

Busy: Restoring Connection to an Unhurried God

Part 1: The Yoke of God

Scripture

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.”

Matthew 11:28–30

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your degree of stress and busyness on the following scale:

10 = Someone call an ambulance!

9 = “Free Time?” What’s that?

8 = I’m not going crazy, but I can see crazy from here ...

7 = “Exhausted” is my middle name.

6 = I can really use a vacation – and I just got back from one!

5 = How many days (hours/minutes) to vacation?

4 = My calendar is a wee bit on the heavy side.

3 = Feelin’ groovy!

2 = Ommmmmmmm.

1 = I and the Universe are One.

If you rated yourself 5 or higher, this series is for you! If you rated lower than 5, then this series is for also you—not because it will help you eliminate busyness and stress, but because it will help you focus your energies.

I. Is Jesus Yoking?

Our passage for the day comes from Matthew 11:28–30, where Jesus invites the weary to come to him and find rest. He invites all of us who are carrying heavy burdens to take his yoke upon us—and he seems to say this is easy.

The problem is that as attractive as that sounds, our fast-paced lives make it hard to imagine how Jesus’s invitation could possibly apply to us. Our schedules are so full with work, family, and other obligations that the mere suggestion of a yoke that could be “easy” and a burden that could be “light” seems absurd. Was Jesus “yoking”?

Perhaps Jesus wasn’t “joking,” but it does seem like he’s at least contradicting himself. On the one hand, as we’ve observed many times before, Jesus’s core message was that heaven (God’s

kingdom or realm) may be found *on earth*, not simply in the afterlife. And because it may be experienced now, on earth—where struggle is constant—then God’s realm must be found in the heart of our struggles, not merely in the absence of them.

That is the essential meaning of the Beatitudes, is it not? Blessed are the poor in spirit … blessed are the mourners … blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness … blessed are the persecuted. Can heaven really be found in such difficult experiences? According to Jesus, if you can’t find heaven in the heart of your struggles, you have precious little chance of finding it anywhere else.

On the other hand, if our earthly experience of heaven is located at the heart of our struggles, we might assume that the yoke Jesus invites us to accept cannot possibly be as “easy” as he claims it to be.

II. Well Fitting

Here is a very important piece of information. Jesus never promises that his yoke is easy. We have to remember that Jesus didn’t speak English. He spoke Aramaic, which was translated into Greek, which was (much later) translated into English. We don’t have access to his original words, but we can find the Greek translation easily enough. And when we look at the Greek, we find that the word translated as “easy” in many Bibles is “*crestos*.” A better translation of “*crestos*” would be “kind.” An even *better* translation, given the context of yoking animals, would be “well fitting.” If you place an ill-fitting yoke on an ox, it doesn’t matter how light its load is, every ounce of effort will be burdensome. Yet even a heavy burden is bearable if the yoke is a custom fit.

What Jesus is telling us is that, in contrast to other yokes, his *fits*. Jesus’s yoke isn’t a “one size fits all.” Not the yoke Jesus speaks of fits *perfectly because* it was made just for you.

I love Jesus’s invitation to accept his yoke upon us because he’s really talking about finding and living into our “sweet spot.”

Golf clubs, baseball and cricket bats, and tennis rackets all have sweet spots. The sweet spot on a tennis racket is that place near the center of the strings where the vibrations transmitted through the impact of the ball cancel themselves out, making players nearly unaware that the impact has occurred. Hitting the sweet spot, therefore, feels natural and almost effortless. It allows players to invest their energies into playing the game, not merely hitting the ball.

As effortless as it feels, however, the sweet spot is difficult to locate and hit regularly. A player must practice hard, paying careful attention to how each swing feels under changing conditions, most especially the pressure of competition. Just as the sweet spot of a racket is found by adjusting to continuous impacts made by a ball moving in the opposite direction, so your internal human “sweet spot” tends to be revealed through direct challenge. You keep adjusting your

responses until they begin coming from a place where you feel most fully yourself—most fully free, yet wholeheartedly engaged and alive. When you live your life from within your sweet spot, life may not always be “easy,” but life “fits” you. Your burden is light because your best energies are employed.

*III. Your Flower, Your Field

In the film *Adaptation*, based on Susan Orlean's nonfiction book *The Orchid Thief*, an unorthodox orchid hunter named John Laroche reminds us of what it's like to sense the call when he speaks of the attraction between an insect and the specific orchid it is meant to pollinate:

There's a certain orchid that looks exactly like a certain insect so the insect is drawn to this flower—its double, its soul-mate—and wants nothing more than to make love to it. After the insect flies off, it spots another soul-mate flower and makes love to it, thus pollinating it. And neither flower nor the insect will ever understand the significance of their lovemaking. I mean, how could they know that because of their little dance the world lives, but it does. By simply doing what they're designed to do, something large and magnificent happens. In this sense they show us how to live, how the only barometer you have is your heart; how when you spot your flower you can't let anything get in your way.¹

I love this image of the insect pollinating the orchid not only because it provides a metaphor for our “sweet spot,” but also because it suggests why living within our “sweet spot” connects us to an *unhurried God*. That insect isn’t busy trying to pollinate every flower in a given field. It lives to pollinate just one flower, the one it was *created* to pollinate. So it flies by hundreds of flowers without giving them an ounce of time or energy, without feeling the slightest bit guilty or duty-bound to go after more than the kind of flower it is was made for.

In contrast to the insect, we tend to get crazy-busy in our lives because we have a hard time saying “No” to others. Therefore, we spend a lot of time, attention, and life energy wrapped up in activities and pursuits that have little or nothing to do with what brings us alive in the world. We hear all the other “flowers” calling to us, saying, “Hey, come pollinate me! Don’t you have a heart? Why are you flying right past me? Really, I won’t demand very much of your time. And aren’t I just as deserving of your help as the next flower?”

Guilt sets in. Duty. Once we respond to one such flower, a hundred others raise their voices, begging us to come their way. “It’s not fair if you help *that* flower and not me!” they protest. Pretty soon, we’re pollinating every flower *except* the one we were created for. Over time, we tend even to forget what flower that is. We’ve paid so much attention to the calls of others that we’ve lost touch with the flower that calls us most deeply.

¹ *Adaptation* (c) 2002 Columbia/Tristar.

How do we get back in touch with our flower? And how do we gain the confidence to say “No” to the ninety-nine that call to us in order to say “Yes” to the one flower that best fits our “sweet spot”?

Jesus offers us an important clue, which most people overlook. He says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Most of us tend to react to Jesus as if he’s just one more flower that’s not *our* flower demanding our time and attention. So we resist his yoke, feeling like he’ll burden us with all kinds of work that isn’t ours to do.

But he’s not.

Remember, he’s offering you a “well-fitting” yoke. In other words, he’s offering you the chance to do exactly the work you were created to do—the work that brings you most fully alive.

And he’s offering to *help* you.

***IV. The Yoke Jesus Offers**

In ancient Israel, just as in early America and the developing world today, the yoke that is used to plow a field fits two oxen, not just one. When Jesus says, “take my yoke upon you,” he’s offering you the other half of his yoke, so that you are both working together. His yoke fits perfectly because it was made just for you. And this yoke connects you to power and ability that far exceeds your own. In other words, the yoke of Jesus connects you to your “sweet spot” and provides you powerful help to live within it. “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.”

Being yoked with Jesus also helps us pinpoint our “sweet spot” to begin with. “Take my yoke upon you and *learn from* me.” On our own, we tend to wander about, get off track, and plough any field that calls to us, much like an insect pollinating every flower but its own. Yet if we have accepted the yoke of Jesus—which is really a metaphor for submitting ourselves to the Spirit of the Living Christ, or Holy Spirit—we are kept from wandering. The Spirit pulls us back when we start drifting into other fields. We feel it in our gut when we are headed in the wrong direction, and the feeling increases the longer we roam abroad, until we finally get back on track and it feels wonderful again.

This might sound coercive, but we accept the yoke of Jesus of our own free will. What keeps us willingly wearing that yoke in the long run is the discovery that Jesus isn’t asking us to help him plow *his* field. He’s offering to help you plow *yours*, the one you were *created* to work in.

Let’s set aside the metaphors at this point and cut to the chase. I got to this point in sermon prep and I knew it was time to pause. I started to journal some questions.

What is my sweet spot?

What are the things that bring me life?

When am I most content? When am I at peace?
What is my greatest joy?

God - sharing God's love, God's all encompassing, all inclusive love

When I get to share with someone who believes they are unloved that they are embraced
By God - I am in my sweet spot. It is why I couldn't just be a social worker although that job is very important. I had to share God with people, I had to pray with people, I always felt empty.

Being with people - really being with people, listening, accompanying, sharing, being in relationship with all of you and with colleagues, friends, family. That is when I love my work and my life.

Helping others discover their sweet spot.

Helping others discern and discover their skills and their gifts, mentoring, teaching, compassion, using my strengths.

Creating - I love it when I have time to be creative - I love to spend time creating with others

And then there are places where I am in my sweet spot

On the water - in a dragon boat or a sail boat - competing or a leisure I am alive

Skiing down a mountain - ahhh.

Climbing a mountain

Perhaps anywhere in nature (as long as I'm not too cold - I hate being cold)
moving/exercising - notice most of those things involve movement and exercise - I honestly do find my sweet spot in a good workout. That's just part of who I am.

And then there is sitting with a friend over a glass of wine and talking for hours (oh I long to do that more often)

Morning coffee on the deck

Being with my family and watching my children enjoy life



When I have time for these things I am in my sweet spot. I feel alive and well. When I am doing those things in my work I know I am doing what I was called to do. I came up with this list while sitting at my desk in only a few moments of prayerful reflection but I am sure I would narrow it down if I spent more time in meditation about it. I have decided this will be one of my sabbatical goals. Admittedly this list came out of pondering the things I'm missing the most or the things that when I do them I suddenly come alive no matter how tired I am. Admittedly I get frustrated often because I have too many things on my plate, I can't even get to the things that bring me life, that I feel called to, that I believe God created me to do and be. I am often guilty of plowing too many fields and pollinating too many flowers and then I feel tired and drained and my work, my family and I personally suffer for it. Somehow too when I get going, when I feel the pressures I am not as good at recognizing what is mine and what is not. I start doing other peoples stuff, I start 'over-functioning' my counsellor used to say. And yet when I get myself back into alignment when I start focussing on these life-giving things I rediscover the abundant life Jesus calls us to.

I'm sure my list looks different than yours and that is the point. My well-fitting yoke is guaranteed to be different than yours. But when we put on our personally tailored yoke the results will be similar. There is a significant result when I am doing these things. I feel closer to my creator, I feel more confident in myself and who I am created to be. And the benefits of that are endless I am a better wife, parent, minister, counsellor, and boss...I might even say I feel the presence of God most powerfully in my life - like the spirit of God is with me, right beside me, surrounding me. I suddenly realize I can find the right tempo again and I find rest for my soul.

This week I invite you to spend some time re-discovering your yoke, your sweet spot, your you! Rediscover the right tempo.²

² sermon adapted from a sermon by Rev. Eric Elnes, Ph.D.
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