

Weight Lifting Matthew 11: 28 - 30 9/1/02

Pastor Dan Anderson

This is Labor Day Weekend - a unique holiday in the USA. Unlike other national holidays, this day does not commemorate a military conflict or a religious occasion. Labor Day was established in 1882 to celebrate a "workingmen's holiday." (www.dol.gov The History of Labor Day).

Every once in a while everybody needs a break - a rest from the labors of life. Life can become arduous - sometimes overbearing - and what we want most of all is to get away, to take a holiday. Sometimes life weighs us down and we wish someone would help to lift the weight from our shoulders.

Jesus offers to do just that - not to completely remove the weight of life, but to share the burdens we experience.

In Matthew 28 we find this wonderful invitation:

"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 offers to lift the weight of life's burdens.

For a few moments, let's consider some of life's difficulties in order to see how Jesus might help to lift the weight of these burdens.

1. The weight of Anxiety.

One of the more difficult admonitions for me is found in Philippians 4, "*Do not be anxious about anything.*" (v 6)

In addition, Jesus asks in Matthew 6: (4) *Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life_?*

Have you ever heard a preacher or teacher say that to worry shows a lack of faith, a lack of trust in the sovereignty of God - and is, therefore, a sin! I certainly have heard those words!

Still, I worry. Like many of you, at times I get anxious.

- When the doctor says, "*I am concerned about that lump*" my heart starts to pound.
- When I go to the specialist for a 2nd look, perspiration forms on my extended forehead.
- While awaiting test results I find it difficult to sleep at night.

I have become anxious about our children. When they were little I had concerns for their health and safety, how well they would do in school, would they be accepted? As they got older I wondered how they would respond to peer and societal pressures. Now that they are young adults,

and I have no control, except over the checkbook, I still find myself anxious about many of the same things.

Some of you have faced anxious moments regarding to your employment. Several have gone through long periods of time without work or an income adequate to meet family needs. Others have watched your company downsize and are wondering when your position will be eliminated.

Beyond the job, some have faced major concerns about financial security. The market has been in a downward spiral for over two years. The nest egg that was to carry you through retirement has eroded away. You may have enough to make ends meet now, but worry what you will do if a personal crisis hits.

There are many issues that bear down on us. There is more than enough to worry about!

Jesus said, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

1 Peter 5:7 invites, *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

At the very least, we can bring our concerns to Jesus knowing that God cares for us!

The passage in Philippians that says, *Do not be anxious about anything* also seems to offer a 3-step response to anxiety:

- 1) pray about it - tell God what is going on
- 2) remember to give thanks for what is good
- 3) direct your thoughts to things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (see Phil. 4: 6 - 8)

In Matthew 6, where Jesus asks, *"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life__?"* we are reminded that God, who cares for and provides for wild flowers, cares much more deeply for you - and God promises to provide for all of your needs.

When we take the weight of anxiousness to Jesus, we do so with the assurance of Hebrews 4. Jesus, our High Priest has experienced and overcome all of life's challenges - so we can approach with him with confidence, knowing that we will receive mercy and grace and help in our time of need.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. _Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (15, 16)

So as 1 Peter 5:7 invites, *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you* - and do so with confidence that God will help you in your time of need.

2. A 2nd weight is the weight of Busy-ness.

Who wouldn't like more time in a day to get done all that needs to be done and to find a smidgen of time for some Rest and Relaxation?

Life is filled with all kinds of demands. People make demands on our life. There are job obligations, kid activities, more kid activities, errands to run, a mountain of laundry to clean, sort, iron and wash all over again, a garden tucked among the weeds, did I mention kid activities?, community commitments, family commitments, church commitments, people we must see, menus to plan, groceries to buy, events we must attend, vacations filled with so many things to accomplish that we come off vacation more tired than when we began!

So we come to church hoping for respite from the rat race only to find that sometimes our services are so filled that there is no time to be alone with God. There is no place of quiet rest.

A few weeks ago the PGA was in town at Hazeltine. I began to think about Tiger Woods. I wondered if he might like to see the Mall of America or eat on the deck at Lord Fletchers or walk the trail by Lake Minnetonka. I thought of what might happen if he tried. I believe he would be swamped by autograph seekers or people wanting to take his picture or just be near. There is no way he could "just get away" like you and I can. (I suppose with his money he could buy his own small tropical island - but he must miss some of the routine pleasures of everyday living).

It is not quite the same, but Jesus was a very popular figure in his day. He was continually hounded by people who called out his name, asking him to do something special for them.

Jesus was a mission driven person. He had come to "*seek and to save what was lost.*" (Luke 19:10). His ministry was for and about people. Still, sometimes he needed a break from the busy-ness of ministry.

On one occasion he dismissed the crowds and got into a boat to get away. He wanted to find a bit of peace and quiet from the weight of life. When he got to the other shore he found that people had run around the lake to the to meet him as his boat docked.

So what would he do? Jesus withdrew into the mountains and hills to be alone and to talk with God. Even Jesus needed space from the busy-ness of life. Even Jesus needed time to replenish his soul.

This same Jesus, who understands *and* is able to help us in our time of need invites, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*"

Sometimes we need respite from the busyness of life. Jesus invites us to carve out quiet space in order to find renewal with God. He invites us to *a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God.*

3. A 3rd weight is The weight of Sadness.

Loss comes from many sources and in each case, loss fills us with grief and sadness.

When we are forced to move, to relocate to a new and unfamiliar community, there frequently is a sense of great loss and sadness.

When a loved one is lost through divorce or death we are overwhelmed with grief. We cannot think straight. We can barely put one foot in front of the other. Our minds are tormented with conflicting thoughts and emotions.

Sadness overwhelms our soul.

When a child disappoints us with the choices s/he makes, choices which alter the course of life - perhaps by using drugs, or hanging with the "wrong crowd", or experiencing pregnancy, or flunking out of school, or wasting money foolishly - when a child makes poor decisions that impact the course of life, parents often feel a deep sense of heartache.

When a friendship is broken, or we are "involuntarily transferred" at work we experience loss and sorrow.

Jesus ached for people in pain.

In Matthew 23, as he approached the city of Jerusalem he cried out in sorrow, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."*

As a young child one of the greatest thrills the church offered me was to know the answer to this question. *"What is the shortest verse in the Bible?"* The rapid answer, *"John 11:35, Jesus wept"*

Jesus was brought to the home where Lazarus had died. When he saw the grief of the sisters and family who were weeping, he was *"deeply moved in spirit and troubled"*, and, *Jesus wept.*

Jesus felt, and Jesus feels, the pain of human suffering. Over and over again he reached out to those who were hurting - people reeling with the sadnesses of life. His touch brought comfort and healing.

When he himself was overwhelmed with sorrow, he turned toward his Heavenly Father for comfort and strength, help and hope.

This same Jesus says to people in sorrow, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

4. A final weight is The weight of Sin.

I listened recently as someone recounted a serious transgression long since past, that continues to haunt and carries with it ongoing repercussions. As I listened I thought of David, the Psalmist who wrote of his own anguish in Psalm 51 , *I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*

Sometimes the weight of sin and the consequences of sin hang like a millstone around our necks. We cannot get away from the reality of our failings. We are frozen, unable to move.

We are like the man of Luke 5. This man was paralyzed, unable to move, so his friends carried him, on his bed, to a place where Jesus was teaching. The first thing Jesus said to the man was "*your sins are forgiven.*" Then he said, "*get up and walk.*"

Sin paralyzes. Forgiveness sets us free. Jesus offers forgiveness and freedom from the weight of sin.

Luke 7 _tells the story of *a woman who had lived a sinful life.* This woman learned that Jesus was eating at the home of a Pharisee, so she went to the house taking with her a jar of perfume. At the house, as she stood close to Jesus, she began to weep. Her tears fell on the feet of Jesus. So she stooped down, wiped his feet with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee saw what she was doing, he said to himself, "*If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.*"

Jesus said to the Pharisee, "*I have something to tell you.*"

The person who knows she has been forgiven responds with extravagant love but the person who has no clue about his sinfulness has little understanding of the wonder of grace.

The wonder of grace is that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Do you carry a weight of sin? Jesus invites, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*"

And he promises, *whoever comes I will never drive away. (John 6:37)*

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In just a few moments we will share The Lord's Table. As we prepare for Communion, let me ask, What weight are you carrying? Is there an issue, some weight that you want Jesus to carry with you?

In your bulletin is a small piece of paper with the drawing of a weight on it.

I am going to ask you, to write down, on the back of that paper, a brief description of a weight that you would like Jesus to carry with you. As we come to the altar, lets give the weights of life to Jesus.

The worship team will lead us in a song and then the Stewards will distribute the bread and the cup. When the Stewards come with the bread, they will also carry a collection plate in which you can place that slip of paper. We will set these collection plates on the Communion table as a sign that we are bringing our burdens to Jesus.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."