

# ***Sabbath: A Rhythm Of Rest***

**Matthew 11: 25 - 12: 14**

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I want to go back with you to the video clip we saw at the start of the service. It was asking, "*What are you looking for?*"

Remember the answers?

*Meaning, happiness, contentment.*

Know what happens if we don't have them?

There's a nagging inside.

And that nagging can drive us, and keep driving us...

to the next party,  
the next thrill,  
the next work assignment,  
the next relationship.

Know what I hear when I watch that clip?

I hear people looking for a life that is a **good fit**. Where their situation and their person matches.

A good fit.

One that doesn't rub raw. Or irritate. Or bruise. Or worse.

When I started running, the best piece of advice I received was, "*Get good shoes that fit. Your whole body will thank you.*" How true!

And that's not just true for clothing.

It's true for our place in life - friends, marriage, school, work. It needs to fit. What's it like to sit in art class when you've got no creative sense at all? Or in band, when you're tone deaf?

Or attempting gymnastics, when you've got no sense of balance. That's me. I remember gr.12 gym class. I'm 6'2". Weighed about 180 at the time (ah to be young again!). My gym teacher was this little wee guy, maybe 5'6". He was spotting us as we did handsprings over the box horse. I went for it. Only didn't develop quite enough momentum and stopped, feet straight up in the air. Wobbled a bit..... and came down sideways. Right on top of the teacher. Closest I came to hearing a Christian School teacher swear.

Gymnastics and me didn't fit.

A proper fit. When you don't have it the results can be awful.

When you try to share a marriage with someone whose spiritual direction and inclination is completely the opposite of yours.

When you try to carry on a lifestyle that your income can't sustain.

When they downsize your workplace and leave you with the responsibilities that at one time were shared by three people and stuff keeps falling off your desk all over the place.

A lousy fit – How do you end up feeling?

As pastor one thing I run into again and again is people that are stressed, burdened and **tired**. People who live for the weekend, or the vacation, or bed.

Stress leaves. Treatment for burnout.

Troubled marriages. Sexual disfunction.

Our city is full of it.

And so....

....Weary, burdened, looking for rest – is that you?

An offer of rest sound good?

How about Jesus' offer?

*"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."* [Matthew 11.28-30]

Rest - Sabbath.

Sabbath is from the Hebrew word meaning *ceasing, resting*.  
Jesus offers to bring an end to our weariness.  
He is our Sabbath.

And He, Sabbath incarnated, says to us -

*...Take my yoke....* Maybe you've seen pictures, or managed to actually touch one at Upper Canada Village. The yoke is a device that was put over the neck to allow a heavy load to be pulled. You'd put a yoke over the neck of a horse to pull a wagon, or the necks of a team of oxen in order to pull a plow. A person would have a long yoke hanging around their neck and off the shoulders, with a bucket on each end, bringing water home from the well.

With a good yoke a huge weight can be supported. Much work can be done. But it has to fit right. A poor-fitting yoke is no better than playing basketball in poor-fitting court shoes. You simply can't carry on for long.

We've talked about how so many of us run around with lives that don't fit right. Well, guess what - we're not alone. Jesus ran into a lot of people that were also ready to collapse; people whose emotions, minds and spirits were stretched to the limit -- blistered -- because life didn't fit properly.

He offers an exchange to them -- to take their chaffing, poor-fitting life and replace it with something made to measure.

*"Take **my** yoke upon you and learn from me....for my yoke is easy and my burden is light...."*

My yoke is **easy** — The original word Jesus spoke in the Aramaic language means something like "well-fitting." A properly fitted harness and yoke allowed the ox to pull the plow all day without pain or injury. A well-fitting yoke makes the load, the burden being pulled or carried, feel light.

Well-fitting: Well-fitting skates mean you can be on the Canal all morning. A properly-fitted job description make it a joy to go to work in the morning.

My yoke fits well, says Jesus.

In our reading from Matthew, Jesus describes two examples of a life that rubs raw, that doesn't wear well but instead wears out; two groups of people he saw that were running themselves ragged, and weighing down the lives of others.

The first is described in v.25 -- the life of the affluent and the educated who thought they had life all figured out. Without going into a lengthy background explanation let me simply say that Jesus isn't trying to slam those with a higher education. Instead, he's talking about people who believe that their logic, their learning, their managerial skills and their personal charm can keep a strong handle on what's going on, can control their future and guide their destiny. Little children know that they need help. Older, educated people sometimes forget that.

Jesus says, You can try to make things fit together in your life, create your categories for living, and cram your agenda and plans in those categories. You can try to impress others, and try to impress God with your abilities. But eventually it will start to chaff. It may even unravel. The glue of self-control will eventually let go.

You need help, says Jesus.

Let me give you rest.

The other group of people that Jesus has a real problem with are those that try to control the lives of others. The example He uses is a religious one. Synagogue leaders who got all preoccupied with rules, expanding on those rules, and keeping them. Even at the expense of human life and healing. They had laid down 39 laws about what constituted work on the Sabbath. Huge expectations for their followers. Incredible burdens.

We don't have to stretch real far to identify with either situation.

Feeling like you can't manage your life any more? That it's close to spinning out of control?

Or getting sick and tired of trying to live to the expectations and demands of others?

Ill-fitting life situations. Heavy yokes.

Friend, what's been rubbing you raw?  
Jesus says, quite simply – “*Come to me.*”

He's not wanting us to try and impress Him with how well we can handle the challenges of life, or how many religious hoops we can jump through.

He just wants us to come – the way we are.

If you take a moment to look at the stuff that wears us out, that threatens to break us, most of the time it is stuff revolving around doing, getting, trying, building, impressing, producing, controlling.

How much of that stuff really fits well? In a way that lasts? That you can keep up with for the long haul?

How much of that matters when you're taking your newborn home from hospital?

How much of that matters when they're wheeling you into the operating room?

How much of that will still be there when you're 80 years old?

Or when you're standing beside an open grave?

Oh - don't get me wrong. There is doing, going, producing, getting, giving that has a real and proper place in life. But only in the right place. And in the right amount.

But first things first. You gotta get the basics right.

My wife is a dressmaker. Before she constructs a garment the first thing she'll do is carefully measure her client. And make sure that she's got the correct type of fabric for the outfit desired. Wrong material, and wrong measurements are a disaster waiting to happen - no matter HOW much work you put into the project. You gotta get the basics right.

Jesus says - “*Come to me and let me suit you up in the basics of a life that fits right. Let me fit you with a life that'll work – that'll hold together for the long haul -- right into eternity.*”

“*For I am gentle and humble in heart.*”

He's not out to suck us dry, to get what He can from us and then drop us by the side of the road. He doesn't leave us on probation, ready to cut us out if we don't put out.

The Bible says that because He's lived the human life, Jesus knows what it's like to be in our shoes.

Ah yes - in this season of Lent, remember that He's been there. Done that. Wearing the scars.

Sitting now in heaven, in remarkable divine gentleness His greatest desire is to get us into contact with our Creator Father in Heaven, keep us in contact with Him, and one day draw us home to live with Him forever.

Ancient Jews often spoke of yokes in the context of being committed to something. If you were committed to the ancient Jewish law code, people talked of you as carrying “*the yoke of the Law.*”

The yoke Jesus offers is that of a committed relationship with us.

In other places in the Bible we hear Him say:

*Surely, I am with you always.*

*I will never leave you or forsake you.*

*I will not leave you as orphans.*

That's commitment.

It's the commitment we see in this season of Lent as we remember, front and centre, the suffering of Jesus on the Cross. His commitment to going all the way to death in order to remove the huge roadblock of human sin – the roadblock that stood in the way of our getting into the Family of God, becoming children of the Heavenly Father.

One more thing about a yoke. I've seen two kinds of yokes. One is the single yoke. One animal in front, doing all the pulling, while the owner stands behind with one hand on the reins, other on a whip.

The other kind of yoke fits two animals. Side by side pulling the load. That's the sort of yoke I want you to think of when you read this passage.

Jesus isn't going to stand back, whip in hand, to see how you perform. Rather, the one who is gentle and humble, who says "*Surely I am with you always*" straps himself in the same yoke that He calls you to put on. He walks right beside you. Helps bear the strain. Takes over when you can't do it and need a bit of a break. Remember the "Footprints" poem?

And He'll **stay** in that yoke.

When you bring your first child home - He's there for those midnight feedings.

Even in the operating room - He's there.

Even when you're 80. He'll be there.

And then – when finally, death unstraps you from the yoke, He'll be there to usher you to your new home in glory.

And all along that journey you'll find a calm way deep inside.

Which is rest.

In the most significant way you can imagine.