

**GOD INVITES TIRED PEOPLE****MATTHEW 11:28-30**

Let me tell you about Tattoo, the basset hound. Tattoo didn't really intend to go for an evening run, but when his owner accidentally shut his leash in the car door and took off with Tattoo still outside the vehicle, he had no choice! A motorcycle cop by the name of Terry Filbert noticed a car going by with what appeared to be something dragging behind it. As he drove his motorcycle up to the car, he saw it was a basset hound on a leash. Officer Filbert said, "That little do was picking them up and putting them down as fast as he could!" He finally got the attention of Tattoo's owner who stopped the car, but not before Tattoo had reached speeds of 20-25 mph and rolled over several times. Fortunately, Tattoo was fine although he wasn't much interested in going out for an evening walk for a very long time afterwards!

"He was picking them up and putting them down as fast as he could!" Does that description hit home? Do you find yourself rushing here... scurrying there... hurrying in this direction... bustling off in that direction? Are you tired? Now, all of us have been physically tired probably often in life. You know the solution. You go to bed earlier, sleep longer, exercise more or eat better. But there are different kinds of tired, am I right? You can have a tired spirit. You can be weary in your soul. Naps don't relieve that kind of weariness. Now, here's some good news. God invites tired people. God invites people who are weary in their souls and worn out in their spirits. We're in the midst of a message series about God being an inviting God. We've been seeing how God invites all kinds of people into an eternal relationship with Him – spiritually dirty people, empty people, lost people – groups of people spectacularly unworthy of a relationship with Him. Today, I want you to hear that God invites another group to come to Him - tired people. Here's the first of two questions this morning...

**WHAT MAKES YOU TIRED OF LIFE?**

You may have not grown up on a farm, but you probably know what a yoke is. It's that piece of wood that fits over the head of an ox enabling it to pull a plow through a field or a cart down the road. What you may not know, however, is that the shape and make of a yoke is very important. You can't just slap a fat, rough, chunk of wood around an ox's neck. If you do, pressures shores will break out on that animal's neck very quickly. He'll refuse to work for you. No, a good yoke is formed and shaped to fit a specific ox's specific neck. It's custom made. In addition, it's smooth, rounded and polished with no sharp edges that could stick the animal. It's large enough to cover a large area of skin so it distributes the stress of all that weight he's carrying widely and well. A good, well-fitting yoke means a contented ox that will likely be very productive for you for many years.

Jesus used that imagery of a yoke to get at this whole issue of being tired of life, soul weary and spiritually worn out. He implies that the reason you get tired of life is because you're carrying stuff around with you that just doesn't fit your soul

or set well with your spirit. Like a yoke that just doesn't fit well, this stuff begins to cause stress to build up inside of you. Your soul starts to feel like chafed, raw skin. Your spirit is always getting poked, prodded or bruised. Before you know it, you have this feeling of being spiritual tired. So, what are the things that make you tired of life? What makes your soul weary and wears you out spiritually?

Of course, there are many causes, but let me mention what may be the top three. First, you get spiritually tired when your purpose in life isn't big enough. I'm sure people in Jesus' day struggled with feelings of futility just like we do. I'm sure they asked the same questions we often ask, "Why am I here? What's the purpose of my life?" Because we keep so busy doing so much stuff in everyday life, we sometimes don't notice how weary our souls are getting. A homemaker wonders if her only purpose in life is cleaning up and chasing after toddlers. A businessman questions if his only purpose in life is makes the company he works for a few more profit dollars. A married couple feels some stagnation creeping into their relationship and wonder about the purpose of their relationship. Perhaps a loved one passes away and your soul takes a punch in the gut because you realize again the shortness of life. So you ask, "Why am I here? What's the purpose of my life?"

The fact is that life, in and of itself, doesn't provide a big enough purpose for life and living. A family – having, raising and enjoying one - is wonderful stuff. Working hard at a profession or a career you enjoy is good. Pursuing and obtaining pleasurable things – a nice home, a dream trip, great gadgets – can provide a temporary kind of joy. But, in the end, none of these provide a purpose big enough for the soul God created and placed within you. They end up feeling like a yoke that doesn't fit real well. After awhile, they chafe and rub your spirit raw. During a period of high unemployment some years ago now, the Irish government began an ambitious road building campaign. Many new jobs were created as workers enthusiastically signed on. They would be able to feed their families while helping to build their nation's roads. But the workers' motivation soon declined. They lost their excitement. Why? They discovered that the roads led to nowhere. The road-building campaign had been invented simply to create jobs. The mission beyond the work had given those workers a sense of destiny. But when they learned there really was no mission, any sense of purpose evaporated. The work was the same, but the meaning was gone.

Here's a second yoke that doesn't very well. Guilt. Every one of us was born with a conscience. It's both amusing but incredibly sad to see how our culture wants you to forget about sin and deny the guilt that is its inevitable product. Mental health professionals tell us that people come to them with personal problems that produce all kinds of stress and anxiety in life. People are soul weary and tired of life. Why? Some of those same mental health folk point to unresolved guilt. Let's fact it, each of us and all of us have failed ourselves and others. We've hurt and stepped on others. We've failed to do the right or good thing when we had the opportunity. People try to forgive themselves and think

positively. They hope counseling will help. They hope the passing of time will help. But guilt has a way of eating away your soul. John Louis Evans was a convicted murderer. When the prison authorities delayed his execution, he wept. Because he was relieved, right? No, because he was frustrated. Evans was so overwhelmed by a crushing sense of guilt that he longed for the release from it that only death would give him. Ok, so you didn't murder anyone, but the principle stands. Unresolved guilt will make your soul weary and tired of life.

Third, you get spiritually tired when you depend on yourself more than you depend on God. We live in a culture that prides itself on self-dependence. Now, don't get me wrong! There's a healthy kind of self-dependence that each of us should possess. For example, God is never honored when you refuse to go to work and earn a living for your family. But, do you ever reflect on how massively dependent you and I are on God for everything? You can't breathe without the air God creates. You can't eat food unless God supplies the rain to grow it. You can't move or do anything without the wonderful body God created and designed for you. You can't work at a job or care for a family without the amazing mind that God put into your body. We are absolutely dependent of God for everything!

There's a kind of spiritual self-dependence that will leave you thoroughly worn out and soul weary. It has everything to do with how you think you begin and maintain a relationship with God and where you go when you die. Now, frankly, here's how most people think. "It's fine to believe in God. Jesus should be admired. Attending a church can be helpful. Passing along moral values to my kids is important. But what's all this talk about "committing your life to Jesus" and getting "born again"? You get into Heaven because you've been a good person. You work hard. You love your family. You do good things for others." My friend, if I just expressed, in so many words, your perspective on how you have a relationship with God and how you get into Heaven when you die, you are headed for a worn out, weary place spiritually. You are depending on yourself rather than on God and what He has done for you through His Son, Jesus. Your soul will end up feeling like it weighs 1000 pounds. You're destined to become hopelessly and permanently tired in a spiritual sense. Now, there's another question I want to ask and try to answer.

### **HOW CAN JESUS GIVE YOU REST?**

Let's consider those three causes of a lot of spiritual weariness and see how a relationship with Jesus changes the situation. Not having a big enough purpose in life equals getting spiritual tired. Jesus, however, gives you a purpose that's bigger than life itself. In that way, He gives you rest. The biggest, most important purpose of your life and mine is to know God and enjoy Him forever. This is more than intellectual or informational knowledge about God. This is all about knowing God in vitally, personal way. God invites you into that relationship.

One of the most interesting things Jesus said is this, “And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.” (John 17:3 NLT) We tend to think that eternal life is kind of a state or a condition of life: breathing, eating, doing stuff forever. But Jesus teaches us here that eternal life at its deepest, most profound level is about a relationship. And the biggest purpose of life is entering into and then experiencing forever an ever deepening relationship with the God of the Universe. And because God is infinite and inexhaustible, you will never run out of things you can learn about God. You’ll never get bored with God. Now, go ahead, raise a family and do it well. Go ahead, seek out a wonderful career and work at it for the glory of God. Go ahead, and taste many of the wholesome pleasures and joy that God provides to you in this life. Just understand that none of those things will ever meet your deepest need for meaning and purpose in life. Again, Jesus said, “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.” (John 10:10 MSG) When that relationship becomes your biggest purpose in life – cultivating, maintaining, entering fully into it – you’ll still get tired, yes, but you won’t get tired of life. Your soul won’t get weary or your spirit worn. When you come to Jesus, He gives you rest from all of that. God invites tired people to find rest in Jesus.

I said earlier that guilt will wear you out spiritually and weigh down your soul quicker than anything else. Ernest Hemingway, the author, provided an interesting insight into forgiveness in his short story, “The Capital of the World.” He tells a story about a father and his teenage son who live in Spain. Their relationship became strained and ultimately completely broken. The son ran away from home. The father began to search for his son. He finally put an ad in the Madrid newspaper as a last resort. His son’s name was Paco – a very common name in Spain. Here’s what the ad said: “Dear Paco, meet me in front of the Madrid newspaper office tomorrow at noon. All is forgiven. I love you.” The next afternoon at noon in front of the newspaper office there were 800 young men all named Paco all seeking forgiveness. Forgiveness – that might just be the most fundamental, spiritual need of every human being on the planet.

Jesus gives you rest by providing the only forgiveness that matters. Jesus did lots of things that astonished and astounded people. One of the most controversial things He ever did was to forgive people’s sins usually before He healed them physically. When He did that, Jesus was demonstrating that He was God in human flesh, because only God can forgive sin. Every time you and I sin, we offend God. Every time. Instead of taking that sin to God, confessing it and turning away from it, we often practice a form of self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness is when you minimize your sin, excuse your sin or rationalize your sin. The result is you get spiritually tired from lugging around that heavy, painful yoke of guilt in your soul.

Sin has to be dealt with. It has to be punished. When you bring your sin to Jesus – confess it, renounce it and turn away from it – He, in a sense, pours His

blood over it – the blood He shed for you and me at the cross. The weight of that condemnation – which will make you tired of life quicker than anything – will lift off of you and be removed forever. Yes, even godly people continue to commit sins this side of Heaven. But the godly person keeps coming to Jesus every day confessing his or her sin and experiencing every day that removal of guilt that only Jesus can provide. When you come to Jesus, He gives you rest. God invites tired people to find rest in Jesus.

I also said earlier that your soul will get tired quickly if you habitually depend on yourself. Finally, Jesus gives you rest by offering you an eternal relationship of active dependence on Him. This is all about learning how to consciously depend on God more and more in life for all things. I want you to notice something important in what Jesus said there in Matthew 11. Jesus did not say, “Come to Me and I’ll take off that heavy yoke and you can just run around without one.” Instead, Jesus says, in effect, “Come to Me and I’ll give you another yoke – one that fits really well and is comfortable to wear. This is a yoke custom designed by Me just for you.” The kind of dependence – the kind of rest - Jesus offers you and me isn’t the “taking a nap” or vegging in front of the TV kind of rest. Jesus never enables or blesses spiritual laziness! No, Jesus calls you and me into an active dependence on Him – a life marked by peace and by joy even as we are eagerly and enthusiastically working away at fulfilling God’s work for us in this life: What is that work? Pointing people to Jesus and helping them grow in Him.

When you make the decision to trust Jesus for what will happen in eternity after you die, you can begin to trust Him for what will happen in this life while you live. You gradually learn what it means to rely upon and depend upon Jesus for literally everything: your marriage, job, kids, health, finances, decisions – anything and everything. You don’t have to pretend to be self-sufficient. How tiring is that! You don’t have to assume that you have all the answers. How wearisome is that! You are learning how to depend on God for everything in and about your life. If you literally depend on Jesus for everything, will you still get tired? Sure, you’ll still get physically tired. But you won’t get tired of life. Your inner spirit won’t get weary. Your soul won’t wear out. In knowing Jesus and consciously learning how to depend on Him increasingly for and in everything, you experience the eternal energy of His grace and love. Your life will be constantly replenished and renewed by knowing Him. When you come to Jesus, He gives you rest. God invites tired people to find rest in Jesus.

One of the popular ads for the 2011 Super Bowl was a Volkswagen commercial that pictures a child dressed in a Darth Vader costume attempting to use “the force” around the house. With the familiar Star Wars music associated with Darth Vader playing in the background, the boy marches down the hallway and then raises his hands dramatically toward a dryer in the utility room—nothing happens. Next the young Darth points his hands at the family dog lying on the floor. The dog looks up quizzically—but again nothing happens. Darth doesn’t give up. Now in the bedroom, he raises his hands forcefully toward a doll seated

on the bed. The doll stares back blankly without budging an inch. Darth's arms drop to his sides in frustration, and he slumps in discouragement.

In the kitchen, still in costume, he stands dejectedly at the counter with his black-helmeted head in his hands. Then his dad pulls into the driveway, and Darth runs out to the car as his dad walks into the house. He hasn't given up! One more time he raises his hands and points them dramatically at the car. He waits, hands upraised. Suddenly the car's yellow turn signals light up and the engine starts! The startled child stumbles backward. The amazed child whirls to look toward the house and then back again toward the car. We see that dad had started the car from the kitchen using a push-button ignition. That ad playfully reminds me of a fundamental principle about living life with God. Just as that kid could do nothing without the intervention of his father, so we can do nothing in life that glorifies God apart from our Heavenly Father. We're completely dependent on Him. You can be sure that when good and spiritual things happen, your Heavenly Father made it happen not you. So learn how to rest in Him.

I like how the Message version of the Bible renders the passage we considered today. "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." (Matthew 11:28-30 MSG) Do you hear God's gracious invitation in Jesus' words? Does it touch something deep in your soul – some yearning, some desire, some wish? Our God is indeed an inviting God. He invites tired people – people with souls weary souls and spirits worn out from trying out alternatives to Jesus. When you come to Jesus, He gives you rest. So come and find that rest perhaps for the first time; perhaps for the 100<sup>th</sup> time.