

## QUESTION #23: “WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT FEELING DEPRESSED?” (Matthew 11:28-30)

10.27.19

### INTRODUCTION

Remember the “Carpenters” song from 1971 which said, “Rainy days and Mondays always get me down?” Well, what about past week, when Monday was a rainy day? Yikes, how am I supposed to feel about that?

The fact is, everybody every once in a while feels depressed — meaning they feel a little down, they got the blues, it’s a little dark inside. Usually not a particularly big deal. Things look better the next morning, the sun pops out, a song you hear picks you up, something makes you laugh, and the darkness goes away. Usually.

But what if it doesn’t? What if the darkness starts to do an impression of gum on your shoe? It seems to hang with you, day after day. That is maybe a bigger deal, and that’s what we’re going to look at today. Specifically, is this something the Bible addresses? What does the Bible have to say to help us in those times where it seems darker more often than it seems light? The Bible makes some huge claims of what it will provide for us. And YES, the Bible does contain a good number of very reassuring verses that are there for us — to provide comfort, and to remind us who it is who loves us and cares for us more and better than anybody. And we’ll begin with some of Christ’s most well-known, most comforting words:

### TEXT

***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:28-30.***

The Greek for the word “come” implies not only coming directly to him but also coming directly with him — suggesting much more than just a moment: not just standing with him but following him as well. With the phrase “all you” brings the clear invitation that everybody is included in these words; no one is not included — and then Jesus extends his invitation in a much more specific way: “all you who are weary and burdened. These words invite everybody to come to him honestly — not hiding their weariness, weakness or burdens, but to actually bring all those things with them. It is an incredibly open invitation to come “as we are,” because what burdens us, what makes us weary, is not defined or, even better, limited. Whatever wearies us, whatever burdens us, is invited to be brought to Jesus; in fact, he WANTS us to bring him these things. This makes us mindful of what the writer of Hebrews tells us, that, because we have a high priest in Jesus Christ who understands us and prays for us, one who has, as David put it, *[r]ecord[ed] my misery; list[ed] my tears on [his] scroll — David, Psalm 56:8a*, a high priest who can be (and I love how the King James expresses it) *touched with the feelings of our infirmities — Hebrews 4:15a*, we can ***come BOLDLY unto the throne of grace — Hebrews 4:15a, 16a***, we can come as we are — however messy that might be.

OK; moving on, the Greek word translated as “labor” implies work — hard, fatiguing toil — which also comes from the Greek words for “heavy” — grievously heavy — and “laden,” which tells us of actually being OVERburdened, overwhelmed and, curiously, struggling with, among other things, the weight of spiritual anxiety.

And what does Jesus offer? A commanding guarantee: “I will give you rest. This rest will happen if you come to me, if you follow me.” The Greek word for “rest” here suggests the

opportunity to take ease, to be refreshed. For people whose each and every moment each and every day was simply a struggle to survive, and to have to work so hard simply to get by, and the daily pressures that would have put on people, the thought of being able to have something so easy in their lives that it would bring the relief of being able to be refreshed was an amazing concept. Of course, what Jesus is offering is not a break from the physical demands of their lives but what he considered far more important: an opportunity to be put at ease, to be refreshed, in their spiritual lives. That was a fundamental that he was eager to get them to understand — God, through him, offered them a foundation for their lives that would make all other aspects of their life far easier to deal with.

And what was the key to that foundation? As contradictory as it sounds, his next words: “Take my yoke upon you.” Why would that be comforting, why would that make life better? The Greek word for “yoke” suggests a coupling, certainly something the people of that day would have seen every day with cattle being yoked together. Only what Jesus is asking them to do is to yoke themselves to him. This is not just this amazing teacher from Nazareth saying, “Come join with me.” This is this amazing teacher from Nazareth saying, “Come join yourselves TO me!” Wow! And in that coupling, that yoking together, they are invited to “learn” of him. Essentially Jesus is saying, “Come alongside of me. Watch me, listen to me, study me, observe me — up close and personal. That’s how you are going to see and learn what I have to offer you.”

He then goes on to describe the kind of person he is, the kind of individual to which they will be yoking themselves:

- 1) In the Greek, first he describes himself as “meek,” meaning gentle and humble.
- 2) Next in the Greek, he describes himself as “lowly in heart,” meaning lowly, humble and modest, but all of those characteristics as a reflection of his spiritual relationship with God.

As a result of that gentleness and humility, Jesus says that all those who respond to his invitation will find “rest for your souls.” The rest he is promising here is a deep, inner rest and quiet from occupation, oppression or torment. These words of promise would have had a great connection with that audience. Think about it: The vast majority of people in Christ’s time (much like all of us who would NOT be considered 1%ers today) worked extremely long, hard hours every day simply to survive. In addition, they were under the oppression of a foreign power, and tormented by what appeared to be the impossible demands of the God of their faith — at least as explained by their religious leaders. Where could they ever even hope to catch a break? Well, he’s standing right in front of them, offering these words of hope, comfort — and promise. They had never heard words like these before — words signifying a hope and a life that could make these moments of day-to-day existence so much better.

And the rest he is offering is so much better than a physical “take five” would be. He says that he is offering rest for our “souls.” What Jesus is saying that he is offering his rest to our minds, to our feelings — to our emotional well-being. And that rest is found in being coupled with him, in being yoked with him. Why? He says it himself: His yoke is “easy” and his burden is “light.” The Greek word for “easy” comes from a root that means to furnish what is easy, meaning that it is fit and good for any use, to meet any need. Christ’s yoke is going to contain nothing harsh, annoying or humiliating. It will always be for our benefit. This burden, always placed in context with relationship with Christ, will always be easy in contrast to the rigorous expectations of religion — particularly the religious expectations promoted by the Pharisees and others of Christ’s day. In that sense, the burdens carried within relationship with Jesus Christ will always be light.

## APPLICATION

These words of Christ remind us that the Bible is chock-full of verses that tell us that, in the midst of our struggles, our heartaches, our pain, we can place our trust, our confidence, in him. How about basking in the glow of verses that highlight these realities? And it all begins with the reality that . . .

**God is near to us:** *The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry; . . . The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all — David, Psalm 34:15, 17-19.*

**God is near to us because he loves us:**

- 1) *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with lovingkindness” — God speaking, Jeremiah 31:3b.*
- 2) *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:26.* Think for a moment: How much value, how much worth do you give yourself? It is one of the chief causes of depression, to think that, when he made us, somehow God created something that he had never done in all of eternity: he made junk. That is an incredibly powerful LIE. That’s why God’s words given to Jeremiah are so important: “everlasting love.” You have always been loved, even before you came to be. You are loved now. You will be loved forever. That is not a lie. That’s what God’s word says.

**Because God is near to us, he invites us to come to him:** *“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” — Moses, Deuteronomy 33:27.*

**Because God is near to us, we do not need to be afraid because he is faithful:**

- 1) *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God — Psalm 42:5.*
- 2) *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal — Isaiah 26:3-4.*

**Because God is near to us, we can bring all the things that worry us to him:**

- 1) *“You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light” — David, II Samuel 22:29.*
- 2) *Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken — David, Psalm 55:22.*
- 3) *Unless the Lord had given help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, “My foot is slipping,” your unfailing love, Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy — Psalm 94:17-19.*
- 4) *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 4:6-7.*
- 5) *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you — I Peter 5:7.*

**Because God is near to us, he will guide us in his direction:**

1) *He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me — David, Psalm 23:3b-4a.*

Now what is implied in these famous words of David is the idea that David's trust allows God to have "free rein" in the direction of his life; that means that God defines what is the right path for David, not David. And these words actually tell us that part of God's "right path" for "his name's sake" will likely be a dark valley — maybe even the darkest valley we could imagine. But if he is our guide, the moments where his right path goes doesn't matter. Remember "The Wizard Of Oz?" The yellow brick road, which eventually brought them to their desired destination of the Emerald City, also took them through a very dark forest — "lions and tigers and bears (oh my)." The fact is, God can see and desire an outcome that we don't have the first clue about

2) *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight — Solomon, Proverbs 3:5-6.*

**Because God is near to us, we can live in his strength:**

1) *[The Lord] 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong — Paul, II Corinthians 12:9-10.*

2) *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me — Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)*

**Because God is near to us, we can know what we have in him:** *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" — Jesus Christ, John 16:33.*

**Because God is near to us, we can celebrate his history of faithfulness:** *I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted. . . . Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand. I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds" — Psalm 77:1-2, 10-12.* This is why OUR praise stories — what we've seen God do, how he has spoken to us — can be so powerful to each other, because those stories can remind us that God is with us, God is alive and present and active. Those stories are every bit as much "praise" as any song we will ever work: And talk about the message in those words: that God continues to work; therefore, his history of faithfulness is still be written and reported — by us, his children!

All these words of God we've shared today are so important in this day and age and culture: Drug use continues to rise, suicide continues to rise. Divorce, redefinition of the family, mental illness — all these things are out of control. And our society continues to move away from God: A recent poll that one in four adult Americans consider themselves the NONES; in other words, they live unaffiliated with any religion. And what we need to remember is that all these issues don't suddenly emerge in somebody fully grown and developed. It starts with a single dark moment, a single difficult issue, a single accepting of a lie. The end-game is terrible, but it never starts out that way. That's why sharing on issues like this is so very important.

So — some practical tips for avoiding the blues:

- 1) Time in the word: All these verses we have quoted today are just examples of what is found in Scripture. God's help is there. Access it. Read it, as many times as you need to. Meditate on it. Commit it to memory. Carry it with you — whatever it takes to keep you mindful of all the wonderful promises that God has provided that tell us that he is with us, and will provide everything to meet our needs. As the psalmist pointed out: ***The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple — Psalm 119:130.*** Therefore: ***Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands give me delight — Psalm 119:143.*** Why? ***Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them — Psalm 119:140.*** As it's written in Proverbs: ***Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him — Proverbs 30:5.*** And the overall blessing of God's word? Paul said it this way to the church in Rome: ***For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope — Paul, Romans 15:4.***
- 2) Prayer — constant conversation with the Father:
  - a) What did Jesus say? ***“Come to me” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:28a.***
  - b) ***Pray without ceasing — Paul, I Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV).*** Nowhere does the Bible prescribe limits on how much or how often we can talk to God, nor does it state any subjects that are forbidden. We can talk to him about anything and everything, so do it!
- 3) Talk with others (family, close friends, confidantes, etc.). Don't take this wrong but your circumstances are nothing special. What did Paul say? ***No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind — Paul, I Corinthians 10:13a.*** It may very well be that somebody close to you has had a remarkably similar experience. Loads are lighter when shared — which is where the church family can play such an important part:
  - a) ***Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. . . . A cord of three strands is not quickly broken — Solomon, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12b.***
  - b) ***Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ — Paul, Galatians 6:2.***
  - c) ***[E]ncourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing — Paul, I Thessalonians 5:11.***

Folks, we're family — and this is what family does. More than that, this is what we are taught in the Scriptures to do with each other: Listen, encourage, build up. That's what Paul had in mind when he wrote in his second letter to the church in Corinth: ***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts in in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God — Paul, II Corinthians 1:3-4.*** In other words, our behavior, our response, to each other's life is predicated upon the way that God behaved and responded to our lives. That means no judging because we were not judged. We come alongside in love, praying for the strength, wisdom and perspective of Jesus Christ — unconditionally and without limits. That's what God's family does.

Don't keep things to yourself; don't trap your blues inside. Unattended, they will grow. We are not meant for isolation. We need to lose some of the lies we tell ourselves — that

nobody probably cares about me anyway, that people will think I'm weird, that they won't look at me the same anymore, that people will think less of me. And guys, this is especially for you: "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" is NOT in the Bible; ***our competence comes from God — Paul, II Corinthians 3:5b*** is. Guy lies? That if I reach out, if I admit to anybody that I'm struggling with something, I'm a weenie. If I reach out, I'm some kind of lightweight, not even able to "man up" (whatever in the world that means) and take care of myself. Those are lies; DON'T GO THERE! Mental health is a real issue, and struggles mentally and emotionally are just as real as struggles physically. Nobody would think less of me if I had a broken leg. Why should people think less of me if I have a broken spirit?

- 4) Do things that engage the WHOLE person. Remember what Christ said: ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" — Jesus Christ, Mark 12:30 (quoting Deuteronomy 6:5)***. Make sure you are providing opportunities to exercise yourself emotionally (connecting with people), exercise yourself spiritually (church, Bible studies, private and family devotions), exercise yourself mentally (learn a new language, a new game [like chess] or skill; read something new), and exercise yourself physically (join a gym, take walks, ride a bike). God made us a whole person with these four areas all mentioned as being part of our being; engaging all four areas can be huge in keeping the blues away.
- 5) Remember Satan's greatest and only weapon against us: He lies. Jesus nailed it: ***"[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" — Jesus Christ, John 8:44b***. Because we are sealed in our faith by the Holy Spirit, because we are held in the hands of Christ himself, because ***"no one will snatch [us] out of [His] hand" — Jesus Christ, John 10:28b***, because ***"no one can snatch [us] out of [our] Father's hand" — Jesus Christ, John 10:29b***, the ONLY tactics that Satan can employ are these two things: deception (lies) and distraction. He throws lies at us — about whether or not we are forgiven, how others are going to look at us, how we look at ourselves — and distracts us from the truths of Scripture. Satan has already lost his war with God. Don't let his lies give him victory over you.

## CONCLUSION

So then what is the final key to taking Christ up on this "offer" of his? Just one thing: Trust. It is about believing that God, believing that Jesus, can actually do everything the Bible says. All these verses we've shared, along with everything else found in Scripture, is meaningless if it simply remains words on a page. It's not near enough if all these wonderful promises are simply verses we find, or verses we know in our heads. We need to know them in our hearts! Abraham moved from his hometown to Canaan because he knew God's word in his heart. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stepped into the fiery furnace because they knew God's word in their hearts. Daniel continued to pray even when it meant the lions' den because he knew God's word in his heart. Just like those "heroes of the faith," God's word is meant to be a living word that is put into action. That's why it was given to us. Without trusting that God can do all he says he can do, that he can do as advertised, so to speak, we are left to ourselves — our own strength, our own cleverness, our own ideas. And Christ made the result of exercising that option pretty clear: ***"[A]part from me you can do nothing" — Jesus Christ, John 15:5b***.

I saw a great picture of trust just the other day [LITTLE GIRL IN PIZZA RANCH]. Is that a picture of us? Do we trust in that little child way? That may be the most important takeaway today. Do we trust that what the Bible says God will do, he will do — completely and as advertised? All the help is there. All the strength is there. All the love is there. God is there. Do we trust that all those things will be there when we come calling? Our lives very literally depend on it.

And before I close, I know that, every week, I tell you guys that I love you. I absolutely do — absolutely every one of you. And you can't mess that up. The point? If you feel like you're getting to or have arrived at a really dark place and can't think of anybody to talk to, give me a shout. If you don't want me to talk, I'll be happy to listen. I'll do whatever serves you. But I will always be there for you. So call me — I don't care the time or the circumstances. Call me. We're family — and that's what family does. Let's pray!