

“Learn the Unforced Rhythms of Grace”

Matthew 11:28-30

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My former spiritual director’s favorite two scriptures are the Road to Emmaus and today’s scripture. Both are about journeying, highs and lows, peaks and valleys, twists and curves. Both go through dark times to mountaintop joy. Two weeks ago, we traveled on the Road to Emmaus as it was the theme for workcamp. I have been drawn to today’s scripture for eleven years. I sense God saying paying attention, discover the blessings, and live this scripture. I have learned an abundance from these words that have and are changing my life, transforming me and filling me with joyful love. God keeps bringing this scripture to my attention, so there is more for me to discover in these words. Today, I will be your tour guide as we explore what God is saying to you.

Matthew 11:28-30 NLT “Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

Jesus’ invitation is for everyone, yet is personal, specific for you. Jesus said, “Come to me all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens.” All people, everyone, struggles with something, all of us at times are exhausted. We all have seasons when everything goes wrong, seasons when we grieve losses, seasons when we are bombarded by negativity, seasons when our thoughts drudge up every past mistake and beat ourselves down into a sad funk, seasons when we struggle with disease, seasons of shattered dreams, seasons of hardships, seasons where we are overwhelmed by our emotions, seasons with so many decisions that we become paralyzed, seasons when we do not want to get out of bed. We all have seasons when we feel like Eeyore: drooping, weighed down, dark, lethargic, negative, anxious, fearful, burned out, with a heavy heart and dry soul.

Jesus is not intimidated or overwhelmed by these seasons, because Jesus came back to life after death. Jesus is not afraid of our brokenness, because Jesus will provide wholeness for all. Jesus is not daunted by our burdens, because Jesus will lift them from us. Jesus is not alarmed by our frail, sinful, vulnerability, because Jesus will invigorate, purify and fill us with abundant life. In the words of Audio Adrenaline, every time we get down God lifts us up.

Jesus invitation is also personal to you. Jesus knows all about you, every hair, every cell, every thought and feeling. Two weeks ago, I was in a terrible place. A series of crappy things happened to me and my family. My mind drudged up past mistakes, spiraling me into a gloomy place. I tried to shake it with positive thoughts, loving service, making a list of blessing, and cultivating gratitude. I was too deep to get out of the slump on my own. I couldn’t let it go, so God kept saying today’s scripture in my mind and sent three people to help me crawl out of the valley.

When Jesus hung on the cross, he embodied not only the sins of every person but also every disease, stress, fear, worry, uncertainty, failure, frustration, predicament, and dilemma. Jesus felt precisely what you feel. All this pain caused Jesus to moan, my God my God why have you forsaken me. God the Creator and God the Sustainer embraced Jesus, ripped off all those burdens and restored Jesus to glorious eternal life. Our Triune God is doing the same for you, for all. Jesus lifts the burden, overcomes the negativity, and provides a sanctuary from chaos. Jesus is offering you rest.

Jesus said, **“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”**

We are yoked, connected, one, with Jesus. We go through everything with Jesus. We are in partnership with Jesus through thick and thin. Together with Jesus we can bear the heaviest burden. We suffer together and celebrate together. Jesus is our friend who will never leave or forsake us. There is absolutely nothing that can ever separate us from Jesus.

In the Jewish tradition, the yoke represents the wisdom of the Torah, which is the first five books of the Old Testament. The yoke is a symbol for freedom from slavery to the delights of The Promised Land.

Being yoked to Jesus is a journey out of all that enslaves you to freedom. You and Jesus together, serving in tandem, a joint effort, are liberating the world, bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. On this journey of every growing freedom Jesus helps each of us bear our self-imposed burdens, our fears, worries, anxieties our self-contempt, our self-doubt. Jesus lifts from us what hurts us in ourselves. As we learn from Jesus, we discover true rest and are energized to help others with their burdens, to help others on their journey.

Yoked with Jesus we exchange our inherent weariness, overburdened soul and the notions that I need to become worthy, I need to be something to be lovely, I need to expend all this energy to be self-made to be a great person, to have a great friendship, to excel academically, to have a meaningful career and life-giving relationships. Yoked with Jesus one finds rest, as Jesus assures you that you are loved and cherished by God, that you are amazing, beautiful and wonderfully made. Yoked with Jesus we exchange the burdens of the world, money, fame, success, achievements, image, for Jesus’ burden to love and be joyful. Yoked with Jesus we exchange our weariness, frantic activity and condemning notions for abundant life, a purpose driven life of loving service and are drawn onward into peace, joy and love. Yoked to Jesus we exchange our attempts to project the image we think others want from us for gently being restored into the image of God. We journey from solitary effort to an ever-growing harmonious community of ever expanding joy and love. The exchange Jesus provides is revealed throughout his life and ministry. Jesus clothed himself with our humanity in order to clothe us with his divinity. Jesus’ yoke is love, unity, completeness, joy and everlasting abundant life. Jesus’ yoke is a journey from slavery to freedom with delight in the glories of the Promised Land.

Paul Tillich wrote, “The yoke of Jesus is easy in itself because it is above law, and replaces the roiling and laboring with rest in our souls. The yoke of religion and law presupposes all those splits and gaps in our souls which drive us to the attempt to overcome them. The yoke of Jesus is above those splits and gaps. It has overcome them whenever it appears and is received. It is not a new command, a new doctrine or new morals, but rather a new reality, a new being and a new power of transforming life.”

Hear now Jesus words from The Message translation. **Matthew 11:28-30 MSG “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”**

Are you burned out on religion? Jesus is clarifying the enormous difference between religion, that is what humanity thinks and says about God, and the actual nature of God. Jesus is contrasting the heavy burdens of the religious leaders with all their rules, judgements, hoops and hollow rituals with the gracious love of God that renews.

I hope I am not, and will never be, a religious person, rather a partner with Jesus. As a pastor, I frequent the thin ice of becoming religious for in trying to share about God and what God intends for us I am in danger of becoming religious. Religion defines God and puts God in a box. God is mystery, infinite in grandeur beyond our comprehension. Religion is certain about God's will for one's life. God is always giving abundantly beyond our dreams. Religion is rules. God is grace. Religion is fatiguing. God is renewing. Religion divides and categorizes. God unites and celebrates diversity. Religion seeks to control. God sets free. Religion is life draining. God is life giving. Religion uses people. God empowers people. Religion is sin focused. God is forgiveness focused. Religion produces despair. God produces hope. Religion creates chaos. God creates order. Religion is concerned about one's past. God is ecstatic about the glorious person you are becoming.

Jesus said, **“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”** Over the last ten years this has been the most nourishing sentence of scripture for me. **“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”** Life is a journey that is not instinctive, or determined in advance, or intuitive. We learn how to walk, learn how to live, learn how to forgive, learn how to serve, learn how to be nourished, learn how to be grateful, learn how to rejoice, learn how to love. Perhaps the primary purpose of life is learning to rejoice and love.

Unforced, I have spent a lot of my life forcing myself to be a certain way or forcing myself to do something. I regret that I force my ideas on others. Somewhere within me is a desire to be in control, to plan out my life, to be financial secure, to be prepared for every situation. It is a desire to live by force. How do you force yourself or others? How would your life change if you lived an unforced life? How can you learn to live unforced? When making decisions seek the unforced option, the one that gives you peace, joy and love. Beatrice Bruteau said, “I think most of the spiritual life is really a matter of relaxing—letting go, ceasing to cling, ceasing to insist on our own way, ceasing to tense ourselves up for this or against that.”

Rhythm, I once strived for balance. I have learned that balance is an unrealistic and unhealthy way to live. I have found balance for a few moments but then a variable changes and everything is unbalanced again. Balance and force are partners in contrast to unforced and rhythm. For those of you who are financially minded think of it like a bank account. There are seasons when you make more withdraws than deposits and vice a versa. However, you cannot only make withdraws. Learn the rhythm of life sleeping and awake, being alone, being with others, productive, restful, giving, receiving, knowing Christ, showing Christ, letting go, letting come and on and on. Learn the unforced rhythms, to dance.

Grace, forgiving self, forgiving others, loving freely and accepting love freely. Giving with no strings attached. Letting others give to you without feeling the need to give back or even say thank you. The rhythms of grace continually lead to greater wholeness, community peace, joy and love.

Over the last ten years when I am unsure, unsettled, burdened I hear a voice saying, **“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”** Sometimes right away, other times after days, a blessing emerges. Savor the sentence Jesus is saying to you, **“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace,”** and perhaps you will also recover your life, take a real rest and learn to live freely and lightly. **Learn the unforced of grace.**
Amen