

Have you ever considered just what the Lord promised when He said, “Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?” (Matthew 11:28)

## A Promise Of Rest

We know that He was not promising a life of inactivity. Christians are expected to work hard (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 1 Corinthians 15:58). Neither was He promising an easy time without opposition or affliction. We are told that we must “*strive* to enter at the narrow gate.” We are told that the world will hate us and we are promised that times of trial will come. Nevertheless, although these things are part of our earthly experience — toil and suffering will only be ended in Heaven — the Lord’s promise is of rest which can be experienced while we are still in this world.

Think of the ways in which a Christian can experience rest. Here are some ideas which spring to my mind. Perhaps you can think of more.

- A Christian can have rest from the accusations of conscience because he knows that however much he may have sinned God’s grace is sufficient for his guilt to be cancelled. He can be at peace with himself.
- A Christian can have that rest which comes from confidence in the knowledge that the One who so loved him that He gave Himself as a sacrifice for his sin also holds all things in His hand.
- A Christian can rest in the knowledge that in Christ all his needs will be supplied (Matthew 6:33), that he need fear nothing, that he is eternally secure in his relationship with his Heavenly Father and that even the worst experiences in his life are working for his good (Romans 8:28) and are a reason to rejoice rather than to be distressed (James 1:2).
- A Christian can have the rest which comes from contentment: the rest which comes from the knowledge that when he is in the loving arms of his Saviour all is well, he is loved, he is secure, he is satisfied, he need strive for nothing more than to please Him.
- A Christian can have rest which continues in spite of toil and suffering because his rest does not depend on the things that are happening around him, it depends on his trust in the Lord.

## A Conditional Promise

So, the Lord promises rest for here and now. But this is a conditional promise. His rest is for those who come to Him, and in the next two verses He elaborates on just what that means. “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29 – 30).

The metaphor the Lord uses here is very helpful. It brings to mind a picture of two animals pulling a heavy load. They are joined by a yoke through which they take up the weight of their burden. The yoke can be adjusted so that the older and more experienced animal carries the greater portion of the load while the younger animal has little weight to bear. It simply has to learn to walk beside the other: for it the yoke is easy.

Of course, young animals are not very good at walking where they are supposed to. Sometimes they rush ahead. Sometimes they become fearful and hold back. Sometimes they pull to this side or that. Each time they pull away from where they should be they begin to shoulder the burden. They have to *learn* to walk under the yoke.

If we want to have the rest which the Lord promises, we too have to *learn* to walk in humble submissive obedience to Him. Side by side, step by step, just as He walked in humble submission to His Father.

Now, let me ask you, is the rest which the Lord Jesus promises your daily experience? Have you ever known what it is like? Have you experienced it in the past but drifted from it? Has life become burdensome for you? Are you labouring at it and becoming weary of the struggle? Well, here is the answer:

“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

### **You Have To Learn**

You may not find that position of rest right away because it is something that comes by learning. You have to learn to walk in humble obedience to the Lord. You have to learn to trust Him. You have to learn because the fact is that you still have a rebellious sinful nature which leads you to do things your own way: a proud nature which causes you to rush ahead or hold back, and when you give into it you take up the burden.

As you learn to walk with the Lord in this way be careful, because when you think you have mastered it something will come along and stir up that old sinful nature again, and you will be in danger of drifting from your position of rest. If you have already drifted from it perhaps you can look back now and see that that is how you went wrong.

Let me sum up like this. When you move away from that place where you are walking in trust and obedience with the Lord, you will start to feel the burdens of life. Stress will begin to mount. If it does, you should see it as a warning to turn you back to the right path again.

When you understand stress in this way you will realise two things, at least. First you will see that stress is going to be part of your life for as long as you have a sinful nature, that is, for as long as you live in this world. Secondly you will see that stress is neither something to fear nor a sign that there is something abnormal about you. It is a warning bell to signal something wrong. It is a friend to point you back to the Lord.



What are the signs of a person under stress?



What will be the long term effects if stress is allowed to continue?

**Teach Others**

When you are trying to help others who are struggling with stress and the problems it generates, keep these things in mind. You must give thought to how you can apply them with the love and gentleness of the One who cried out to the inhabitants of the very cities which rejected Him, "Come to Me ... and I will give you rest." I emphasise this because one thing you must not do is add pressure to someone who is already under stress.



The Lord promises rest to those who follow Him. List the things which commonly lead Christians out of the experience of that rest. Then, for each item on your list, outline what God has to say about it in His Word.

Reason For Absence Of Rest	Relevant Biblical Teaching