

Find Your True Rest in Christ
Matthew 11:28-30
Sermon Sunday, December 1st, 2024
By Ryan Perry

Scripture:

Matthew 11:28–30

[28] Come to me, all 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."

Let's Pray

Introduction:

According to the mental health website [spill.com](https://www.spill.com), in 2020, about 43% of people surveyed, from 100 different countries, were experiencing workplace burnout. In that same survey, they found that about 2/3rds of Americans say that they have experienced burnout at some point in their lives.

When we get away from the workplace, we find that a survey done just this year, by the American Psychiatric Association, found that worry, stress, and anxiousness are on the rise in our country.

That 43% of adults say that they are more anxious today, than they were a year ago. This is up from 37% in 2023. And the top issues that are causing this stress and anxiety include:

- The economy
- Elections (Thankfully that is past)
- Gun Violence
- Keeping their families safe
- Identity Theft
- Health issues
- Paying bills and expenses
- The opioid epidemic
- Climate change
- The impact of emerging technologies on day to day life (Both in the workplace and in the home)

Speaking of technology, with the rise of smart devices, and other technologies that constantly keep our eyes on screens, we are now even seeing a new kind of burnout emerging called digital burnout. Where people are experiencing mental fatigue, which includes brain fog and the inability to concentrate, and emotional exhaustion, which includes things like irritability, anxiety, and depression. **All of which are related to screens.**

But these kinds of stresses and burnout are not simply problems that overworked and overwhelmed adults deal with.

Even among teens, a 2023 survey found that 27% of teenagers said they were feeling burnt out. And according to a 2023 survey done by the Department of Health and Human Services about 40% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness.

All of this has led to a mental health industry that was worth around \$83 billion in 2023 and is expected to grow to \$132 billion by 2032.

Now, I'm not pointing that out because I have anything against the mental health industry. I have benefited greatly from counseling in my life so I believe that it can be very helpful and effective in people's lives.

Rather, I am trying to paint a picture that helps us to recognize that we live in a world, and in a country, where high levels of stress and burnout are just becoming the norm, and we don't seem to have any real good solutions to these problems.

On the one hand we might conclude that we need more vacations:

But in the U.S. alone in 2023, Americans spent roughly \$1.5 trillion travel, leisure, and outdoor recreation alone. So I'm not convinced that vacations are the answer.

On the other hand, we might conclude that we need more relaxation or down time.

But according to the Bureau of Labor, in 2023, the average American reported having about 5 hours of leisure or down time a day.

Now, if you are a parent of young ones in here or even a parent of teens who need to be driven everywhere, I realize that you hear 5 hours and think, ***"Wow, that's not me, but 5 hours would be nice."*** And you are right, this number is just an average of all ages, and it does not account for everyone's life circumstances.

However, if 5 hours is the average for leisure time, and we are still dealing with such high rates of burnout and stress then that can't be our answer to these problems either.

And to make sure I cover all my basis, money isn't the answer either, because as Americans, our standard of living is ranked in the top ten in the world.

So the solution to the rampant burnout, stress, exhaustion, depression, and anxiety that seems to be plaguing our culture isn't more vacations, more leisure time, or more money.

Because the truth is that our problem isn't simply our working conditions, our technology use, health issues, family issues, or the economy. **It's not merely a problem related to our circumstances.**

Our problem is deeper than that. It's a worship problem. We have been led to believe that the real rest and fulfilment that Jesus provides can somehow be found apart from Him.

If we make enough money, if we have enough vacations, if we get enough me time, if we didn't have family strife, or health issues, or bills. If our boss wasn't such a tyrant, if the job demands weren't so taxing, if our kids were more well behaved, if school wasn't so hard, then we could really rest, be less stressed, and all of the burnout, anxiety, and depression would go away.

But when we look to the Bible and what Jesus says about rest, it's interesting that he has very little to say about our circumstances. Instead, Jesus says that real rest can only be found in him.

And as we look at Matthew 11:28-30 this morning, there are three main things Jesus has to say about resting in him.

- 1. We find rest by believing in Jesus (V. 28)**
- 2. We find rest by following Jesus (V. 29)**
- 3. We find rest as we receive gladness from Jesus (V. 30)**

Now I will say that I do believe physical rest is important. As long as we are in the flesh we have a need, at times, to rest our bodies and minds. We need proper sleep, nutrition, and exercise, and it is good and right to Sabbath (rest).

However, a right view and application of physical rest can only happen when we first understand how Jesus has called us to find rest for our weary souls in him.

So let's begin by looking at the first thing that Jesus says to us about finding rest in him.

- 1. We find rest by believing in Jesus (V. 28)**

Matthew 11:28

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

As we look at the word "Come" we need to see that Jesus often connects it with the word "believe." As he says in John 7:37-38:

*[37] On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him **come to me** and drink. [38] Whoever **believes in me**, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*

Or in John 6:35 Jesus says:

*[35] ... "I am the bread of life; whoever **comes** to me shall not hunger, and whoever **believes in me** shall never thirst.*

So when Jesus invites people to come him, he is inviting them to believe in him. **But who is Jesus calling to come and believe?**

He is calling those who labor and are heavy laden. Or as the NIV translates it *"all you who are weary and burdened."*

Jesus is calling people who are tired, exhausted, burdened, and burnt out.

In this context it is Jews who are being burdened by the Pharisee's and religious leaders. Because these religious leaders are continually adding laws to God's law and are telling people that they need to obey them perfectly in order to be saved.

Jesus referred to these religious leaders in Matthew 23:2-4 when he said:

[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.

They were burdening people with rules about things like tithing, the Sabbath, and eating food, that were made up rules that God never created. **And they were making these rules necessary for salvation.**

They were burning people out because they were making salvation a human activity, instead of a divine act of God.

But instead of calling people to keep a bunch of rules in order to be saved, Jesus is calling them (and us) to come and believe in him.

To give up on the impossible task of trying to save ourselves, and instead to believe that he is the one and only one who can give us life and make us right with God. **To come to him with our cares, anxieties, stresses, and with our feelings of exhaustion and hopelessness because he is the only one who can give us the present and eternal rest that we so badly desire and need.**

Application:

Whether you realize it or not there is a lot going on in the lives of God's people here at LEFC. We have those who are dealing with the loss of a loved one. Those who are doing the hard work of caring care for aging parents. People who are dealing with serious health struggles.

Families who are looking at a major job change and relocation in the next 6 months. Couples who are focused on the exciting yet challenging adventure of marriage in the next year. Young families who are doing the good, yet exhausting, work of raising little ones on very little sleep. And even for our students in here I know that many of you are trying to figure out how to navigate the busyness of school, sports, youth group, and jobs.

Not to mention the fact that we have now entered a very busy holiday season. And we as a church are still in the process of trying to figure out what life after this transition looks like.

There are a lot of cares, stresses, and anxieties that exist in this room, and some of you may be experiencing certain levels of burnout, exhaustion, and hopelessness.

But the remedy for stress and burnout isn't trying harder or having more margin for leisure and vacations.

Rather, it's coming to Jesus in faith. That we would cast all of our cares, worries, and stresses on him. And that we would believe that he is our God and Savior who has control of our future and our present. So that we can live and work as if the outcome of all situations is in God's hands. **That we can believe that he will do what is good and best.**

And that our confidence will be not in what happens today, but what Jesus has in store for us in an eternity with him. Look with me at the following verses:

1 Peter 5:6-7

[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.

Psalm 31:15

[15] My times (days) are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

Romans 8:28-30

[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This is where real and lasting rest begins. Believing in Jesus, casting our cares on Jesus, trusting Jesus in all situations, and living as if Jesus will bring about his best for us, as we wait for the day of glorification, when we are with him forever.

Now this doesn't necessarily mean he will perfectly fix all of our situations. In fact, our burdens in this life could get heavier at times. It also doesn't necessarily mean he will always give us physical rest, though that's important at times.

Instead, Jesus is saying, in spite of your circumstances, look to me and put your full hope in me. When you do this, I will take the weight of your burdens off of your soul, and I will give you an inner peace (shalom) and inner rest, both in the present and forever.

But a belief in Jesus that provides that kind of rest is more than just thinking about Jesus. If mere intellectual belief could provide rest, I think we would all be perfectly at peace with Jesus right now, wouldn't we?

But the word "belief or believe" in the Bible means something more than that. It means that we are to come and follow Jesus. Which leads to our 2nd point for this morning.

2. We find rest by following Jesus (V. 29)

Matthew 11:29

[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.

As I mentioned in the first point, this idea of “come” is closely connected with the word “believe.” **But Jesus doesn’t mean for us to have a mere intellectual belief in him.**

Instead, according to verse 29 our belief and trust in him should cause us to **become learners, servants, and followers of Christ.**

The term “yoke” commonly refers to a bar that is put across cattle for carrying or plowing heavy loads. It is in one sense a heavy burden placed upon these cows. **But in this verse Jesus is using it to refer to his teaching and his way of life, which is a life of servanthood.**

In fact, Paul uses the word “yoke” in the same way in Galatians 5:1, but uses it negatively to refer to being a servant or slave of the law. As he writes:

*[1] For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, **and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (the law).***

But when Jesus says, “*take my yoke upon you,*” he is not calling us to a lifeless and dead obedience to some law that can’t save us.

Instead, the yoke that we take upon ourselves when we believe in Christ is a yoke of freedom.

For Galatians 5:1 also says: “*For freedom Christ has set us free...*”

We are free from the requirements of the law, we are free from the bondage of sin, and we are free from the weight of the burdens that once felt crushing to our souls.

But that doesn’t mean that we are free to do whatever we want, and it surely isn’t a license to be lazy. That’s not the purpose of our freedom and that doesn’t truly bring rest to our souls.

Rather, we are now free to live for and serve Christ. To pour out our lives in service to him so that he would be made to look great.

As Jesus says to the disciple’s in Matthew 10:37-39:

*[37] Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. [38] And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. [39] **Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.***

The purpose of our freedom in Christ is that we would take his “yoke or teaching” upon ourselves and become his disciples. This involves pouring our lives out in service to the one who humbly and willingly gave his life for us.

However, it isn’t hard, joyless service to an overbearing boss or slave driver. But instead, it is a joy-filled, life giving, and rest giving work that we do in response to our God, our Savior, our Master, and Friend who is “gentle and lowly of heart.”

Yet, I know that our immediate response is to try and lessen what Jesus saying, or come up with reasons why we need some sort of rest, other than what Jesus is offering.

We say things like:

“Yeah, well Jesus was using extreme language to make a point. But he doesn’t really want us to follow him like that today.”

“I get that we are supposed to pour our lives out for Jesus, but I’m an introvert so I need time to rest and recharge.”

Or we talk wrongly about **balance** and say:

“Yes, we need to serve Jesus, but we’ve got to be careful that we don’t give too much, because we need take care of ourselves.... **we need balance.**”

But this isn’t the way Jesus or any of the Bible writers ever talked about following him. Rather, they always use the language of losing your life, pouring yourself out, or sacrifice to talk about what it means to be a servant of Christ.

As Jesus said in Luke 14:27:

[27] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Or as Paul wrote in Romans 12:1:

[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Now, yes, we do need to rest, and we do need to take care of ourselves. I don’t want you to hear me saying that you shouldn’t do that. Nor, do I want you to hear me telling you that you now need to fill your schedule to the max.

Instead, I think that Jesus is trying to reorient hearts, lives, activities, and routines around a new center. That center being what makes him look great and supremely valuable.

As we have already seen and learned in Philippians: **Our purpose is to be citizens of heaven who reflect the greatness of Christ.**

Or similarly, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31:

[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

This means that everything we do is meant to have the glory of God and the greatness of Christ at the center of it.

And when Christ becomes the center and motivation for all that we do, we will make choices on how to spend our time, energy, and our resources for the purpose of honoring God, and making Jesus look like our greatest treasure.

This is “the yoke, the teaching, the burden” that Jesus says will bring “rest to our weary souls.”

Application:

At our previous church in the Cleveland, Ohio area, we used to do a kids Christmas musical every year. And in 2013, the women who had done them for years decided to take a step back from them which meant that either someone in the congregation would need to fill her shoes or it just wouldn't happen.

Or so I thought.

As it happened, no one in the congregation stepped up. And instead of letting it go for that year, the Senior Pastor told me that I had to do it. Now, I have to admit, as much as I enjoy little kids, I wanted nothing to do with this musical. **So, you can imagine, I was pretty upset and had all sorts of excuses for why I shouldn't have to do it.**

"This isn't my gifting, this isn't what I was hired for, I don't have the time to do this, or if you want it so badly why don't you do it." These were just a few of the many excuses and angry thoughts that ran through my head and ultimately came out of my mouth.

Now, I would love to tell you that God changed my heart as I did this musical, or that God gave me so much joy in the process that the extra time and effort that I put in didn't bother me. But that would be a lie.

I was inwardly kicking and screaming through the whole process because I felt overworked, overwhelmed, stressed out, and ultimately underappreciated for the work I was doing.

But God in his goodness, years later, has helped me to see the error of my ways. He showed me that the work itself wasn't the issue, the issue was my heart.

Because I had made my desire for ease, comfort, less work, and appreciation my god. Somewhere along the way, within my ministry I lost track of Jesus as my central treasure and motivation.

So instead of taking on the "yoke" of servanthood, I took on the "yoke" of self-centeredness. This led to anger, resentment, exhaustion, and **it led to a restless and tired soul.**

Now, I truly understand that every person in this room has a lot going on in their lives. Daily challenges and struggles that are stressful, wearisome, and have the potential to bring us to a place of exhaustion and burnout.

However, if they are leading us to anger, resentment, and are putting within us a desire to give up or check out, then we may have to come to grips with the fact that we have a worship problem. **That we may have made something besides Christ, and a life well lived for him the object of our rest.**

So my encouragement to each one of us this morning is to come back to Jesus as the center of our motivations and affections.

That we would believe in him, treasure him, give him our burdens, learn from him, and pour our lives out in service to him.

That we would take on the “yoke” of servanthood. Because then, and only then, will we find real and lasting rest for our weary souls.

Does this mean that being a servant of Christ will always be easy? No, it doesn't. Does it mean that we will have to continually fight against our fleshly desires for worldly ease and comfort? Yes, it does.

But Jesus assures us that when we take on his “yoke and burden,” which is a life of Christ-exalting servanthood, that it is something that we will want to bear. For he says that his yoke and his burden will not only give us rest, but will produce gladness and joy.

3. We find rest as we receive gladness from Jesus (V. 30)

Matthew 11:30

[30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

In contrast to the many legalistic burdens that the religious leaders would impose on people Jesus is now giving his disciples relief by saying that his yoke, his burden, his commands, his way of life are **easy and light**.

And these words “easy” and “light” are better summed up as good, pleasant, and sweet.

This means that, living for Christ, taking his yoke, and pouring ourselves out in service to him is good, pleasant, sweet, joyful, and gladdening to our souls.

We also see this same idea in John 15:10-11 when Jesus says:

*[10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. [11] These things I have spoken to you, **that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.***

When we make Jesus our treasure, our motivation, and we follow him, he says that what awaits us is a full and lasting joy.

Do we believe this? Do we believe that Jesus can give us the real and joyful rest that our souls so badly need?

If you do, then take his yoke and his burden, and pour out your life for his purposes. Because nothing else will satisfy you, nothing else can give you life, and nothing else will give you the rest you so badly desire.

Now, maybe you're here this morning and this joyful rest is something you want, but you don't know how to get it.

I want to tell you that it starts with believing in Jesus. Believing, that he died on the cross to pay the penalty for all of your wrongdoing, that he is the only way to a forever life with God, and that he is the only remedy to the stress, anxiety, and unrest in your soul.

And once you put your trust in him, his call is to come and follow. To turn away from living for your own purposes and pleasures, and instead, to follow his commands and his ways.

To center your life on Jesus, and to spend every moment making him look great, in thought, word, and deed.

And when you do that his promise to you is that he will lead you, he will take care of you, he will take the crushing weight of your burdens, and will give you the present and forever joy-filled rest that you're looking for.

As Jesus said:

...and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Let's Pray.