

Adventuring with God

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Returning and Rest

*"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 my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
(Matthew 11:28-30)*

I have always liked A.W. Tozer's remark about new Christians: "There is nothing so refreshing as to watch a new Christian before he has heard too many sermons and watched too many Christians." When we start out in our walk with Christ Jesus we don't know much yet, but we have one thing absolutely right. We know that everything good in our lives is by Him, through Him, and because of Him. We recognize our utter dependence upon His power and mercy and would not dream of trying to go it alone.

But as the years pass we begin to accumulate considerable Bible knowledge and spiritual experience. We listen to the voices of men, who tell us how important we are to the kingdom, how gifted we are to serve with expertise and passion, and how much responsibility we need to take on in order to please our Father. Often we don't realize what is happening. All we know is that we have lost our joy and sense of awesome wonder. We numbly go through the motions of what started out as a vibrant relationship with God, silently wondering what happened to "the abundant life" we were promised.

In these times of burnout, discouragement, and anxiety Jesus continues to call us back to the place where we are rightly related to Him. He knows how fruitless our efforts have become and how anxious we feel in our spirits. He knows there is only one remedy for our situation, only one thing that will truly satisfy: to return to HIM.

"I will give you rest." Oh, how inviting that sounds, but rest seems an impossible goal in our frenzied pace of life. What could we give up? Where could we cut back? In our busyness we have lost the ability to even choose a different lifestyle. Like small children overtired and over stimulated from a long day of shopping, we cannot see what is best for us, to come aside and rest for a while in

the arms of our loving parent. Instead, we lash out in our frustration and fight against the one who knows what we truly need.

"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." So little attention has been given to these verses... I don't think I have ever heard a sermon with them as the main text in the thirty years I've been serving the Lord. Perhaps that's because we hear Jesus' words, but they seem fanciful and out of reach to us. We know that life doesn't stop for us even if we are utterly spent. We have to continue to meet needs and fulfill responsibilities. And so we dismiss Jesus' invitation as some kind of pie in the sky nonsense, not taking into account that every other teaching from Him is incredibly helpful and practical. Maybe it's time to ask again: What does He have in mind when He says we will find rest by returning to Him?

Obviously, His invitation doesn't mean just quitting (dropping out, as the hippies said back in the sixties) and meditating somewhere. Rather, He is calling us to a different kind of work that is in and of itself restful. We continue to work, but we learn from Him how to work smarter. When we look into our hearts, we discover that often our anxieties and heavy burdens flow out of our desire to control situations and other people. We want to determine how things will go, and make sure that things turn out to our benefit. But the nature of Jesus was to submit himself to the will of God and to leave the outcome of His circumstances to the Father. His humility enabled the Spirit of God to lead Him to the divine appointments that would most glorify His Father. And Jesus was okay with that.

Relinquishing His own ideas of how things should go and responding to the promptings of the Spirit enabled Him to relax and enjoy the journey. Contrary to our human way of thinking, the yoke of obedience did not chafe Him. Rather, it served as the means of lightening the burden of trying to control everything that happened. Jesus could fulfill His calling in the quiet confidence that His Father would make the way and provide all He needed to accomplish His will. He did not need to strive or fight. He could be gentle and humble in the full confidence that nothing would thwart God's purposes in His life.

Can I learn how to do this? It seems impossible some days, that's for sure. But the promise stands in spite of how I feel. If I come to Him I can find rest - through identification with His life and character. His grace is available to me if I will humble myself and submit myself to God's plans for my life. Even in Isaiah's time believers were assured of divine help as they humbled themselves before the Holy One of Israel: "*In returning and rest will you be*

saved; in quietness and in confidence will be your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).

Returning to Jesus refocuses our hearts on what is true and good. Taking His yoke upon us restores our sense of purpose, bringing an inner peace and rest to our souls. Such an unhurried, calm approach to life seems unnatural to us, especially if we have been caught up in a frenzied pace for some time. But the beauty of Jesus' promise is how easily we can break the cycle. His invitation goes out every moment of every day: Come. .return. .to me. I have what you need to enter into rest and enjoy my companionship again. Let yourself be yoked together with me and see how I approach the challenges that will come your way. It's never too late to learn from me. You'll be delighted to find how easy my yoke is, and how light your burdens can be when your heart is right.

"Return to thy rest, O my soul: for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee" (Psalm 116:7). Indeed. .He truly has. And how I long to find rest and peace in Him again!

*"Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come,
Into Thy freedom, gladness and light, Jesus, I come to Thee. ...
Out of earth's sorrows into Thy balm, out of life's storms and into Thy calm,
Out of distress to jubilant psalm, Jesus, I come to Thee."*

William T. Sleeper