

*Matt. 11:28-30 — Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

**Come Unto Me** – this MUST be the first step if we're ever to understand and be in the depth of relationship with Jesus that He, and we, desire. Notice that His invitation is without any qualification – ALL ARE WELCOME. And notice He doesn't say, Come unto my religion, or My self-help book, or my Christian Book Store, or my pastor so-and-so or father such-and-such. It's us. Going to Him. Period.

**All you who labor and are heavy laden** – This qualifies the entirety of the human race. We all labor, and most of us are laden with the cares, fears, and difficulty of this life.

In both our practical, flesh-bound life and the eternal, spiritual life we labor. In the flesh-bound life we work jobs, we work at home, we work at church, we work a lot – we work in and at so many things. In our world today, relationship dynamics and their complexities and foibles are so often a drain to our minds, souls, and hearts. With the advent and trend toward multiple, simultaneous points of active contact, it can easily overwhelm us. It is often wearisome and can leave us feeling exhausted, just like working a rock quarry with a sledgehammer would leave our bodies feeling exhausted. Similarly, our spiritual lives can seem like hard work, especially when we take the perspective that our spiritual well-being is up to us. We fight temptation, we war against the intrusive attacks of the enemy, we fight battles in our minds and hearts. We pray, sometimes fervently, for many things, and are spiritually deflated when something other than our expected answers to prayer don't come the way we'd envisioned.

We are so often heavy laden with the cares, fears, worries, and difficulties of this life. Jesus has a LOT to say about that, most specifically in the sermon on the mount, because He understands our tendencies toward horizontal thinking. It is so very easy to get distracted and wrapped up in these and other burdens. We tend toward immediate reaction and follow down paths of thought and action that we were never meant to travel. Along that journey, if we're mindful of our faith and spirit, we may hear the voice of the Spirit prompting us to stop, to enter God's presence for wisdom and understanding and proper thought and action. But not as often as we should. Somewhere in that maligned venture we'll probably multiply our difficulties with uninformed, humanistic actions and thoughts. We'll probably also encounter guilt too, if we happen to notice any aspect of our spiritual reality. We find ourselves weighted down with the cares of this world and life, and at times it feels like we're lugging around a bag of bricks on our backs.

This was never, ever, God's intention for His most prized creation.

***And I will give you rest*** – there's the complete solution. By coming to the feet of Jesus Christ, weary and burdened, he promises us an exchange. You give me all of that burden, pain, worry, fear, weariness of frame and soul. You lay it all down before me – I mean ALL OF IT – and I will give you rest. Ah, rest! Something we ALL crave, we all desire, we all need. The price of this rest is our willingness to give over our burdens. Sounds like an inequitable transaction to me. But this is Jesus. He is the master of inequitable exchange. He gives us rest in exchange for our mess. He gives us forgiveness for our sinfulness. He gives us adoption for our estrangement. He gives us eternal life for our eternal hostility toward God. Remember, the only requirement He gives us is that we come to Him. That is the absolute first step. Even faith in Him isn't the first step. That can only happen after coming to Him. And faith comes in this very transaction. So often people who come to Christ find their first experience in faith through this very transaction. His call is profoundly simple. Everything else will proceed from that place. Don't miss the importance of this.

***Take My Yoke Upon You*** – In our modern society today we will miss the significance of this statement, both literally and metaphorically.

A-HA!!! I KNEW there was more to it! Just got rid of a burden, and now there's a yoke around my neck!! Well, yes, and that yoke is one not of burden, but of connection. Moreover it is a yoke designed by the one who offers us the rest. Moreover, it is the object by which we are connected to the liberator, not the burden-giver. Finally, it is the means by which we will learn and accomplish everything in life from this point on.

In agrarian terms, the yoke served a dual purpose: first, it allows a single farmer equilateral control of two or more animals, and second, to provide a training apparatus whereby an animal of training and experience would be connected to one needing that training and experience. Early in that process, the new animal will rebel against the control of the yoke, only to experience difficulty and pain. The demeanor of the trained animal will keep steady and determined during such outbursts, and this demeanor will eventually transfer to the new animal. In time, the workload becomes very minimal when both animals are moving in concert with each other – even to the point that they aren't exerting any more energy that they would without a task. Finally, the farmer benefits because the animals are able to accomplish all that is necessary without difficulty. Yet even with the best trained animals, the yoke is still necessary, because it keeps those experienced animals in perfect sync, allowing the Farmer to do what is necessary to maximize their efforts.

So, Jesus comes to us with a custom-made yoke that will indeed fit us perfectly. IF we're willing to take it on, it may feel like it doesn't fit right, only because we're used to being wild and independent, and we know where that eventually leads us. So it may rub us here or chafe us there, but that's because of newness. As we learn our Lord's stride length and style, these initial discomforts cease. Then there's our rebellion against the control of the yoke. We push ahead, lag behind, drift to the left or right, or just stand still, all the while complaining how 'hard it is to have faith', when in essence we're rebelling against faith. We're no longer in control, and we're no longer successfully moving in sync with our perceptions, distortions, and fleshly-influenced decisions, and it's creating havoc within us. But if that yoke is firmly fastened, all the old methods are failing. We whine and cry that it's too hard, that we don't have enough faith, that God wants more than we can do – just like the unruly farm animal would if it could speak. Finally, with that yoke in place, we come to the next part of the verse

***And Learn From Me*** – We call the restriction of the yoke control, where it's actually reshaping, rehabilitating, and relearning how to live in a different way. It's learning. And any of us who went to school found out that learning does two things. First, it influences our own perception of self and the world around us, and it is infinitely easier if we submit to the process. The two-year-old that refuses to learn that hitting is bad will suffer not only the repercussions of that choice, but will hard to teach in myriad ways in life. The twenty-year-old who refuses to learn from their mistakes of their teens will be bound to repeat, even augment them time and again in life. BUT – the person who willingly adorns the yoke of Christ, though difficult at first, will also submit to learning from Him. That is the goal of the yoke – to train us with His God-level wisdom, understanding, and power. We can fight it all we want, and it'll only take longer.

But who would you ever want on the other side of that yoke besides Jesus? The one who is the creator, sustainer, and guarantor of eternal life is willing to walk, step by belabored step, alongside wild mustangs like us!! This is what he lives for – literally!!!! And who would EVER be more qualified than Jesus, having both the eternal divine nature and having lived a completely physical existence? Anyone else come to mind that would be better suited than Jesus Christ? Well, not in the context of the next portion of this verse . . .

***For I am gentle and lowly in heart*** – It's one thing to have a learned professor, or successful professional as our mentor. When it comes to the mentor-protégée relationship, we want the absolute best mentor possible, to guarantee our own success. Wouldn't a powerful, domineering professional be the best to retrain and reshape us? How are Jesus' attributes be in any way desirable? Well, let's return to that analogy of the animal yoke as a training tool between one that's experienced and a wild one. Think of the pain, and suffering, and difficulty, and failure that would ensue if an overbearing, reactionary, and powerful animal were the mentor in that scenario! Chances are, and history has proven, that the teaching animal MUST be gentle. Both people and animals have died when this attribute is ignored. The animal being trained will fight, rebel, and adopt a hatred toward the training animal that is incurable. It will never be able to fulfill its destiny, and it will never be able to fulfill its potential. Usually they would end up on a dinner table. Furthermore, the word lowly here refers to humility – a willingness to highlight the accomplishments of others before self, and the character to promote the abilities of others, knowing the positive results which that has for everyone. The team of animals in this scenario is guided with care and patience, taught by loving experience, and ultimately the team prospers because the mentor will highlight and augment the attributes of the protégée over itself. The mere fact that the mentor has been chosen because of these attributes is his greatest reward – he is gentle and lowly, and therefore has no insecurities.

Wow. So much about this yoke thing!! Where is all this going?

***And you will find rest for your souls*** – there it is, the El Dorado of our quest. But what is rest for our souls? How would YOU describe it? My go-to for this is ALWAYS Psalm 103 – the genuine description of a rested and restful soul, from the owner of a soul who has been yoked to the Father for years. More specifically, verses 8-14, which so clearly describe what gives us the basis for this, ‘rest for our souls:’

*The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.*

*He will not always strive with us,  
Nor will He keep His anger forever.*

*He has not dealt with us according to our sins,  
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.*

*For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;*

*As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

*As a father pities his children,  
So the Lord pities those who fear Him.*

*For He knows our frame;  
He remembers that we are dust.*

Take a moment to read that with thoughtful consideration. If God leads with mercy and patient grace; if He is willing to set aside His fully legal right to be angry with us; if He is willing to mitigate the penalties of our sins; if this enormous, immeasurable mercy completely removes our sins from us; if his heart of love and compassion toward us is based on His intimate knowledge of our frailties – should that not give us rest in our souls? Well, Jesus is the embodiment of these and myriad other truths of God’s love and favor toward us. And according to Him, the process of taking on this yoke and learning from Him will be our learning, our shaping, our transforming, resulting in the greatest desire of man’s heart – rest for our souls. But wait, there’s more . . .

***For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*** – In this beautiful analogy of being yoked, paired with Jesus Christ, where we are put in tandem with the loving, humble, and gentle mentorship of the Savior of the world, we find the answer to what has compelled us to Him in the first place. The burdens of this life apart from Him steal our very lives from us. They are too great for us to bear over the long haul. We become deceived into thinking that’s just the way it is, that there’s no solution to life’s increasing burdens, and that the panacea of rest is a mental myth. BUT – when we respond to Jesus’ call, and obediently take on that custom-made yoke, learning to walk and live in stride with Him – it is then that we discover an amazing truth. Yoked to Jesus, we find out that life and its work become profoundly easier. Under His mentorship we are given the fantastic experience of living with supernatural power under our wings, lifting us and allowing us to glide, rather than trudge, through life. Not only is Jesus’ mentoring instructive, it is also powerful, even to the point where at times we find HE is bearing ALL of the burden alongside us, and all we’re required to do is keep in step with Him. His yoke is not the tool of restriction and bondage we presumed at the beginning of things, but rather it is a frame of freedom and empowerment. His yoke is easy, and as with so many of the transactional elements of relationship with Jesus, we are the beneficiaries.

Furthermore, the “burden” of Christ, the load put on us is, in reality, an oxymoron. When He says the burden is light, it means that our part of the relationship with Him is remaining yoked to Him. It means that it is our responsibility to revisit the first part of these verses again and again, to constantly be in a place of releasing this world’s accrued burdens to Him in that unequal transaction we talked about. It means that we renew our covenant with Him, not because it has become null & void, but because we need to continually be in a state of mental & spiritual renewal. Our “burden” in this sense, then, is remaining in Jesus Christ. That’s it. At times it may seem hard, but that’s usually because we’ve returned to some broken method of relationship we had before being yoked to Him. The yoke is easy, not because of us, but because of Him. The burden is light, not through our efforts, but through His.

**Conclusion** – The importance of this teaching and its understanding CANNOT be overstated. It is fundamentally vital to everything else that has to do with our relationship with God. If we just flirt with these verses and thoughts, if we just leave here today and move back into our life status quo, we might as well reckon ourselves spiritually paralyzed and sit on the curb of the street called spirituality. To pursue growth in God and Christ without this inequitable exchange and being yoked to Jesus means that we will never understand His lordship, and we will be so distracted by our burdens and work that we’ll never experience the freedom that God has designed for us. Our minds and spirits will remain imprisoned in the brokenness of bondage, and our ability to be a useful part of God’s work on earth will be virtually impossible. Please, by the mercy and urgency of the Holy Spirit, go home and think through, read through, pray through these verses. Come to Jesus for the rest and rejuvenation that He promises. Accept that exchange and receive His yoke upon you. LET HIM TEACH YOU, and learn from Him, the best of the best mentors possible. Let your soul bask in the eternal rest He provides, and remember as we begin every day, that HIS yoke is easy, His burden isn’t really a burden, and that His greatest desire is to walk alongside us in constant companionship with us.