



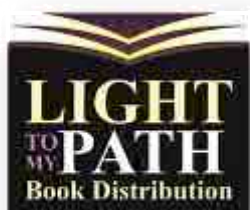
REST FOR YOUR SOUL

An Examination
of the Teaching
of Jesus in
Matthew 11:28-30
about Finding Rest
in our Weariness

F. Wayne MacLeod

Rest For Your Soul

*An Examination of the Teaching of Jesus in Matthew
11:28-30
About Finding Rest in our Weariness*



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Light To My Path Book Distribution
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Preface

There are not many people in full-time Christian ministry who do not experience some form of exhaustion. The cares and concerns of the people to whom we minister are often weighty. This study comes out of a need for the strength of the Lord in my own personal life and ministry. I write it for selfish reasons with the hope that it will be of benefit to the reader as well.

Over the past years, I have been involved in a variety of ministries. By nature, I am a shy person and uncomfortable with the attention that often accompanies those in full-time ministry. God, however, has given me a pastoral and Bible-teaching ministry. I am so thankful for this ministry, but being in front of people can be emotionally exhausting. There have been times while preaching or teaching that I have just wanted to stop and vanish into thin air. Many times, I have spoken at conferences and been reduced to tears as I contemplate the next message in the series I am teaching. I am thankful for the strength God provides, but there is still an emotional cost to pay for being faithful.

The Lord has opened a book writing and distribution ministry for me. I have been so blessed to be part of this and thankful to the Lord for this immense privilege. I find great joy in the study of the Word of God and sharing this with God's people around the world. In recent years, however, I have been overwhelmed with appeals for free material. Requests for thousands of books sit on my desk needing to be processed. I have been stretched as I seek

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the Lord's provision to get this material out to those who really need it. I feel overwhelmed with the need and realize it is far beyond what I can do on my own.

Pastoral needs in the church where I am ministering are often on my mind. The Lord has recently opened my eyes to see pastoral needs in a way I have never seen before. How do I minister to those in need? Is there more I can do? How do I balance my time and ministries so that nothing suffers?

Every servant of God is faced with these issues. The cares of daily life and its obligations can sometimes take its toll on our emotional and physical well-being. This is where Matthew 11:28-30 comes into play. Here in these verses, the Lord tells all who are weary to come to Him, take His yoke, learn from Him and find rest for their souls. This is the focus of the study we are about to embark on. I trust that as we let the Spirit of God speak to us through this study, we will find the rest our souls so desperately need.

F. Wayne Mac Leod

Chapter 1

The Stress of Hard Work

We are living in a world filled with anxiety and worry. Morneau Shepell and the Mental Health Commission of Canada, in a July 5, 2018 report made the following statement:

Mental health issues in the workplace are among the top concerns for organizations of all sizes. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), one in five Canadians experience a mental health problem or illness each year, equating to 500,000 employees unable to work every week due to mental health problems or illnesses.

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/news-article/13522/canadian-employees-report-workplace-stress-primary-cause-mental-health-concerns>

In August of that same year, Barnes & Noble, the largest book retailer in the United States, announced “a huge surge in the sales of books about anxiety; a 25 percent jump on June 2017”. (Tim Newman: “Anxiety in the West: Is it on the rise?” Published Wednesday, 5 September 2018. <https://www.medicalnews today.com/>)

On May 9, 2018, Time.com posted an article by Jamie Ducharme entitled, “A Lot of Americans Are More Anxious

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Than They Were Last Year, a New Poll Says.” The report stated that 40 million American adults or about 18% of the population had an anxiety disorder. This was based on a study by the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Sixty-eight percent of those who questioned said that “keeping myself or my family safe” and “my health” made them either somewhat or extremely anxious. Sixty-seven present said that “paying my bills or expenses” was the source of this anxiety. (Jamie Ducharme, “A Lot of Americans Are More Anxious Than They Were Last Year, a New Poll Says,” May 9, 2028, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/time.com/5269371/americans-anxiety-poll/%3famp=true>)

The problem is not unique to the non-Christian world. In a study done by Crystal Mary Burnette, discovered the following:

Burnout is a common condition among pastors and those in other helping professions. Christian ministers are subject to work-related stress that is typical of other human service occupations. Stress in the life of a pastor can result from rigid work schedules, bureaucracy, denominational structures, conflicts between personal and congregational needs, high congregational expectations, and impoverished or conflicted personal relationships.

She went on to say:

Based on the empirical literature, popular press, and personal testimonies, burnout is a reality for many pastors. Estimates of the prevalence of burnout vary widely, ranging from 10% to 47% of pastors according to

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either subjective ratings of burnout or Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) criteria (Doolittle, 2010; Randall, 2013). Burnout and exhaustion among pastors pose a threat to local church health and ministry vitality (Miner et al., 2010).

(Burnette, Crystal Mary, "Burnout Among Pastors in Local Church Ministry in Relation to Pastor, Congregation Member, and Church Organizational Outcomes" (2016). All Dissertations. 1745.

https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/1745)

When Jesus walked on this earth, He told His disciples:

[18] "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (John 15)

Jesus went on to say:

[33] I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16)

As Jesus sent His disciples out, He had these words to say:

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[16] "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

[17] Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, [18] and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. [19] When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. [20] For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

[21] Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, [22] and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10)

If there is one thing we can be sure of as believers in this world, it is that we will be persecuted and hated because of the cause we represent. Jesus does not apologize for this. In fact, he required the church of Smyrna to be faithful even if it cost them their lives.

[10] Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2)

A quick examination of the men and women of the Old and New Testaments will reveal that many of them did indeed suffer for the cause of their Lord. Those who suffered were not pitied but lifted up as an example for us to follow.

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[3] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. [4] In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.
(Hebrews 12)

[10] As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
[11] Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (James 5)

The apostle James taught that those who endured and remained steadfast were blessed individuals.

Scripture challenges us to work hard for the sake of the kingdom of God. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy, his son in the Lord:

[3] Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
[4] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. [5] An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. [6] It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. [7] Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. (2 Timothy 2)

Paul uses that example of a soldier, an athlete, and a hard-working farmer to illustrate the diligence he expected of Timothy. If Timothy was to be a good servant of God, he needed to separate himself from the affairs of the world and focus on the task at hand. He needed to discipline

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himself to follow the rules God had set in His Word. He needed to work hard to see that his labours were not in vain.

An examination of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus shows us that very often, He was surrounded by people who came for healing, counsel or teaching. It seemed that wherever He went, the crowd followed Him. It was often a struggle for Jesus to find time alone away from the constant demand of the people.

There is no record in Scripture of Jesus or the apostles spending large amounts of money to take a vacation. They did, however, have days when they were able to get away from the responsibility and the masses of people crying out for their attention. Even the Sabbath was a day of ministry for them, as they taught and ministered in the synagogues or preached to the people who gathered for worship and instruction.

I often think of the words of Jesus to the individual who told Him that he wanted to follow Him. The Lord replied:

[58] And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Luke 9)

Jesus does not say, the Son of Man has no place to live or no money in the bank. He told the inquirer that day that the Son of Man had no were to lay down to rest. We get the sense that the Lord Jesus experienced the fatigue of ministry and the demands upon His time.

Jesus taught that we only have a limited amount of time to do the work the Father has given us to do:

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[4] We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. (John 9)

Our lives are like a vapour that quickly passes. The seventy or ninety years of our lives are cut short by illness and death. We look back and wonder where the years went. We look forward to the day we will stand before our Creator to give an accounting for what we have done with the time He has given. How have we used our lives? Have we been faithful?

The apostle Paul said this to the Ephesians:

[15] Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, [16] making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5)

Jesus taught that no one knows the day when He will return, but when he did, He expected His people to be awake and alert.

[42] Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. [43] But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. [44] Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24)

Scripture teaches that those who serve the Lord will be persecuted and mocked. It also shows that God expects us to redeem the time and be always vigilant and faithful. We are to focus on our responsibilities like a soldier on duty. We are to be diligent in keeping the rules like an

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athlete. We are to work as hard as a farmer. We are always to be alert, fending off the attacks of the enemy. We are to do this because we want the master to find us faithful at His return.

Let's consider what we have been saying in this chapter. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been called to minister in a world that is perishing. The task before us is a difficult one. We must stand firm against the persecution and tribulation that will inevitably come to all who shine as lights in a dark world. The ministry will take a toll on our bodies and minds. A quick reading of the Old Testament prophets or the book of Psalms reveals how these men and women of old struggled with the pain of serving God. They shed tears. They had many unanswered questions. They were beaten, mocked, insulted, ridiculed and even laid down their lives for the call of God on their lives.

How can we endure such a struggle? In our modern society, we encourage Christian workers to slow down, not try to accomplish so much and take prolonged breaks from work. I am sure that there is much benefit to considering these techniques, but has this really worked? Evidence points to the fact that we are still struggling with anxiety and burnout at an alarming rate.

What we need to understand is that the God who expects us to be always alert and faithful in service understands us better than we understand ourselves. He does not throw us into the sea without teaching us to swim. He doesn't place us in the battle without providing us with the armour required to fight a good fight. If we want to know how to face the task before us gracefully, we must look to Him for the wisdom and strength to do so.

The Stress of Hard Work

This is what Matthew 11:28-30 is so important. It is one of many passages of Scripture that shows us how we can be faithful servants in the midst of difficulty and persecution. In the course of this study, we will break down these verses in an attempt to understand what it means to find rest for our souls.

For Consideration:

Do you experience anxiety and stress in life? What is the cause of this?

What kind of stress is involved in the work of God? Has becoming a Christian added any difficulty or struggle in your life? If so, give an example.

What do Jesus and the apostles teach about difficulties in the service of the Lord?

Does the Bible encourage hard work for the kingdom of God? Give some examples from Scripture.

Have you been working hard for the kingdom of God? What struggles or burdens has that brought into your life?

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For Prayer:

Take a moment to confess that sometimes you complain and grumble about the problems you experience in life. Thank the Lord that He warned us that there would be difficulties.

Thank the Lord that He was willing to endure great pain and agony for you when He was on this earth.

Ask the Lord to show you what role He has for you in the work of the Kingdom of God. Ask Him to help you to be diligent in that work.

Chapter 2

To Whom Do We Go?

3 Come to me ... (Matthew 11)

Our bodies and minds can only endure so much strain before they become weary and give out on us. We were created with a need for physical rest. Just before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus took His disciples to Gethsemane to pray. He left them on their own and went off by Himself. There in that solitude of the garden, Jesus cried out to the Father for strength to face what was about to happen.

The disciples, weary from the events of the day, fell asleep while Jesus was praying. Listen to what Jesus told them when He returned and found them sleeping:

[40] And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? [41] Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26)

Jesus reminded the disciples that day of the weakness of their flesh. There are things we would like to do, but we do

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not have the physical or emotional energy to do them. This is the nature of these earthly bodies. It is a weakness that Satan loves to exploit for his own purposes. It is when we are tired and weary that we are most vulnerable to temptation.

When Jesus returned to them the third time and found them still asleep, He woke them up with these words:

[45] Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. [46] Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (Matthew 26)

Jesus understood something the disciples did not understand. As the disciples slept, the enemy was preparing a band of men to capture them. While they rested, the enemy approached the garden.

Notice in verse 45 that Jesus understood the need for sleep. "Sleep and take your rest later on," He told His disciples. Sleep is necessary for the earthly body, but this was not the time for sleeping.

Genesis 2:1-2 tells us that after the Lord God created the heavens and the earth, He rested.

[1] Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. [2] And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. (Genesis 2)

Consider what is happening in these verses. What does Genesis 2:2 mean when it says that God rested from all

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His work? Did God stop all activity and go to sleep to replenish His energy? God is the source of all strength and power. He does not run out of energy, nor does He need to rest as we do. Listen to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 121:

[3] He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.[4] Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. (Psalm 121)

The psalmist tells us that God does not sleep. He never stops caring for His people. He never stops working out His purpose and plan for this world. This unlimited energy is beyond our imagination. As the Almighty God, He does not diminish in strength. God's rest in Genesis 2:1-2 has nothing to do with replenishing His power but completing the task of creating the world. He rested from creating the world because He finished what He had set out to do. God did not stop working, however. He continued to care and provide. He continued to work out His purpose. In fact, it is because God does not stop working that we can rest. Listen to the words of Psalm 127:

[1] Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. [2] It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. (Psalm 127)

We can be at ease because we know God is building the house. We can sleep because we know that God is watching over us. This is the basis for our rest.

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Have you ever been so overwhelmed with a problem that it began to take its toll on your body? You find yourself emotionally and physically exhausted. You lay down to sleep, but your sleep does not give you relief. You wake up just as tired and emotionally distraught to face the issue all over again. Sleep and rest have their limitations. If you do not first find peace with God, your sleep will be to no avail.

In the book of Jonah, we find the prophet running away from God. God pursued him in the wind and the rain that battered the ship. When the boat risked sinking to the bottom, Jonah went down to the hold and fell asleep. That sleep did not change anything. It was merely an escape from reality. The prophet woke up to the criticism of the captain, reprimanding him for not crying out to God for the salvation of the entire crew.

For Jonah, sleep was not the answer to the problem he was facing. It was a temporary escape, but he would wake up to face the reality that nothing had changed. Where do we go for strength when we are weary? Where do we turn to when the burdens of life seem to overwhelm us? The words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28 provide the answer: "Come to me."

The words are not difficult to understand, but the application does not always come easy to us. We have a natural tendency to try everything else before we listen to these words of Jesus. We will go to bed and sleep. We visit a counsellor to learn how to cope. We take a vacation to get away from things. While these techniques are useful in themselves, the words, "Come to me," often go unheard.

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John 6 recounts the story of how the people of Jesus' day chose to abandon Him because of His teaching:

[66] After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [67] So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" [68] Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6)

When Jesus asked the disciples if they were going to leave Him, Peter replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (verse 68). These words apply to the context of this study. When we find ourselves drowning in the chaos of life, to whom shall we go? When problems overwhelm us and sorrow fills our heart, to whom shall we cry? When weariness and fatigue over the many cares and concerns threaten to drown us, to whom shall lift our hands? Who can help us? Who alone can ease the strain and empower us to overcome? Listen to the words of Isaiah 40:

[29] He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. [30] Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31] but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40)

Isaiah tells us that even youth, in the prime of life, will become exhausted and fall, but there is a greater strength than the strength of youth. The Lord God gives strength to those who wait on Him. This limitless power of God will renew us and cause us to soar like eagles. It will empower

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us to run the race set out before us with joy, hope and victory.

Commenting on what it means to come to Jesus, Adam Clark says this:

Mt 11:28 Come unto me - This phrase in the new covenant implies simply, believing in Christ, and becoming his disciple, or follower." (Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke (CLARKE) "Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke." Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2015. Electronic edition copyright © 2015 by Laridian, Inc., Marion, Iowa. All rights reserved.)

The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way:

*[6] And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11)*

There is such an incredible simplicity to these words that even a child can understand them. Who is this God we approach? He is the Creator of the heavens and earth. He sustains and keeps this universe. We owe every beat of our heart to Him. He is a sovereign God who sent His Son to die in our place. We are His children, and He is committed to watching over us. Knowing these truths, the Psalmist declared:

[8] In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4)

The picture in my mind when I read these words is that of a young child in the arms of the Father falling to sleep with

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confidence and absolute security. This child knows he or she is protected and safe. There is nothing to worry about because the heavenly Father is present. All anxieties are stilled in the presence of the heavenly Father. Notice in Psalm 4:8 that sleep did not bring the peace required. The psalmist slept peacefully because He already had confidence in the God who made him dwell in safety.

Those who come to Jesus, believe in Him and trust in His care. Their hearts are set at rest because they know that He watches over them. They trust Him in the most profound struggles of life. In His presence, the deepest pain is eased. In His strength, the greatest obstacles fall. His purpose assures us, and we find rest in our souls. Our sleep is blessed because we have come to Him.

Our vacations and our sleep are not sufficient to give us the rest we need from the wearisome burdens we bear. Jesus tells us that we need to come to Him. He alone is the source of the rest we need for our souls. Confidence and trust in Him alone can give us the strength we need. Faith in Him and His purpose alone give meaning and fullness to our rest.

For Consideration:

Is there, according to Jesus, a time to deny ourselves sleep for the sake of the kingdom?

Does God sleep? Does He ever need to sleep?

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How does knowing that God is always working, enable us to rest?

In what are we tempted to put our trust when we are weary and needing rest? What do you do when you are feeling overwhelmed?

What does it mean to come to Jesus?

For our rest to be full, we need first to come to Jesus. Have you ever been tempted to bypass coming to Jesus when you are feeling stressed and overburdened?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you the devotion necessary to be a faithful servant in His Kingdom.

Thank the Lord that He does not sleep but continues to watch over you and the work He has called you to undertake.

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Ask God to forgive you for not coming to Him when you were overburdened with the cares of this life.

Ask God to give you the grace required to commit your worries and concerns to Him. Ask Him for strength and wisdom to accomplish the tasks He has given you.

Chapter 3

All Who Labour and are Heavy Laden

28 ... all who labor and are heavy laden (Matthew 11)

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus invites all who labour and are heavy laden to come to Him. Let's take a moment to consider the words used in this phrase.

Labour

The first word Jesus uses in verse 28 is the word labour. The Greek word κοπιᾶω (*kopiáō*) is derived from κόπος *kópos*. The AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary defines κόπος *kópos* as follows: "to strike, beating, wailing, grief with beating the breast." It goes on to say that in the New Testament, the word κόπος *kópos* is used to speak of a "wearisome effort, generally 'labor of love...' that which we as Christians ought to render to the Lord as labor in the Christian ministry." (Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament: L A R I D I A N, Cedar Rapids, Iowa)

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In John 4, the word κοπιᾶω *kopiāō* is used to describe what Jesus was feeling after a long journey to Samaria.

6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. (John 4)

The word κοπιᾶω *kopiāō* is translated by “wearied” in John 4:6. The idea is that Jesus was feeling worn out physically from His long journey.

Adam Clark, in his commentary on this verse, makes this comment:

"All ye that labor and are heavy laden - The metaphor here appears to be taken from a man who has a great load laid upon him, which he must carry to a certain place: every step he takes reduces his strength, and renders his load the more oppressive. However, it must be carried on; and he labors, uses his utmost exertions, to reach the place where it is to be laid down."

(Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke (CLARKE) "Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke." Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2015. Electronic edition copyright © 2015 by Laridian, Inc., Marion, Iowa. All rights reserved.)

The word “labour” is not to be seen in a negative light. As believers, we are all called to labour for the cause of Christ. Paul told the Corinthians that he “worked harder” (κοπιᾶω *kopiāō*) than any of the apostles.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked

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*harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the
grace of God that is with me. (1 Corinthians 15)*

He encouraged Timothy and the church in Ephesus to consider elders who “labour (κοπιᾶω *kopiáō*) in preaching and teaching” worthy of double honour:

*17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of
double honor, especially those who labor in preaching
and teaching. (1 Timothy 5)*

In fact, Paul committed his life to “toil” (κοπιᾶω *kopiáō*) with all his energy to help believers mature in the Lord and their walk with Him:

*29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he
powerfully works within me. (Colossians 1)*

It is a requirement for all believers to labour for their Lord. The work to which He has called us will be taxing on our bodies and minds. The Lord tells us that persecution and trials await us on the path of service. Our bodies will be exhausted from the expenditure of energy. Our minds will feel the stress and strain of the pressure to which they will be subjected. Jesus’ body was wearied. He laboured on the cross and felt the agony of separation from the Father. We must not fear labour but commit ourselves to it for the sake of our Lord.

Heavy Laden

The second word Jesus uses in this phrase is the word φορτίζω *fortizō*. The word was used to speak of how an

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animal was loaded with goods for travelling. It also refers to the cargo of a ship (see Acts 27:10). Jesus used the word to speak of the heavy and oppressive load (φορτίζω fórtizō) of legalism the religious leaders heaped on the people of His day:

4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. (Matthew 23)

This is the interpretation of the NIV Study Notes when it comments on Matthew 11:28:

Probably a reference to the "heavy loads" the Pharisees placed "on men's shoulders" by insisting on a legalistic interpretation of the law (23:4). (NIV Study Bible Notes (NIVSBN)"NIV Study Bible Notes." Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. Zondervan NIV Study Bible (Fully Revised). Copyright © 1985, 1995, 2002 by The Zondervan Company. All rights reserved)

While some burdens can be oppressive, each believer is expected to bear not only his or her burden but also the burden of their brother or sister:

2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load.
(Galatians 6)

The burdens we are to carry come in various forms. The apostle Paul had a troublesome "thorn in his flesh":

All Who Labour and are Heavy Laden

7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12)

Notice that God refused to take this trial from Paul. He told him that He would empower him to carry it instead. The weight of responsibility was also heavy on Paul. Listen to how he describes his ministry to the Corinthians:

27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11)

Paul's ministry was not without its burdens. He carried daily stress and concern for the welfare of the church. As a pastor of a small church, I have felt many responsibilities for the people of God. I remember one day crying out to the Lord, "Lord, how can I help these people walk in the path you have for them when I struggle to do so myself." I see broken relationships and people struggling in their spiritual walk. I feel the pain of those who have lost loved ones or whose health has failed them. God has called me to reach out and bear these burdens with the people of God. What pastor has not felt overwhelmed by the weight of this responsibility?

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The labour and the burdens we bear are unavoidable if we are serious about serving the Lord. You cannot be a good servant of God if you are not willing to work with all your strength. God expects nothing less. Every servant bears a burden. If you belong to the Lord Jesus, you have been given a responsibility. God expects us to carry that responsibility faithfully.

When Jesus calls those who are weary and heavy-laden to come to Him, He is not telling them they will no longer have a work to do or a burden to bear. To the day we die, it is our privilege to labour for the Master and share His heart of compassion for the lost and needy.

What we need to note is that when we feel the fatigue that comes from faithful service, we are to go to Him. When the burdens and weight of our God-given responsibilities weigh us down, we are to cry out to Him. When we don't know what to do, we are to run to Him. When we are mocked and ridiculed, we are to hide in Him. When we fail and fall on the path under the weight we bear, we must humbly reach out to Him.

When Jesus was weary in John 6:4, He sat down. In other words, He rested His body. I am convinced, however, that He did more than this. I believe that He also committed that weary body to the Father for the renewed strength He required for the task before Him.

Billions of dollars are spent every year to take vacations, yet stress and mental illness continue to increase. Jesus teaches us in Matthew 11:28 that when we are feeling the strain of labour and the weight of the burden we bear, He is the source of refreshing. His refreshing does not strip us

All Who Labour and are Heavy Laden
of toil and difficulties but it does give us the strength we
need to carry on and be richly blessed. Could it be that the
reason we are not experiencing the rest we need is
because we go everywhere but to Jesus for our
refreshing?

For Consideration:

What is God's call on your life? What burden has He given
you to carry? Have you been faithful?

If you were to stand before God today to give an
accounting for the work He has given you, would you feel
any shame? Explain.

How do you find rest when you are weary? What part does
the Lord have in your refreshing?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you a clear sense of the ministry He
has given you? Ask Him to give you the passion for this
ministry. Ask Him to help you to serve Him well, even when
there are many obstacles.

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Ask God to give you the grace and refreshing you need in the work He has entrusted you.

Ask the Lord to teach you how to find strength and refreshing in Him.

Chapter 4

Rest

[28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11)

Having invited all who labour and are heavy-laden to come to Him, notice now what Jesus promises those who accept His invitation—“I will give you rest.” What is this rest Jesus promises?

The Greek word used for rest is the word, ἀναπαύω anapaūō. The word has a variety of meanings in the English language. It can mean to cease, to rest, to be quiet, or to refresh.

We read in Genesis 2 that God rested when He completed the work of creation:

[2:1] Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. [2] And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. [3] So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 2)

Notice that God rested from “all His work that He had done in creation.” In other words, He finished what He was doing and ceased creating the world. God did not rest because

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He was tired or weary from creating the world. God did not sleep to refresh Himself or to regain His energy. He simply ceased creating the world because it was perfect. Nor did God stop working when He completed creation. He continued to give life and breath to all living creatures. He continued to oversee and pursue His purpose for His creation. Rest is often seen in conjunction with inactivity. This, however, is not the case for God.

For us as human beings, however, there is a need for a different kind of rest. This rest is necessitated by a variety of factors. Unlike God, we do not have an unlimited source of physical energy. Our bodies wear out and become tired and exhausted from strenuous effort. The runner can only run so far before his or her body gives out. We have physical limitations placed upon us as humans. Attempting to go beyond those limits may prove to be fatal. The heart will only take so much exertion before going into cardiac arrest. If we are going to have a quality of life and perform at our best level, we need to pace ourselves and get the sleep we need each day. We need physical rest.

Our physical body is not our only limitation as humans. Our minds also need rest and refreshing. You might have high physical energy, but your mind can be overloaded and stressed. You begin to forget things. You wander around in a fog because your mind and emotions are weighed down with burdens and anxieties.

Doctor's offices are filled with individuals who have been overburdened by the weight of the stress they carry every day. Maybe you have met people who have gone through so much trauma that their personality has changed. They have been broken by what they have lived through and can

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no longer function emotionally as they once did. Our minds can only handle so much before they risk brokenness.

What is the case for us physically and emotionally is also true spiritually. I have met people who have become angry with God because of the things that have happened to them in life. They cannot accept that God would allow them to face tragedy. Maybe you have become lax in your spiritual walk and found yourself wandering from God. In the end, you find yourself wondering where God is or if He even cares for you. You feel like God no longer hears your prayers and begin to doubt whether He is concerned for you. You find yourself empty and dry spiritually. I have seen cases where people have become despairing and fearful. Even our spirits need to find rest in God. Like a child who rests in the arms of a mother or father, so our spirits need to return to God to find reassurance and comfort in Him. The church father Augustine understood this when he wrote in his confessions:

Great are You, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and of Your wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Your creation, desires to praise You — man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that You resist the proud, — yet man, this part of Your creation, desires to praise You. You move us to delight in praising You; for You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. (Augustine, The Confessions Book I, found at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>)

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“You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” This statement is powerful. It reminds us that until we rest our body, soul and spirit in the arms of God, they will always be restless. I have met too many believers who are anxious and worried about everything that comes their way. They burden themselves with every care and stress of life but are not able to find comfort in their God. Their hearts are restless because they have not been able to rest them in the care and keeping of their Creator.

What is the first thing we do when we are tired and need a rest? We go to bed. We sit down and read a book. We take a vacation. All these things are good in themselves, but this is not what Jesus tells us to do in Matthew 11:28. Jesus tells us that we are to go to Him when we are heavy-laden, and He will give us the rest we need.

Listen to the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 4:

*[8] In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone,
O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4)*

When the Psalmist laid down to sleep, he understood one crucial detail. He would only wake up if God protected and kept Him safe. We take it for granted that we can simply go to sleep and wake up the next day. The reality of the matter, however, is that God gives us sleep.

*[2] It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his
beloved sleep. (Psalm 127)*

Notice what the Psalmist tells us in Psalm 127:2. It is the Lord who gives rest to His beloved. Just as we need the

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Lord God for every waking step we take, so we need Him for every moment we sleep. He protects us and keeps us in our sleep. He restores our bodies as we rest. He wakes us up every day to step out into new opportunities. Were it not for His protection and providence, we would not wake up to face a new day. Every night we commit our tired and weary bodies to Him, asking for physical refreshing and the grace to have yet another day on this earth. As we wake, we recognize His kindness and commit ourselves to thank Him by living fully for Him with the renewed strength He has provided.

It is not just our bodies the Lord restores. Listen to the words of David in Psalm 23:

[23:1] The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. [2] He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. [3] He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psalm 23)

Do you see what the psalmist is saying in these verses? He tells us that the Lord caused him to lie down in green pastures, led him beside still waters, and restored his soul. Let's take a moment to consider these phrases.

David reminded his readers that the Lord made him lie down in green pastures. The lying down David describes here is for the purpose of rest. Notice who gave David this rest. It was the Lord God his Shepherd who made him lie down to rest. The rest that the Lord gave David was in green pastures, beside still waters. As David lay on the soft mattress of green, the gentle sound of the peaceful stream eased the trouble of his mind and lulled him to sleep. He would wake up refreshed because of the generosity of the

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Lord to give him this rest. The rest David describes is the most wonderful type of sleep he can imagine. In the green pasture by quiet waters, that rich blessing of sleep was given to him. His Good Shepherd led him specifically to this place to provide him with the rest he required.

Psalm 23 goes on to say that God not only gave David physical rest, but He also restored his soul. At that time, the worries and concerns of the world around him seemed to disappear. The burdens and cares faded away beside those still waters. The sound of the stream, the gentle breeze and the warmth of that day carried his mind away, and it found rest from the stress and concerns of the day in the care of His great Shepherd.

David's spirit rejoiced in God that day. He saw the hand of God in the green pastures and quiet waters. He felt the presence of God as his soul was restored in this solitude. He knew the leading of God as he woke to walk in new paths of righteousness. God gave David rest for his body, soul and spirit. David knew this was a gift of God.

Of course, the most significant rest God gives us comes through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus. It is a release from sin and guilt. Commenting on this Adam Clarke has this to say:

Sinners, wearied in the ways of iniquity, are also invited to come to this Christ, and find speedy relief. Penitents, burdened with the guilt of their crimes, may come to this Sacrifice, and find instant pardon. Believers, sorely tempted, and oppressed by the remains of the carnal mind, may come to this blood, that cleanseth from all unrighteousness; and, purified from all sin, and powerfully

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succored in every temptation, they shall find uninterrupted rest in this complete Savior. All are invited to come, and all are promised rest. If few find rest from sin and vile affections, it is because few come to Christ to receive it.

"Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke." Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2015. Electronic edition copyright © 2015 by Laridian, Inc., Marion, Iowa. All rights reserved.

The refreshing of God may come to us through green pastures and quiet streams, but it may also come through other people in our lives. Paul told the Corinthians how God refreshed his spirit through individuals who had come to visit him:

[17] I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, [18] for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people. (1 Corinthians 16)

Have you ever felt the leading of God to offer a word of encouragement to a brother or sister in pain? Has God ever put a burden on your heart to provide practical help to someone in need? God may minister to us personally, or He may send His servants to care for us. Behind this, however, is the provision of God for our weakness and pain.

Listen to the words of the Lord through His prophet Isaiah:

[13] As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. [14] You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish

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like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies. (Isaiah 66)

What an incredible promise the Lord made to His people. "I will comfort you," He told them. "Your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass." Here in these words, the Lord promises rest for their hearts and bones. Emotional and physical rest is promised to those who were being pursued by their enemies.

The Lord would go on to say:

[15] "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. [16] Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. (Isaiah 49)

It would be easier for a nursing mother to forget her child and refuse compassion to that child in need than for the Lord God to overlook His children in their crisis. Isaiah reminds us that we are continually before God and in His heart.

What is the application of these truths? Do you believe Jesus cares about you in your need? Do you trust that He cares enough to act on your behalf? Are you confident that He is able to carry you through the trials that come your way? I suppose that every reader will answer yes to each of these questions, but before being too quick to respond, consider these questions in more detail.

Do you believe Jesus cares about you in your need? Does He see what you are going through? Does His heart break

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for the pain you feel? Is He aware of the grief and the deep burden you are carrying? Does he experience this burden Himself? Do you have in the Lord Jesus one who feels compassion for you? Do you have the assurance deep in your soul that He cares? Then you will be comforted in this.

Beyond this, however, do you believe that the one who cares so much will be compelled to act on your behalf? Will He see you in such agony of body, soul and spirit and not willingly bear that burden for you? Will He who died for you on that cross of Calvary not reach out to you in your suffering now? Can you hear His voice cry out to you today, "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"?

The call is for "all" who labour and are heavy laden. This means everyone is to come to Him. It is an invitation to you personally. If you are weary with labour and burdened with a heavy load, that call is for you. He invites you to come because He wants you to come. He feels your burden and the fatigue of your body, soul and spirit and wants to act on your behalf.

If we do not experience rest, it may be because we have not come to Him. It may be because we have not laid the full weight of our soul upon Him. It may be because we still carry the load that He is willing to bear for us. It may be because we do genuinely believe that He will do as He says and bear our burden. Maybe you feel that you have to carry it all and fix it all. He calls us to let Him work. He calls us to surrender those cares and watch Him work out the details.

Consider the words of the apostle Peter:

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[6] Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, [7] casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5)

Humble yourself before God. Tell Him that the burden is too big for you, and it is wearing you out with its weight. Come humbly before Him for help. Cast all those anxieties you have on Him. Trust that He is fully able to work out every detail. The rest God gives may come in the form of release from the weight we carry or in the form of strength and encouragement to bear that weight. Matthew 11:28 makes it clear to us that there is a rest for all who labour and are heavy laden. That rest comes from God. To find that rest, we must make it our priority to go to Him.

For Consideration:

Does God need to rest as we do? Explain.

Why do we need to rest?

What is the difference between rest for the body and rest for the emotions and spirit?

How can we be God's instruments to bring rest and refreshing to each other?

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Are their burdens you are carrying that you need to surrender to God? Can you trust Him to take the weight for you?

For Prayer:

Thank that Lord that He never stops working on our behalf.

Thank Him that He promises to give us rest and refreshing for our body, soul and spirit.

If you are bearing an overwhelming burden right now, take a moment to come to the Lord and bring that burden to Him. Ask Him to give you the rest you need. Remember that rest we need may not be the absence of labour and struggle but the strength to face it.

Ask the Lord to forgive you for not recognizing Him as the source of our rest.

Chapter 5

His Yoke

29 Take my yoke upon you ... (Matthew 11)

Jesus has been speaking to those who labour and are weighed down with heavy burdens. He promised that if they came to Him, He would give them rest. Notice in verse 29, however, that Jesus expects that when we go to Him for rest, we will do two things. First, we will take His yoke upon ourselves, and second, we will learn of Him. Let's consider the first of these requirements.

Commenting on this verse, Adam Clarke says the following:

Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you - Strange paradox! that a man already weary and overloaded must take a new weight upon him, in order to be eased and find rest!

(Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke". Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2015. Electronic edition copyright © 2015 by Laridian, Inc., Marion, Iowa. All rights reserved.)

Adam Clarke is right. There is indeed something strange about this statement of Jesus. Why would you give yet another burden to an already over-burdened person? The

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answer to this lies in our understanding of the yoke of Christ.

A yoke is defined by the Tyndale Bible Dictionary as follows:

The wooden bar that allowed two (or more) draft animals to be coupled (yoked) so that they might effectively work together.

(Comfort, Philip W. (ed), Elwell, Walter A. (ed): Tyndale Bible Dictionary, "Yoke," Laridian, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 2001)

According to this, the purpose of a yoke was to join two or more animals so that they could be stronger together. Imagine a single ox straining to pull the plough. Out of compassion for this overworked ox, the owner then fetches a yoke and another ox. He binds the two oxen together, so they work as a pair. The result is that the work this original ox was doing is now shared by another, and his burden is eased. Let's take a moment to consider this illustration to understand what the Lord Jesus is telling us in this phrase.

Notice that Jesus describes the yoke as "my yoke." In other words, the yoke we are to put on will join us to Him and His purpose. There are several points we need to make here.

If the yoke we are to put on is Jesus' yoke, the implication is that He is already working. He is not asking us to bear a yoke that He is not already bearing. He has been working out His plans for our lives and knows what He wants to accomplish in and through us. He is tilling the ground for the seeds we will plant. He has been opening doors and

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preparing hearts and circumstances. He has already been working on our behalf. He bears that yoke for us.

If we are to take His yoke upon ourselves, it will mean surrendering to His purpose. You cannot yoke yourself to someone and compete with them. The whole objective in being bound together is to have one goal and heart. Taking the yoke of Christ means making a conscious decision to walk with Him and work side by side with Him. It is an act of complete surrender. We bind ourselves to Him, submitting to the purpose He has for us.

Notice also that if we yoke ourselves together with Him, He bears that load with us. The burden is not so overwhelming because we are not carrying it by ourselves. He pulls that plough with us. He takes the strain we found ourselves bearing alone. When Jesus asks us to take His yoke, He is not burdening us with yet another load to bear, He is offering to carry it with us —easing our burden.

Notice that the rest Jesus offers is not a cessation of work. By telling us to take His yoke upon ourselves, Jesus is telling us that we are going to be working. Yoking ourselves with Jesus and His purpose will mean that we will have to keep in step with Him. This is the commitment of anyone who accepts this offer of being yoked with Christ.

Those who are yoked with Christ must die to their own idea and plans. They go where Christ leads them and do what He puts on their heart to do. This took the apostles to places of great difficulty and struggle. Through it all, however, there was great joy and satisfaction. Stephen, as he was being stoned for preaching the gospel, looked up

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and saw the presence of Christ on His throne and he rejoiced:

[54] Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. [55] But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. [56] And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." [57] But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. [58] Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. [59] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Acts 7)

Here was a man who was yoked together with Christ. Being joined to Christ is a dangerous place to be. It will often place us at the forefront of the battle. Jesus will lead us into the heart of the fight, and together with Him, we will fight the enemy. Like Stephen, however, we are not alone. The presence of Christ is yoked to us, and we find great joy and peace in that presence.

Christ invites us to surrender our concerns and worries and yoke ourselves to Him in complete confidence and trust. This yoke not only eases our load but also puts us in a place of fellowship with Him. His presence comforts and reassures us no matter how difficult the work before us may be. We are not alone. We are joined to our Saviour, who will work out all things for our good and His glory.

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Jesus challenges all who are labouring and straining under a heavy burden to come to Him. He asks them to submit to being yoked together with Him. This means that we will have to put aside our ideas and plans and submit to His. It will mean hard work, but we will never be alone, He will be yoked with us wherever we go, supporting and standing with us. We must trust Him if we are going to bind ourselves to Him. Where He goes, we will go. What He does, we will do. Our wills will be His will. Our purpose will be His purpose. There must not be any struggle with Him in this. We pull the plough together. We bear the load together. We walk side by side in harmony and peace.

You can take as many vacations as you like or sleep as much as you need, but there will be no rest until you are willing to take Christ's yoke upon yourself and walk in complete surrender to Him and His purpose. We can only know rest if we submit to His yoke.

For Consideration:

How does taking Christ's yoke upon ourselves ease our burden?

What comfort do you find in the fact that Christ bears the yoke with us?

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Can you yoke yourself with Christ and fight for our own will? What would be the result?

Will taking on the yoke of Christ mean a life of ease?

Can we find rest apart from submission and fellowship with Jesus Christ?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He is already working on our behalf.

Ask the Lord to give you the grace to willingly trust Him and surrender to His yoke.

Thank the Lord that rest is not found in inactivity but in submission and fellowship with Him.

Are you struggling with a load of responsibility or grief? Take a moment to meditate on the fact that Jesus bears this burden with you. Surrender to Him and His purpose.

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Trust Him to care for you and give you wisdom and enabling to fulfil His will for your life.

Chapter 6

Learning from Him

29 ... and learn from me (Matthew 11)

In the last chapter, we examined what it meant to be yoked with Christ. Matthew 11:29 goes on to challenge those who come to Christ for rest to learn from Him. What is the connection between the rest Jesus offers and learning from Him?

The yoke we share with Christ is not just about easing our burden; it is also about learning from Him. Listen to the words of Hebrews 5 about the Lord Jesus:

[7] In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. [8] Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. [9] And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, [10] being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5)

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that when the Lord Jesus was on this earth, he suffered in the flesh. In His agony of soul, He offered up prayers and supplications to God with “loud cries and tears.” The writer goes on in Hebrews 5:8

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to say that Christ “learned obedience through what he suffered.”

Some time ago, I was in a car accident that kept me from driving for about a year. During that time, I was unable to travel to my ministry obligations. The accident was caused when I blacked out while driving. I was going through a series of tests to determine what caused that blackout. This was a difficult time for me personally. I remember walking to a coffee shop to do some writing one day. As I walked, I was reflecting on the loss of ministry and the questions about my health. I was feeling a bit down at the time as a result. I remember my prayer to God as I walked that day: “Lord, I am willing to face this trial, but I am asking you one thing. Don’t let me come out on the other side the same. Help me to learn the lessons you want me to learn.”

That accident taught me something important. There is something much worse than going through a trial in life, and that is coming out of it the same, without having learned what God wanted to teach you through it. Some of the greatest lessons in life come through the most challenging trials. It has been in these times of “loud cries and tears” that I have learned the most and been drawn closest to the Lord.

Consider what the Lord Jesus is telling us here. The picture He paints is a picture of you and me yoked together with Him. He shares the labour and heavy burden we bear, making it easier for us to endure. But the picture does not end there. As we carry that heavy load together, the Lord Jesus teaches us some of the most vital lessons of life. He uses the trials we bear for good. The apostle Paul had this to say about the sufferings of the believer:

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[3] Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5)

Paul told the Romans that they had every reason to rejoice in their sufferings because of what those sufferings would do for them. Their pain would produce endurance. As they endured, their character would be shaped. As their character was transformed, they would experience a greater sense of hope and awareness of the love of God being poured out into their hearts.

The trials we face in life shape us. For some, these struggles will harden their hearts and make them bitter. I have met individuals who have become angry with God because of the things they endured in life. This is because they did not yoke themselves with Christ. They were unwilling to surrender to His purpose and learn from Him.

The connection between taking Christ's yoke and learning from Him is not optional. If you want to learn from Christ, you must first yoke yourself to Him. When you are joined with Him, where He goes, you go. As you walk with Him, He teaches you through the things you suffer. This will not be easy. He will point out your failures and hidden sins. He will show you your weakness and push you to strengthen your defences. He will lead you to places you never thought you could go. He will call you to do things you never thought you could. He will refine you through the

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things you endure, make you stronger and draw you closer to Him and His purpose.

What we need to understand is that the Lord Jesus is not only interested in giving the weary rest but also in strengthening them so they can overcome. He wants us to stand in faith against what used to overwhelm us. He wants us to learn how to handle the stresses and burdens that life throws at us. If all Christ did was give us rest, we would never become strong to face the enemy. He wants us to learn from Him. When we are strong, the burdens that used to weigh us down are not so heavy anymore. When we learn from Him, we can bear greater burdens. We become more effective and useful for the kingdom of God. We experience more of His enabling grace. He teaches us how to endure and live in victory.

If we are going to learn what He wants to teach us, however, we need to be yoked to Him and surrendered to His purpose. We will not learn if we are rebelling and trying to do things our way. The yoke of Christ implies submission and humble obedience. Only as we walk with this attitude can we learn from Him.

The burdens we bear will not be in vain if we are willing to let the Lord teach us through them. These trials can strengthen us and make us more effective servants of God. They can draw us closer to Christ and purge away our sinful attitudes and behaviours. These trials can become a vital tool in the hand of Christ to shape us.

We need to take great comfort in the fact that Jesus tells us that not only will He help bear our load, but He will also

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teach us what these trials are intended to accomplish. Our testing will serve a purpose as we learn from Him.

For Consideration:

What lessons have you learned through the things you suffered?

What is the connection between being yoked with Christ and Him teaching us? Can we truly learn from Christ if we are not submitting to Him?

If Christ only offered us rest, would we ever grow? Why is it essential that we learn how to handle the burdens of life?

What does the fact that Christ wants to teach us in our trials show us about His expectations for us?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the things He has taught you in the trials and struggles you have faced in life.

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Ask that Lord to forgive you for times when you were unwilling to learn what He had to teach you. Ask Him to give you a deeper commitment to be yoked together with Him in all submission and humility.

Thank the Lord that He has a desire to teach and strengthen us in our faith and walk. Ask Him to give you a heart that is open to what He wants to show you in the trials you face.

Thank the Lord that our trials are not in vain.

Chapter 7

The Gentleness of Jesus

[29] ... for I am gentle ... (Matthew 11)

The Lord Jesus invites all who labour and are overwhelmed with their load to take His yoke upon them and learn from Him. Notice in this phrase that one of the reasons for this is because He is gentle. Why does Jesus mention this characteristic to those who are overwhelmed with the burden of life? What is the connection between the gentleness of Jesus and the rest we need?

The word “gentle” used here is the word πραῖος (prah'-os) which can be translated by gentle, humble or meek. It is a form of the word πραῦς which speaks of someone who is mild, humble or meek. Meekness is defined as follows by blueletterbible.org:

Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the OT, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time (Isa 41:17, Luke 18:1-8). Gentleness or meekness is the

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opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will (Gal 5:23).

(<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4239&ss=>)

Jesus described Himself as gentle or meek. In doing so, He is teaching us several fundamental lessons.

ACCEPTING GOD'S PURPOSE

First, a meek person accepts God's dealing without complaint and grumbling. This person knows that God has a purpose and will work out that purpose for our good and His glory. Sometimes the circumstances we face are challenging. Consider the example of Jesus. As God, He left that glories of heaven to become a man. He humbled Himself to the point of depending on a mother and father for life. He gave himself entirely to the ministry to which the Father had called him. He was mocked, ridiculed, opposed and rejected for the things He taught. He was falsely accused and laid down His life as an innocent victim, bearing our sins upon His shoulders. He accepted the cross as that will of the Father for the good of His people. He suffered and died a horrible death for you and me.

In His gentleness, the Lord submitted to the cross, trusting the will of the Father. He knew the Father had a purpose and was willing to surrender His life to that purpose. He did not struggle against the will of His Father but committed Himself in life or death to do live in obedience.

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Gentleness is a complete surrender of our will, mind and body to the Lord God. This was the example of Jesus. He understands what it means to suffer. He knows what it is like to face the mocking and rejection of those who will not believe our message. He knows what it is like not to have a home or a supportive family. He understands the pain we feel. He was tempted like we are. This gives Him a unique ability to comfort us in our suffering and temptation:

*[18] For because he himself has suffered when tempted,
he is able to help those who are being tempted.
(Hebrews 2)*

Have you ever spoken to someone who faced the same pain you suffered? Is there not great comfort in knowing that this person understands you completely. You don't have to explain yourself or your feelings to them, they just understand. They identify with you completely. How comforting it is to speak with them. Somehow, as we speak, it feels as if they are bearing the weight with us. We go away refreshed and renewed. Because we have found someone who understands, we leave realizing that we are not alone in our pain. Someone else feels what we do? We have a companion who has faced what we are experiencing.

The gentleness of Jesus caused him to bear tremendous pain and suffering. He invites you to come to Him as a fellow sufferer to share your pain. He offers a listening ear and bears that pain with us. Nobody will understand like Him. Come to Him and share that hurt. He will not turn you away because He too felt what you feel.

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SELFLESSNESS

The second point we need to make here about the gentleness of Jesus is that gentleness is not occupied with self and promoting self above others. When the Lord Jesus came to this earth, He did so for you and me. When He was mocked and rejected, it was on our account. When He was beaten and lifted up on the cross, it was for my sins. Speaking to the Philippians, the apostles Paul says this:

[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2)

Notice what Paul is saying in these verses. He challenged the Philippians to do nothing out of selfish ambition but to act in humility. They were not to be concerned about themselves alone but consider the needs of those around them as being more important than their own.

Paul then went on to describe the Lord Jesus and offer Him as an example for the Philippians to follow. Jesus was equal to God but emptied himself and took on the form of a man. As a man, He humbled Himself to become a servant. As a servant, He humbled Himself to the point of death. As one who died, He humbled Himself to the most

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humiliating and painful deaths, “even death on a cross.” The life Jesus lived on this earth was not about lifting up Himself. He lived every moment in submission to the will of the Father and in service of His people.

Shall we hesitate to come to such a Lord in our time of need? Will He who devoted His life to bringing you forgiveness and eternal life not receive you and listen to your pain? Will He not reach out to you in your need and comfort you in your weakness? Will He not delight to give you peace in the raging storm of life? Will He who laid down His life for you turn you away when you come to Him? He is gentle. He will receive you with open arms. He will comfort and strengthen you.

LEARNING OBEDIENCE

Finally, as Jesus grew, the Bible tells us that He learned obedience through the things He suffered. The writer to the Hebrews has this to say about Jesus:

[7] In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. [8] Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. [9] And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5)

As a man, Jesus needed to grow in His knowledge of God and His purpose.

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[52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2)

He had to learn just as we do. One of the ways Jesus learned was through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). As he was ridiculed, He had to learn to trust the Father. When He was overwhelmed by people and their needs, He had to find strength in the Spirit. He chose to allow the circumstances of life to teach Him and mature Him as a man. He had to learn just as we do. He struggled with everything we wrestle with. Life's lessons were harsh at times. Yet, He chose to persevere and learn what the Father had for Him to learn through those trials.

Because Jesus was gentle in character, He accepted each of these trials and struggles as part of the lessons the Father was teaching Him. He grew in wisdom as a result. He learned the lessons we still need to learn. He is able to show us what we need to learn from the heavy burdens we bear.

Jesus shares His qualifications as a comforter with us in Matthew 11:29. He tells us that when we are overwhelmed with the burden of life, we are to come and learn from Him. He is uniquely qualified as a teacher because He is gentle. He teaches us through His experience. He rebukes self-centredness and pride in us and reminds us that God is shaping us for His purpose. His elevation to the right hand of the Father teaches us that victory is won through submission and obedience to the will of God.

As we come to this gentle Jesus, see His example, and are comforted by His absolute confidence and trust in the Father, we are given courage and hope. We see His

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victory and know that in Him ours is possible as well. In His gentleness of spirit, the Lord Jesus shows us that He knows what we are facing. He teaches all who come to Him how to bear that load. He strengthens them to carry it.

This gentleness of Jesus was not freedom from pain, struggle and death. In His humility, Jesus bore the weight of our sin on His shoulders and suffered the cross for us. The gentleness of Jesus did, however, remove the battle between Himself and the Father. Isn't this the most significant burden of all?

Fighting against God for what we want in life is a burden that is greater than any of us can bear. I want my comfort and ease. God wants to send me out in His name to reach the world. I refuse to listen to what God wants because I don't want what He offers. There is no peace in my heart. The conviction of the Spirit and my rejection of what He wants to do in my life is so intense that I am living a miserable life. If only I would surrender, how different my life would be.

Countless saints throughout the ages have testified to the blessing and peace of absolute surrender. In life and death, they have experienced the peace and gentleness of Christ. Death was no burden because the life and hope they knew were of far greater value.

What should we understand from Jesus' statement in Matthew 11:29 about being gentle? We should understand first that we can come to Him without hesitation. He understands our needs and has experienced our pain Himself. He understands and is uniquely qualified to minister to those needs because of His gentle spirit.

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While we will undoubtedly experience the ministry of Christ to us in our need, that is not the only reason we come to this gentle Jesus. Jesus calls us to learn from His gentleness. Go to Jesus and see how He dealt with the weight He bore. See how, in His gentle spirit, He surrendered to the will and purpose of God. See how this gentleness allowed Him to learn the great lessons of faith. See how this gentleness banished pride and selfish ambition to care for and minister to those He came to save. Learn from His meekness as you bear your burden. Allow the lessons you learn to bring you to a deeper commitment to the purpose of God. As you yield to God and His purpose, watch how His blessing falls. Experience the joy and refreshing of His Spirit.

Gentleness is not freedom from burden but a willing acceptance of that burden. It is an acceptance of the plan and purpose of God and a release from the selfishness and pride that keeps us from experiencing God's refreshing and enabling in the burdens He has given us to bear for Him.

For Consideration:

Take a moment to consider the struggles you bear in life. What weighs you down. How does having a gentle spirit ease the burden?

How did Jesus demonstrate gentleness? How is this an example to us?

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How does knowing that Jesus has a gentle spirit give us greater freedom to come to Him?

Gentleness is described as a selfless attitude. Do you have this kind of attitude? Are there areas of your life where you need to learn to be more gentle?

How do pride and selfishness keep us from learning?

Does having a gentle spirit mean that we will have no burden to bear? How does a gentle spirit ease the weight we carry?

For Prayer:

Ask God to break any pride and selfishness in you. Ask Him to replace this with a gentle spirit that is willing to surrender to Him.

Thank the Lord Jesus for the gentleness of His Spirit that led Him to the cross for your sake.

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Do you have a burden that you bear? Take that burden to God and ask Him to teach you through it? Ask Him to give you the grace necessary to learn what He wants to show you through it.

Thank the Lord Jesus that He understands what you are facing. Thank Him for how He demonstrated that victory is entirely possible as we surrender with a gentle spirit to the Father who loves us and is using the circumstance of life to teach us and draw us closer to Himself.

Chapter 8

The Lowly Heart of Jesus

[29] for I am ...lowly in heart (Matthew 11)

We can learn from the gentleness of Jesus in our trials. The Lord Jesus also invites those who are wearied to learn from Him because he is lowly in heart (verse 29).

The word lowly, when used in a social context, refers to those who are poor or who have a low social standing. This lowliness is measured by their lack of resources and influence. When the Lord Jesus came to this earth, He did not choose to be born to a wealthy family. Mary and Joseph were humble and ordinary people who worked for a living and had no particular influence in their society.

The life Jesus lived on this earth was a lowly life. He had no home of His own or any possessions to speak of. He depended on the provisions of those who heard Him speak. One day a scribe came to Jesus and asked Him permission to follow Him. Listen to the response of Jesus:

[19] And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." [20] And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

(Matthew 8)

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Jesus reminded the scribe that if he were to follow Him, there would be hardships.

On another occasion, a rich ruler came to Jesus to ask Him what He could do to have eternal life. Jesus responded:

[21] Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [22] When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Matthew 19)

Notice that Jesus told the man to sell whatever he possessed, give the money to the poor and then follow Him. The man was unwilling to part with his belongings and left Jesus that day with a sorrowful heart.

Jesus was telling these men that if they were to serve Him, they could not be distracted by the things of this world. Those who serve the Lord Jesus must be willing to put everything else aside. They must be devoted one hundred percent to the cause they represent.

The apostle Paul made it clear to Timothy that one of the qualifications of an elder in the church was that he not be a lover of money. Money and possessions have a tendency to distract us in the work God has called us to do.

The Lord Jesus lived a lowly life. He was not distracted by the affairs of this world or a love of money, comfort or ease. He knew what it was like to suffer. He knew what it was like to be hungry, cold and without a place to call home.

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While Jesus lived a lowly life, notice that He tells us that He was “lowly in heart.” The lowliness of Jesus, while reflected in the kind of life He lived, was not just the absence of possessions but a humbleness of heart. This kind of heart is evidenced in a number of ways.

A lowly heart is a humble heart. It is not puffed up and proud. It was this attitude that caused Jesus to submit to the cruelties of the cross for us. Although He was God, He willingly laid His life down so that we could be forgiven. The Creator died for His rebellious creation. He stooped down to care for us in our time of rebellion and sin.

A lowly heart is also an afflicted heart. Just as a humble lifestyle is filled with pain and trial, so the heart of Christ was afflicted with these same agonies. He grieved for the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:

[37] “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matthew 23)

Isaiah prophesied of a grieving Messiah when he wrote:

[2] For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. [3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53)

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Isaiah described the Messiah as one who would be like a root coming out of the dry ground. He would not be kingly or handsome. He would be despised and rejected. His heart would be filled with sorrow and grief.

The Father did not grant Jesus all the things an earthly king would typically have. He was not a popular person. The people He lived with took advantage of Him. He understood what it was like for people to mock and abuse Him. He experienced rejection and hatred. He grieved when He watched people refuse His warnings. His heart broke for those whose ears could not understand what He preached. He cried out on the cross: "Father, why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:34). All the grief you and I experience in life, the Lord Jesus also experienced. His heart was a lowly and afflicted heart. This is the heart of one who understands what we are facing in life. This is a heart that has shed tears and grieved over disappointments and losses. It is a heart that learned obedience through the things it suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

Jesus calls those who are heavy laden to learn from Him because He is lowly of heart. We do not need to fear to approach Him. He has been exalted to the place of highest honour, but Jesus uses the present tense when He tells us that He is lowly in heart. His position at the right hand of the Father does not change His lowliness of heart. It is still a humble heart that grieves for those who mourn and feels the pain of our rejection. It is a heart that identifies with us and will not turn away from anyone who comes to Him in faith. It is a heart that still identifies with our weariness.

While it is true that we have in the Lord Jesus, one who has a lowly and understanding heart, we also need to learn

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from His example. If the Lord Jesus, the Son of God and Lord of all, came to this earth and lived a lowly life with a lowly heart, who are we to elevate ourselves above Him. In John 13, the Lord demonstrated this lowly heart when He took up a towel and washed the feet of His disciples. When He has completed this task, He spoke to those present and said:

[13] You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. [14] If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. [16] Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (John 13)

The Lord Jesus told His disciples that if He, as their teacher, washed their feet, then they should be willing to do the same for others. The servant is not greater than the master, nor is the messenger greater than the one who sent him. If Jesus humbled Himself to this point then we too should be willing to do the same. He is our example.

What are you facing in your Christian life? Do people reject you? Are you feeling the weight of always giving and rarely receiving? Do you feel like the burden of other people's problems is pressing you down? Do you feel like your words and actions are unappreciated or even rejected? Jesus tells you to look to Him as your example. Go to Him and share your heart, but do so with the understanding of what He has done for you. As Master, He washed your feet. As Saviour, He suffered and died for you. As Lord, He

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emptied Himself and lived a lowly life. Will we expect a life of ease when He so willingly suffered for us?

Speaking to His disciples in John 15, the Lord Jesus said:

[18] "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (John 15)

In this world, we should expect difficulty and trials. Just as Jesus endured these struggles, so we too will face them if we follow in His footsteps.

The question we need to ask ourselves in this context is this: Where is the rest Jesus promised if we must follow His lowliness of heart and suffer in this world? Can the heart be lowly and still be blessed and filled with peace? Can the troubled heart rejoice? Is there rest for the heavy-laden?

To answer these questions, I would like to examine some New Testament passages. The first passage is from Acts 7. In this chapter, Stephen preached a powerful message. Those who heard it, however, were angry. Stephen rebuked his listeners for their hypocrisy and rejection of the Messiah. When he finished speaking, the crowd was so enraged that they decided to stone him to death. In the

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midst of the chaos that ensued, Stephen looked up into heaven. Acts 7:54-56 describe what he saw:

[54] Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. [55] But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. [56] And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

As he was about to die, Stephen saw the heavens open and the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God. As the stones struck his body, the heart of Stephen rejoiced. The sight of the Lord Jesus and His approval gave him courage and joy. He was willing to die. His soul was at rest. There was no need to fight what was happening to Him. He would pass on from this world into the presence of Jesus with peace in his heart. We see evidence of the humbleness of Stephen in Acts 7:59-60 when he cried out to the Lord:

[59] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." [60] And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7)

Stephen's heart was free from the weight of bitterness and hatred for his enemies. The peace of God flooded his soul in the midst of the pain of broken bones and open wounds.

In Acts 5, the apostles were in prison for preaching the gospel. An angel of the Lord appeared to them in their cell

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and released them. He told them to continue preaching the word of life. When the authorities discovered the apostles teaching in the temple, they were enraged and wanted to kill them (Acts 5:33). Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, counselled them against this. Taking the advice of this respected teacher, the leaders decided to beat the apostles instead. Notice the response of the apostles to this beating:

[40] and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. [41] Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. (Acts 5)

The apostles rejoiced that they were found worthy to suffer for the cause of Jesus Christ. They fearlessly continued to preach the good news with a rejoicing heart.

The apostle James has this to say about the trials we face in life.

[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1)

When we face trials of various kinds, we are to count it all joy. We are to do so because we know that these trials are not in vain. God is testing our faith and producing steadfastness in us. That steadfastness will perfect and

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mature us. We can rejoice because the Lord will use whatever happens to us for good.

Jesus had this to say to those who were falsely accused and persecuted for His namesake:

[11] "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5)

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven," Jesus said. The pain of the mother giving birth is rewarded by the young child she holds in her arms. She joyfully endures the pain for the delight of holding that baby. The runner suffers the pain of limbs and lungs to stand rejoicing on the winner's podium.

The writer to the Hebrews challenges his reader to look to Jesus as their example in the suffering they faced:

[12:1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12)

Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him. That joy was to be with the Father again but was also in the knowledge that many sinners would be saved and

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join Him. That reality brought joy to the cross He bore. His suffering would not be in vain. Countless individuals from every nation of the earth would surround the throne of the Father as a result of His agony. It was worth the pain and suffering. He endured it with joy in His heart.

There is a joy for the lowly heart. Jesus proved this by His death on the cross. The apostles demonstrated it in their rejoicing when persecuted. Stephen experienced it when He was stoned. There is rest in the heart that looks to Jesus and learns from Him. That rest is not an absence from suffering but peace, joy and confidence in it.

As we approach the lowly heart of Jesus, we see what He was willing to endure for us and are given the courage to remain firm and faithful. We understand that He sees our suffering and pain and will not give us more than we can bear in His strength. We are confident that He knows what we are experiencing and will reward us for our faithful service. This understanding gives us the courage and confidence to face the foe. It drives us onward in service and devotion to Him, who endured all for us.

For Consideration:

How does the word “lowly” describe the life Jesus chose to live on this earth?

Can riches and possessions hinder our spiritual walk? Explain.

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Jesus describes His heart as a lowly heart. What is a lowly heart?

Knowing that the heart of Jesus is a lowly heart, what confidence does this give us to approach Him and share our struggles and afflictions?

What is the world's concept of rest? How does this compare with the kind of rest Jesus promises here?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to set you free from the love of this world.

Thank the Lord for what He endured for you. Ask Him to give you a heart that is devoted to Him no matter what life throws at you.

Do you feel weary and overwhelmed? Take a moment to speak to the Lord about this. Pour out your heart to Him, who understands everything you are going through. Thank Him that He understands like no one else because he Himself was tempted and tried like you.

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Ask the Lord for grace and joy in the struggles you are facing now. Ask Him to give you absolute confidence that He is Lord over all your pain and suffering and will use it to accomplish good in you. Ask Him to set you free from the burdens of worry and fear so your heart can be at rest in His purpose.

Chapter 9

Rest for Your Soul

(29) ...and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11)

Jesus promises rest for the souls of all who come and learn from Him. The Greek word used for soul in this verse is the word ψυχή (psuchḗ). It comes from a word with means to breathe or to blow. It refers to the breath of life that is in us. Genesis 2:7 describes this when it says:

[7] then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2)

Notice the connection in this verse between the Lord breathing into the nostrils of man and him becoming a living creature. The King James Version uses the word “soul” when it says that after God breathed into his nostrils, “man became a living soul.” Our soul, on a fundamental level, is the life within us. The soul, however, is more than just life. It has a conscious awareness of its environment and communicates with that environment. It makes decisions and feels emotions, desires and needs. It reasons and remembers. Our thought processes are the function of the soul. Our feelings are the response of the soul to the circumstances we face. It is distinguished from the physical body in that it is not something you can see but is part of who we are as human beings.

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Jesus tells us that just as our bodies need rest, so also do our souls. Who among us has not been emotionally overwhelmed? The grief we feel in our hearts can sometimes become too much for us to bear. The disappointments in life can weigh us down and deplete our energy. The soul is not without its limitations. It can become tired and weary.

The fatigue of the soul is different from the physical fatigue we experience. To remedy this, we simply stop working and let the body recover. What happens, however, when the soul becomes tired from the decisions and pressures of the day. I have had times when I would go to sleep with the concerns of my job and wake up just as tired because my mind would not give me rest. I would go through the day feeling exhausted because the strain continued to bear down on my soul. The exhaustion of the soul is not because of hard physical work but because of emotional pressure. Just like our bodies, our souls need to rest and be refreshed if they are to function as God intended.

How can we give our souls rest? What does rest for the soul look or feel like? The word Jesus uses for rest in Matthew 11:29 is defined as inner peace. In Luke 6, the Lord compares those who hear and obey His word to a man building his house on a solid foundation.

46 "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? 47 Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. (Luke 6)

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What is significant about this teaching of Jesus is the image He paints for us. Jesus describes a house that is built on a firm foundation. As the storm rages, the floodwaters rise and break out against that house, but it is not shaken because it is well built. The man who built the home was at peace in his soul because he knew that his house was secure. He had rest for his soul in the midst of the storm.

What Jesus promises in Matthew 11:29 is not the absence of trouble but peace of soul in the midst of the storms of life. Consider the example of Jesus in Luke 8:

[22] One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, [23] and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. [24] And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. [25] He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (Luke 8)

Jesus and His disciples were crossing the lake when a great windstorm arose and threatened to sink the boat with them in it. The disciples began to fear for their lives. Jesus, however, was sleeping through this great event. When the disciples woke Him to say that they were perishing, Jesus rose and rebuked the waves. The storm subsided, and there was calm on the lake once more. In this story, we

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have a picture of rest for the soul. The disciples could find no rest in their souls, but Jesus was at complete peace.

The disciples learned that day that Jesus “commands even winds and water, and they obey him.” The Lord Jesus was in complete control of the events of that day. The disciples still had to learn that lesson. They could have no peace until they entrusted their situation to Jesus. The storm that threatened their boat was more than the disciples could handle. Their emotions went into overload. Fear, anxiety and hopelessness began to well up within them until they began to cry out, “Master, we are perishing.” Their souls were heavy laden and weighted down to the point of despair. The burden they bore was too much for them to handle, so they cried out to the Lord for mercy.

In Luke 10, the author tells the story of Mary and Martha when Jesus and His disciples came to visit:

39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10)

Martha was busy with the meal preparations. Luke 10:41 tells us that Jesus recognized that she was anxious and troubled about many things. In fact, this anxiety got to a point where Martha spoke to Jesus and said: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her

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then to help me?" (verse 40). Martha's soul was troubled and anxious. She was feeling the pressure of getting everything ready for her guests, but more than this, she was feeling the injustice and frustration of watching Mary sit quietly at Jesus' feet while she (Martha) did all the work. This did not seem fair to Martha. That sense of injustice began to well up in her soul until it exploded in angry resentment towards her sister.

There are many things that trouble our souls. Fear, anxiety, despair, or a sense of injustice are just a few things that can overload our souls to the point where they become tired, weary or even overloaded to the point of exploding in angry and resentful words.

What is the solution to a tired and overwhelmed soul? Jesus tells us that if we come to Him and learn from Him, He will give us rest for our souls. He will calm the fears we face by reminding us that He is in control of the storm. He will break the resentment we feel by challenging us to surrender our rights and privileges to Him. He will set our hearts at rest as we learn to trust Him in every situation. We begin to learn that His purpose is better than anything we could imagine for our lives. We see how even the trials and struggles He brings shape and refine us, drawing us closer to Him and that "for those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28).

As we let Him lead, the burden of shaping our own destiny disappears. As we entrust our work to Him, He directs us in the way He wants us to go. We become aware of a very personal Christ who has a purpose for our lives. We surrender our lives to Him. We release our troubles to Him,

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and the burdens of our soul are replaced by confidence in His work in and through us. We recognize that our disappointments will give way to new opportunities in His purpose. We accept that He knows what is right and will always lead us in the paths of truth and righteousness for His namesake (Psalm 23:3). Even when my path leads through the “valley of the shadow of death,” I will not fear because He is with me (Psalm 23:4). I begin to realize that I am not in control of the destiny of this world and that without Him, I can do nothing (John 5:30; 15:5), but with Him, I can do all things (Philippians 4:13). The burden of carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders yields to simple obedience and surrender to the purpose of God for my life. Jealousy and envy disappear. Pride and selfish ambition vanishes and are replaced by a heart of devotion to the will of God and a sense of joy in being part His purpose.

Our soul finds rest in surrender to Christ. It finds rest in the realization of my relationship with Him and His purpose. I know that because He is gentle and lowly of spirit, He will care for me. I cast all my cares on Him because He cares for me (1 Peter 5:7). I know my eternity is secure because of His work on the cross. The storms may rage, but I am confident that in Him, I am able to overcome. This knowledge brings peace and rest to my soul.

For Consideration:

What is the soul?

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Why does our soul need rest?

Does rest for the soul mean that there are no storms in life?

How does looking to Jesus bring rest to our souls?

What troubles your soul today? Can you look to Jesus today and surrender these troubles to Him?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for how He breathed into us, and we became a living, feeling and rational soul. Thank Him for the marvel of life.

Ask God to forgive you for assuming that everything depends on you, your skill and ability.

Take a moment to cast your cares and anxieties on the Lord. Recognize that He is Lord over all and that He is

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willing to strengthen and equip you for every purpose He has for your life.

Ask God to give you rest for your soul as you surrender to Him and accept His purpose.

Chapter 10

Easy Yokes

[30] For my yoke is easy ... (Matthew 11)

Jesus tells those who come to Him that His yoke is easy. We examined this yoke in chapter 5, so we will not repeat this here. What is of interest to us in this phrase is that Jesus defines the yoke as an easy one. What is an easy yoke?

As we said in verse 5, the yoke we bear is a submission to Christ and His purpose. A quick examination of the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament shows us that this submission to Christ will mean deep sacrifice and struggle at times.

Jesus tells all who would follow after Him and take His yoke on themselves that they would have to deny themselves and take up their cross on a daily basis:

[23] And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. [24] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. (Luke 9)

This means that all followers of Christ will have to die to their own plans. They must surrender to Christ and His purpose alone.

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He warned those who followed Him that their own families would turn against them and hate them because of their relationship with Christ. In some cases, these family members would even seek to put them to death.

[21] Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, [22] and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10)

Jesus told those who belonged to Him that as the days of His return drew near, they would face tribulation and death. The nations of the earth would turn against them and despise them because of their relationship with Christ.

[9] "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. (Matthew 24)

Christians will be hated in this world. In John 15, Jesus told His disciples that the world would persecute them just as they persecuted Him.

[19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. (John 15)

We must examine Christ's words in Matthew 11:30 in the context of the verses quoted above. How can the yoke we bear as believers be easy if it will mean persecution,

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betrayal, denial, hatred and death? To answer this, let's take a look at the meaning of the word "easy."

Some commentators see in this phrase a reference to the salvation of the Lord Jesus. Consider, for example, what took place in Acts 15. In this passage, we have the account of how some men were teaching that unless a man was circumcised according to the custom of Moses, he could not be saved (Acts 15:1). This caused quite a stir among the believers, and it was determined that Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem to find out what the teaching of the church was about this matter.

When the apostles and elders met to discuss the issue, there was much debate. Peter stood up in that assembly and testified to what the Lord had done through his ministry among the Gentiles and how He had given them the Holy Spirit just as He had the Jews. He concluded with these words to the council:

[10] Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [11] But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." (Acts 15)

It was the belief of Peter that by requiring that the Gentiles submit to the Law of Moses and circumcise their male children, they were "placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples" that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear. The burden of perfectly keeping the law of Moses was not something that any Jew was able to carry. They always fell short of that law. No one could keep it perfectly. Peter reminded those present that salvation was through

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the grace of the Lord Jesus and had nothing to do with the practice of the Law of Moses. In other words, the heavy burden of trying to measure up to the perfect standard of God had been removed by Jesus Christ. In Jesus, there was forgiveness and salvation apart from the law. All that was required now is that the believer trust in the Lord Jesus and His work to be saved from their sin. All who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ could be saved (Acts 16:31). The enormous burden of trying to get to heaven by our own efforts has been broken. Now those who trust Jesus and His work can know eternal life.

The word translated “easy” in Matthew 11:30 is the Greek word *χρηστός* (*chrēstós*). The word is used to speak of something that is profitable, good or useful. When the word is used in relation to people, it refers to those who are kind and gentle. In this context, the Lord is easy on us or compassionate when he places a yoke on our neck.

The yoke we bear will not be too much for us to carry. Christ’s yoke, though difficult, is kind. It is given to us with tenderness and compassion. Like a gentle physician, giving a lifesaving needle to a young child, all that child can see is the needle and the momentary pain. What the child does not understand, however, is the kindness of that needle and how the physician administered it for his or her good.

Whatever burden God gives us, we can be sure that it comes from a kind heart and seeks our good. The New Living Translation of the Bible captures this when it translates verse 30 as follows:

Easy Yokes

30 For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light.

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While the yoke the Lord gives us may be substantial, it is always good for us. It is a yoke designed to shape us and transform us into the image of Christ. This is not to say that there will not be pain involved in the bearing of this yoke. That pain, however, will be the means by which we are strengthened and matured. None of the burdens or trials we bear will be without reason or purpose. We will carry no load that Jesus will not give us the strength to endure and will not use to perfect us. While we may not presently understand it, the gentle and meek Jesus who calls us to learn from Him gives us this burden from the kindness of His heart. He knows what we need.

When Jesus tells us that His yoke is easy, He is not telling us that the Christian life will be without its struggles. If anything, being yoked together with Christ will bring persecution and hatred in this world. He is telling us, however, that the burden of having to measure up to obtain salvation is gone. All that is required now is to believe and submit to Christ and His work. While those who do submit to Him will encounter pain and struggle in this life, they know that every trial they pass through is designed to mature them and draw them closer to their Saviour. They know that they will be hated in this world, but they also have the assurance of the comfort and strength of the Lord

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to face each day. They know His presence in the fiery furnace through which they must pass. They rejoice in fellowship with Him and in the assurance that this temporary agony is nothing compared to the joy that is set before them in the presence of Christ for all eternity. They do not count their suffering as harsh. Instead, they look back with thanksgiving for what the Lord Jesus accomplished in them through the things they endured. They rejoice in His presence. They are relieved of the sins that entangled them, and they are freed to walk in a deeper and more intimate fellowship with Him.

For Consideration:

Can we ever measure up to the perfect standard of God? How do the work of Christ and our submission to Him remove the burden of having to measure up to God's standard?

Should we who have submitted to the yoke of Christ expect an easy life?

Describe a time when you experienced the comfort and strength of the Lord to face your trial?

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Is it always easy to see the kindness and compassion of God in thy burden He has given us? Consider a time when God used what you faced for your good.

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord Jesus for removing the heavy burden of having to be good enough to be saved. Thank Him that we can know complete forgiveness through His work on the cross.

Thank God for the comfort and strength He gives to face every trial on this earth. Ask Him to give you the grace to look to Him for this strength each and every day.

Thank the Lord for the fact that every trial you face in life, is designed to strengthen you in your walk with God. Thank Him that His heart is to mature you in your walk and relationship with Him.

Thank the Lord that the yoke He calls us to bear is always kind and compassionate.

Chapter 11

Light Burdens

[30] ... “and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11)

Jesus ends His comments in this passage by telling all who came to Him that His burden is light. There are a number of points we need to make about these words of Jesus.

Burden

Notice first, in these words that Jesus speaks about a burden. The word “burden” in the Greek language was used to describe the goods that were carried by ship. It was also used by Jesus to describe the burden of the law and religious traditions:

[23:1] Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, [2] “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, [3] so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. [4] They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. (Matthew 23)

Jesus speaks about a people who had been burdened with massive loads of tradition and law that they weighed them

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down so much that they could no longer bear the weight. The picture is of individuals seeking to merit the favour of God through their personal efforts. No matter how much they did, it did not seem to be enough. God remained distant, and they had no assurance of His presence and favour.

The cross of Jesus Christ changed all this. There is no more striving to merit the favour of God. The work of Jesus on the cross opens the door for our forgiveness and cleansing. We can know the favour of God through what the Lord Jesus has done. Salvation is a gracious act of God through the death of the Lord Jesus, assuring all who come to Him of forgiveness and relationship with God. We do not have to merit our salvation. All we have to do is accept what Jesus Christ has done to achieve it. It is His merit on our behalf that assures our salvation. The burden to be good enough is gone. All the work has been done by Jesus on our behalf.

“My” Burden

Notice also that Jesus speaks of this burden as “my burden.” We should not see this only as a burden that He bears but also one that He gives to us. Jesus describes the charge He gives as “light.” We will examine this in a moment. If the burden defined as “my burden” is the burden Jesus bore, it can hardly be called light. He bore the sin of the world on His shoulders and suffered the most horrible death possible on that day. The burden Jesus bore for us was a weighty burden. Under its load, He would cry

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out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

When Jesus speaks about His burden, He is talking about the burden He places on us. It is vital that we understand that Jesus has a responsibility for us to bear. The rest Jesus promises in this passage is not freedom from a burden. Listen to His words in Matthew 16:

[24] Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
(Matthew 16)

Jesus is quite clear in Matthew 16 that if we are going to follow Him, we will have to take up our own cross. This means that all who are serious about being His disciples must be willing to lay down their lives for Him. This will mean suffering on His behalf. It will mean losing friends and family members. It will require a death to our own visions and plans. Full and total surrender is required of all who would belong to Jesus Christ. We are to pick up our cross if we want to follow Him.

Those who come to Jesus for rest must still bear a burden. The burden Jesus gives us comes in many forms. Paul describes in 2 Corinthians all the suffering he endured for the sake of the Lord. He concluded with these words:

[28] And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11)

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Paul felt the daily stress and concern for the churches. This was a weight he bore for the Lord. God had given him the responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of these churches. This burden was a burden of responsibility and concern.

We often see things through the eye-glasses of our spiritual gifts. The evangelist carries a deep burden for the souls of men and women who do not know the Lord. Those with gifts of mercy feel deep compassion toward those in need or those who have been mistreated. The teacher feels responsible for proclaimed and defend the truth. The pastor has a burden for the spiritual welfare of his people. As long as we have a ministry for the Lord, we will have a weight on our hearts to carry out what God has given us to do. This is a burden of responsibility and concern we have received from the Lord.

The burdens the Lord gives us must be embraced. We must open our hearts to these burdens because we are accountable to God for them. Consider the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25 about the master who went away on a journey and left money to his servants. When he returned, he required an accounting from his servants for how they used the money he had left them. The man who had received five talents returned them with five more. The man who had two did the same. The servant to whom only one talent was given, however, did not invest it or make any interest on it. Consider the words of the master to that servant:

[26] But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? [27] Then

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you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. [28] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. (Matthew 25)

The master anticipated a return on what he gave his servants. The first two took on this burden and worked with what the master had given them. The last servant, however, put his talent aside and did not burden himself with trying to invest it or earn more money for his master. The result was that the master became angry with him and took away what he had given him and gave it to someone who would be responsible for it.

The burden Jesus gives is the privilege of taking up our cross in absolute commitment to Him and His purpose. It is also a burden of service. With the gifts He imparts to each believer, comes the burden of responsibility. We must accept these gifts and charges and make it our purpose to invest what He has given us into the lives of those He sends our way. The rest Jesus promises is not a release from our responsibility or commitment to Him. In these matters, we must be devoted until the day we die.

A Light Burden

This brings us to the second part of Jesus' statement in verse 30. He tells us that the burden He gives is light. The word light implies that He gives us is easy to bear. In other words, it is not beyond our ability to endure.

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There is a world of difference between what we think we can bear and what the Lord knows we can bear. Listen to the discussion between the Lord God and the prophet Jeremiah:

[6] Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." [7] But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. [8] Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." [9] Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. [10] See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

(Jeremiah 1)

You can almost hear Jeremiah say, "Lord, this is a burden that is too big for me as a young man. I could never carry the weight of this responsibility." God did not ease the burden but instead promised that He would give Him the words to speak and deliver Him from his enemies. God was not interested in Jeremiah sitting back and only doing what he could do in his flesh. God wanted to stretch him and move him beyond his human ability to something he could only do in the strength and power of God.

When the people of Jeremiah's own hometown wanted to kill him, the prophet complained to the Lord about the burden of persecution he bore. Listen to the response of the Lord to Jeremiah that day:

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[5] "If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? (Jeremiah 12)

God had even greater plans for Jeremiah. At the time, the prophet was struggling to run with men. God wanted him to run with horses. Jeremiah felt overwhelmed in a safe place. God wanted to take him into the thicket. God wanted to develop Jeremiah's character and confidence in Him. His purpose was to stretch and use him in more significant ways. While Jeremiah felt the Lord expanding Him, it was not more than he could handle. God was coaching and training Jeremiah for the competition that was before him. Before giving him a bigger burden to bear God equipping him in smaller things. Only when he was ready would God place that burden on his shoulders and send him out.

God knows what we can handle and will not give us more than we can endure. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said:

[13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10)

God will not let us be tempted beyond our ability. He watches out for us and protects us. He will always give us the ability to endure or overcome what comes our way.

What we need to understand is that God has two purposes in mind for us. The first purpose is that we will grow in

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strength, fellowship and perseverance. The second purpose is that we will not have a burden that is too much for us to bear. These two principles walk hand in hand. Light burdens do not mean not burdens at all. Light burdens do not mean that life will always be easy. A light burden is one we can bear in the grace of God. It may involve loss or great sacrifice, but it is not more than we can handle in His strength. He will always “provide a way of escape” so that we can endure it.

While God will not let us be overwhelmed, He does want us to bear a burden. That burden is specially designed for us. It is a burden that will enable us to grow in strength and fellowship with Him. It is also a burden that will bless God’s people as we step out in faith and obedience.

Many years ago, now, the Lord put a burden on my heart for some young mothers who were not coming to church. I felt God had called me to teach the word, and I needed to reach them with it. I printed just a few copies of the study I was going on the book of Jonah and offered it to them. As simple as that step appeared to be, it was not an easy step for me. I wrote those books in French, a language I had to learn to minister in that area. I felt embarrassed to offer what I had written to people who spoke the language much better than I could ever speak it. I felt that God was asking me to take this step, however, and He gave me the courage to take it. That was the beginning of the writing ministry for me.

A few years passed by, and I was in a large Canadian city when I felt the leading of the Lord to drop in to see the Canadian director of an overseas mission. I showed him the material I had been writing and told him that if he felt

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the books could be of use in the ministry of his mission, I would trust the Lord for provision to ship books to any address he gave. That was the beginning of the distribution ministry.

The distribution ministry would begin to grow without my help. People heard about the books and started to send me requests. I had to trust the Lord for hundreds of dollars to get this material out. My faith was being stretched as the burden of responsibility increased. Soon the need was no longer for hundreds of dollars but for thousands.

As time went on, I began to receive requests for the translation of books. The Lord increased the ministry burden and challenged me to take yet another step of faith that would require tens of thousands of dollars each year. With each new responsibility, the Lord added to the burden. I needed more provision and wisdom. I also required greater boldness to step out in faith.

I have found that this weight of responsibility continues to grow. As I write, I have requests for thousands of books on my desk. To meet these requests now requires hundreds of thousands of dollars. Is this burden easy? It requires a lot of wisdom, discernment, faith and patience. It always stretches me in my faith. I am still learning to trust God for provision. I still need to trust Him for wisdom to know what He would have me do. The burden has grown. I carry the responsibility for more people. I have grown in the use of my gifts, but I find that with each weigh that is put on me, there is a need for even greater trust and confidence in God. God has not placed this responsibility on me to destroy me but to strengthen me in my relationship with

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Him and my fruitfulness for Him. As I look back over the years, I have seen His provision, direction and blessing in wonderful ways. I would not be able to bear this burden alone, but I don't have to. He who called Jeremiah to speak gave him the words to speak. He who calls me to write gives me the words to write. He who calls me to provide material to believers around the world also provides the means by which this can take place. I am simply to be faithful to what He is asking me to do. He will carry the weight if I am committed to His call.

As the Lord moved Paul from one place to another and the burden for the lost increased, the apostle came to the conclusion that nothing was impossible if God was in it:

*[13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
(Philippians 4)*

When trials and persecutions were hurled at him, he could say with confidence:

*[37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us. (Romans 8)*

Every responsibility and every pain we bear is carefully measured by God and designed to strengthen and equip us for higher service. His burden is not beyond us. It will not destroy us. On the contrary, it will only give us more courage and strength for the greater things He has in store.

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For Consideration:

Does rest for our souls mean that we will have no more burdens? Explain.

How has the cross of Jesus brought rest for our souls and eased the burden of sin and measuring up to God's standard?

What is the difference between the burdens God gives and the burdens we take on ourselves?

What burdens has God given you? Think of this in regard to the burdens of responsibility and passions He has put on your heart?

How has God used the things you faced in life to strengthen and equip you for more effective service?

Have you been faithful in carrying the burden of responsibility God has given you?

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For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He will never give us more than we can handle in His strength and wisdom.

Ask the Lord to show you the burden He has placed on your heart and life. Ask Him to give you the strength to step out in these responsibilities for His sake.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the great lessons He has taught you through the things you have faced in life. Thank Him for how those circumstances better equipped you for service.

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement.

F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

These books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into several languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith-based ministry, and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of

believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books? For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at www.lighttomypath.ca