

## **Finding Relief For The Difficult Journey**

**Matthew 11:25-30**

By [Rev. Bryn MacPhail](#)

Today is my 8th Sunday as the minister of the St. Andrew's/Fraser Charge. As I reviewed the content of my sermons and the Scripture passages for the last 7 weeks, I was struck by the many demands made by Jesus. Listen again to some of the challenges of Christ to this point:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4:17).

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5:44).

"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48).

"He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (10:38).

I listen to those demands and am thankful that all of you are still showing up! :-)  
These demands are enough to make even the most devoted Christian run and hide. Then we come to this section in Matthew 11, in particular, verses 28-30 and we hear a new invitation from Jesus:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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 shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light".

Is Jesus kidding here?! Jesus calls us to "repent". He calls us to "love (our) enemies". He calls us to "be perfect", and to "bear (our) cross"--and then He follows that up by telling us "(His) yoke is *easy*"?! Certainly there is nothing "easy" about the demands of Christ! *Or is there?*

I recently read an account where John S. Dunne tells of early Spanish sailors who reached the continent of South America after a difficult voyage. The ship eventually sailed into the headwaters of the Amazon, an expanse of water so wide the sailors presumed it to be a continuation of the Atlantic Ocean.

It never occurred to them to drink the water, since they expected it to be salt-water. The result was that some of these sailors died of thirst.

Can you imagine the scene?--Sailors dying of thirst as their ship floated on the

world's largest fresh water source. What the sailors expected to be harmful was the very thing they needed to survive.

The same can be said for the commands of Jesus. We hear the calls to repent, to bear our cross, to love our enemies and we recognize the profound disruption in our life if we actually followed these things through. REPENTANCE calls us to *radically change* the way we live. BEARING OUR CROSS demands that we make *painful sacrifices*. We can't imagine how doing these things will help so resist the call. We pass up "fresh water" because we mistakenly think it will harm us.

This very moment, people everywhere in the Church are dying of spiritual thirst with fresh water all around them.

People struggle to make important decisions, yet the Bible remains closed on the night table. People struggle with anxiety and depression, yet the Great Comforter awaits to hear our prayer. People struggle with failure, yet the road paved by Christ is not walked on.

Yes, the road is difficult, yes the journey is long, but at the same time, Jesus promises "rest". The word translated "rest" can also be translated "relief". Jesus challenges us to take the difficult road, but He is there with us--offering us the fresh water of His Word to bring relief.

Now even if you buy this analogy--that the commands of Christ are fresh water and not salt-water, you may wonder if the analogy breaks down. You may say that, "Sure, the commands of Christ are good for me just as fresh water is, but at least fresh water tastes good also".

The idea is that although the commands of Jesus may very well be good for us, they are good for us like Buckley's cough medicine is good for a cold. The commands of Jesus may help us, but they sure are painful to swallow.

There is a reason for this. The commands of Jesus will not be appealing to follow when we are not in the *habit* of following them.

Let me offer another illustration. On Tuesday I went to the Dentist here in town, but spent most of the hour with the Hygienist getting my teeth cleaned. I knew I was in trouble when I saw a particular poster on the wall. The poster had a man sitting in a dental chair with band-aids all around his mouth. In the poster, the hygienist came in and scolded the man for flossing only once since his last visit--he flossed the night before.

And since I was in the same boat, I was a bit nervous about the cleaning. As the hygienist scraped, and scraped, and scraped away the "gunk" on my teeth I naturally began to bleed. I was in a fair amount of pain and the hygienist was

constantly having to wipe away the blood with the cotton. At one point she said to me, "When you get in the habit of flossing everyday this cleaning will become quick, painless, and you won't bleed".

*The Christian walk is much the same.* Jesus says "Come to Me . . . My yoke is easy" and we struggle to believe Him like we would a dentist who says, "This won't hurt a bit". The key to finding relief in the commands of Jesus is following them DAILY. If you come on Sunday and think the demands of Jesus are unsettling, perhaps it is because you aren't doing your "spiritual flossing" throughout the week.

I think we would all agree that daily prayer and Bible reading would be great for our spiritual health, but how many of us do that? My hygienist has convinced me of the need to floss daily. Now I just need to form that habit. I hope and pray that you all at least recognize the need to pray and feed on God's Word everyday. Then it is just a matter of making that your habit.

Some of you may be wondering how you could possibly find the time to read the Bible and pray everyday. The Reformer, Martin Luther, has a great response to that: "I am too busy not to pray"(repeat). The idea was that the busier Luther got with work, the more he sensed a need to pray and read. He did this, I suspect, because he knew what it was like to find "relief" in the Word of God.

Reading the Bible and praying is NOT "one more thing we have to do" in an already packed schedule. It is WHAT WE NEED TO SURVIVE our busy schedule. We are "weary" and "heavy-laden" from all of life's difficulties. Christ is our refuge. We meet Him in the Bible and in prayer. He is what we need to prevent spiritual dehydration.

There is, of course, one more way we meet Christ and are refreshed by Him. It is in the sacraments. Today as we share in the Lord's Supper, we have a genuine opportunity to find relief for our weariness.

We have an opportunity to get a glimpse of what Christ can offer us EVERYDAY. As we share the bread and the wine, I pray that your troubles would become bearable--bearable because you know Christ is there with you.

As you share in the bread and the wine, may you find relief for the difficult journey. Amen.

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