now, part the sea of injustice that drowns so many around the world. Speak to the hearts of leaders everywhere, that they may govern with fairness and compassion. Move the hearts of communities to change their attitudes and actions towards all who are marginalized.

Loving Jesus, you welcomed the oppressed and lifted up the downtrodden. Do the same for all who suffer today under oppressive systems. Give us strength to keep trusting you, even when the burdens seem too heavy to bear.

Holy Spirit, fill us anew. Let your power overflow in our communities across the globe. Use us to be a blessing to others. Inspire us by all who use their own struggles to bless those around them.

Thank you, Loving God, for hearing our cries and bearing our burdens. We trust in your unfailing love and your mighty power to transform situations.

Amen.

Reprise the refrain of the theme song "Come Unto Me."

JATO'S STORY: The Burden of Religious Persecution

My name is Jato, and I am a Christian mother living in northern Nigeria. Every day when I send my 14-year-old daughter, Amina, to school, my heart tightens with worry. You see, Amina is the same age as Leah Sharibu was when she was taken from her school in Dapchi, just a few hours from here.

Leah's story haunts me. A young girl, steadfast in her faith, refusing to deny Christ even in the face of captivity. It's been eight years since Boko Haram took her, and still, she remains their prisoner. Every time I look at Amina, I can't help but think, "What if it had been her?"

Living under the shadow of religious persecution is not easy. There are areas where Christians are killed simply for their faith. But by God's grace, we continue to live alongside our Muslim neighbors. It's not the same everywhere - in Yorubaland in the southwest, Christians and Muslims live together like family. And I know that in some parts of the world, Christians are the ones persecuting other religious groups because of their faith.

I often wonder, what does my faith call me to do in the face of religious persecution? Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us. It's not easy, believe me. Some days, when I hear of another attack, another kidnapping, I feel anger rising in my heart. But then I remember - being a Christian means being Christ-like.

These conflicts didn't start yesterday. Even in Jesus' time, there were clashes between different groups. But Jesus showed us a different way. He calls us to show love, even to those who seem to have no regard for life. At first, this seems like a heavy yoke to bear, but Jesus promises that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

How do we find that lightness? It's only through God's grace. We carry the yoke of loving our neighbors - even when those neighbors wish us harm. It's not easy, but God's grace sees us through every challenge.

When I pray with Amina each morning before she goes to school, I remind her of Jesus' words: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Our strength doesn't come from an expectation of an easy life. Instead, it's rooted in the knowledge that Christ walks with us through every hardship. In the face of persecution, we don't simply await rescue; we actively live out our faith, knowing that each act of love and forgiveness is a testament to Christ's enduring power in our lives.

Leah's story reminds us of the cost of this faith. But it also shows us its power. In Damaturu, a small Christian community still gathers to pray for Leah's return. Their hope, their persistent faith, inspires me to keep believing, to keep loving, to keep living alongside all my neighbors - Muslim and Christian alike.

As I watch Amina leave for school each day, I pray not only for her safety but also for her heart. I pray that she, like Leah, will have the strength to stand firm in her faith. But I also pray that she will have the love to see the image of God in everyone she meets, regardless of their faith.

This is how we find rest in God - not by harboring hatred or intolerance, but by letting Christ's love flow through us, even in the face of persecution. It's a daily choice, a daily surrender. But in making this choice, we find that our burdens truly do become light, and in God, we find our rest.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Let us pray:

God of the persecuted and protector of the faithful, we come before you with heavy hearts from Leah's story and the fears of mothers like Jato who send their children to school each day under the shadow of potential violence.

Lord Jesus, you faced persecution and stood firm in your faith. We lift up Leah Sharibu and all who suffer for their beliefs. Grant them strength and comfort in their darkest hours, inspiring us to stand strong in the face of adversity.

Holy Spirit, we cry out for those displaced by violence, forced to flee their homes and become refugees in unfamiliar lands. Shelter all who are displaced under your wings, providing for their needs and guiding them toward safety and new beginnings.

God of justice, we confess the sins that tear at the fabric of our society: the intolerance that breeds fear, the hatred that fuels violence, and the indifference that allows injustice to persist. Break every chain that binds us and separates us from our neighbors.

We cry out against extremism that spreads fear and violence. Touch the hearts of those involved, showing them the value of human life and the path to peace. Comfort those, like Jato, who live with the fear of losing loved ones. Change the hearts of the perpetrators, guiding them toward reconciliation.

Jesus, our Burden Bearer, help us take up your yoke of love and forgiveness. Strengthen us to resist evil, choose love, and be agents of positive change. Renew our minds and hearts, guiding us in righteousness, that we may honor you and bless others, even those who persecute us. We trust in your unfailing love and your power to transform conflicts and hatred.

Amen.

Reprise the refrain of the theme song "Come Unto Me."

BLESSING'S STORY: The Burdens of Poverty and Despair

My name is Blessing, and I've lived in Lagos all my life. I've seen Nigeria change over the years, but not in the way we all hoped. We dreamed of progress, of a better life for our children, but instead, we have watched our nation slide deeper into poverty and despair.

Every day, I see the toll this takes on our minds, our spirits. It's like we are all trapped in a cycle of disappointment. We've been let down so many times that even when good things come our way, we are afraid to believe in them. That's Nigeria now – we've stopped believing that things can get better.

The government seems focused on itself, not on us. Salaries for most people aren't enough to live on, while a select few earn fortunes. A bag of rice – a staple food – is now a luxury for many families. Our young people, bright and full of potential, can't find work. Some fall into despair. And too many are committing suicide. Others turn to crime – kidnapping, banditry, or prostitution – out of desperation.

It's a vicious cycle. Poverty affects our mental health, and poor mental health makes it hard to escape poverty. We're a nation rich in resources, but poor in leadership and hope.

But even in the midst of this despair, I see glimmers of light. I think of my neighbor, Grace. She lost her job and her husband the same year. She had every reason to give up, but instead, she started a small business selling homemade soap. It's not much, but it keeps food on her table and her children in school.

Grace often tells me, "Blessing, we are not just coping, we are living by faith." Her words remind me of what the Bible says: "Those who are cast down will be lifted up." So, we keep moving, keep believing that one day, the storm will pass.

We keep trusting that God will open another door for us. We continue dreaming and working towards a better future. It's not easy, but we hold onto our faith. It pushes us towards the light at the end of the tunnel.

This is my testimony – that even in our struggles, we see evidence of God's faithfulness. We may be burdened, but we are not broken. We continue to work, to hope, to pray for the Nigeria we know is possible.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Let us pray:

Holy God, Giver of life and Sustainer of all, we give you thanks and praise for the persistence of Blessing, and all who keep moving forward despite even the most difficult circumstances. Continue to strengthen and comfort all who are weary from the burdens of life.

God, you know the poverty plaguing many lands. Children go to bed hungry. Families struggle to meet basic needs. We remind you that you are Jehovah Jireh, the Great Provider, and we cry out for your provision. Open doors of opportunity and soften the hearts of those who can help.

We lift up all who live with mental health challenges, often exacerbated by poverty, stress, and the difficulties of daily life. When economic conditions worsen and the value of money diminishes, we see more of our sisters and brothers falling into despair. Comfort those contemplating suicide and show them that their lives have immeasurable value in your eyes.

We also pray with those facing other health issues. We especially remember the burden of malaria that still plagues our world, and we pray for better environmental management and healthcare to combat this persistent threat.

Ancient of Days, we think of those facing the burden of aging in societies ill-equipped to care for their elders. For those unable to plan for their old age due to economic hardships, we ask for your provision and innovative solutions. Guide us in creating societies that respect and care for the wisdom and needs of older generations.

We pray for families and communities struggling to cope with the pressures of life. When stress and hardship make it difficult to support one another, remind us of your endless patience and love. Help us to extend that same grace to those around us.

Jesus, you called us to come with all the burdens that weigh us down. Here we are! Lighten these loads and help us to cast our cares upon you.

Holy Spirit, be our Comforter in times of distress. When we cannot see a way forward, be our guide.

Grant us the faith to keep moving forward even when the path seems impossible. Help us to be a light to others, sharing hope and extending a helping hand where we can.

We trust in your unfailing love and your promise that you will never leave us or forsake us.

Amen.

Reprise the refrain of the theme song “Come Unto Me.”

CALL TO ACTION

As we have journeyed through this service, we have become informed about the burdens carried by our sisters in Nigeria and around the world. We have prayed together, bringing these concerns before God, our great Burden Bearer.

Now, we come to a moment that calls us into prayerful action. The motto of World Day of Prayer is *Informed Prayer, Prayerful Action*, reminding us that our prayers should lead us to action for the transformation of the world.

Let us respond to this call together, affirming our commitment to be Christ's hands and feet in a world longing for hope and rest.

Leader: Where do we find our hope in a burdened world?

All: In Christ, who bears all of our burdens.

Leader: How do we respond to overwhelming situations?

All: We remain resilient, believing that the storm will pass.

Leader: Where do we place our trust in uncertain times?

All: In God, the Giver of life and Sustainer of all.

Leader: What should we do when those around us are weary and heavy laden?

All: Bear one another's burdens, as Christ bears ours.

Leader: As we go forth, what is our call to action?

All: To live out our informed prayers through prayerful action.

Leader: May we go forth with the strength of Christ.

All: We go with faith, hope, and love, to be light in the world.

OFFERTORY

We continue now with a time of giving our financial offerings.

Offering time is a blessed time! In Nigerian churches, it's customary for people to dance their offerings forward, expressing joy in giving and celebrating God's provision. This act of dancing reminds us that giving is not a burden, but a joyful response to God's grace. As we give today, let us bring our offerings with that same spirit of joy and thanksgiving.

[Each country may add information here about how the offering will be used, as decided by their WDP National Committee.]

Your generous gifts will support the ministry of World Day of Prayer and help address some of the burdens we've prayed about today. Whether you dance, walk, or remain seated as you give, let your offering be a symbol of your commitment to lightening the loads of others. May our gifts, like our prayers, be a tangible expression of God's love in the world.

OFFERTORY SONG – *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*

Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come?
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home,
when Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is he:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me;
his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.

Refrain:

*I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free,
for his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.*

“Let not your heart be troubled,” his tender word I hear,
and resting on his goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
though by the path he leadeth, but one step I may see:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me;
his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
when songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to him, from care he sets me free:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me;
his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.

CLOSING WORDS

Leader 1: As the melody of "His Eye is on the Sparrow" fades, we're reminded of God's tender care for each of us. Just as God watches over the sparrow, God sees our burdens - the weight of oppression, the pain of loss, the struggles with poverty and mental health. Through the stories we've heard, we've witnessed how God works in our lives, offering strength and hope even in the most difficult times.

Leader 2: Today, we've seen God's hand at work in the lives of our Nigerian sisters. God used Chioma's school friends to remind her of her inherent value, lifting the burden of shame and low

self-esteem. Through the community surrounding Beatrice, our widowed sister, God demonstrated how love can overcome systemic oppression. In Jato's story, we saw how God's strength sustains faith even in the face of persecution, challenging us all to be instruments of peace and understanding. And through Blessing's testimony, God revealed how hope and resilience can flourish even amidst poverty and despair.

Leader 3: As we leave this place, let us remember that God invites us to be co-workers in lifting each other's burdens. God calls us to prayerful action - to be the friends who remind others of their worth, the community that supports the vulnerable, the voices that speak for the persecuted, and the hands that offer hope to the struggling. Let us collaborate with God in bringing comfort and justice to our world. As the body of Christ, we are empowered by Jesus' promise: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." This assurance not only gives us peace but also propels us to action. May we go forth as living extensions of Christ, bringing God's rest and relief to all we encounter. In this way, we not only find our own rest in God but become channels of that divine rest for others.

Reprise Theme Song

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