



Sermon Title: Survival Habits of the Soul (Matthew 11:25-30)

IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. If this is your first meeting for the New Year, give opportunity to reconnect: how was your Christmas? Best times?
2. When have you felt pressured to meet expectations, yours or someone else's?

UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. Read through the verses from Matthew 11:1-24. Why might this have been a time of pressure in Jesus' life?
2. According to Pastor Ken, what were some daily burdens / pressures of Jesus' first hearers?
3. Why is it both surprising and significant that Jesus uses the word 'yoke'?
4. Read Jesus' prayer in Matthew 11:25-27.
Pastor Ken said, 'Jesus is basking in the wonder of His relationship with His Father and the amazing love that His Father has shown Him. And so the 'easy yoke of Jesus' is the yoke of His Father's love that Jesus himself enjoyed and wants us to experience.'
How does wearing Jesus' yoke affect the way a person can move through the world?
5. Review the three 'habits of the soul' that Pastor Ken talked about. How can they awaken a person to God's love?

OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

1. With which burdens / pressures do you need God's help?
2. Which one of these 'three habits' can you embrace in this New Year?
How can our Group pray for you?

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

Resource Apps:

Centering Prayer
Reimagining the Examen

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THE WORD (NIV)

Matthew 11:1-24

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. ²When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" ⁴Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." ⁷As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. ⁹Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." ¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. ¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵Whoever has ears, let them hear. ¹⁶"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: ¹⁷"We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." ¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' ¹⁹The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

²⁵At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."



We live in a time when the pressure to achieve is great. Pastor Ken well knows this pressure. Born in Tokyo, he experienced most of his formative years in Vancouver. If his family had stayed in Japan, they would have been under enormous pressure to get him into the right preschool, the right school, the right university... and then eventually the right company. But he hasn't escaped the pressure to succeed. As a young person, he felt the pressure to succeed in sports, in romance, in the corporate world, and even in his calling as a pastor.

We can get trapped into an "if-only" mentality, thinking that if we achieve certain dreams, we'll experience inner rest and happiness. 'If I go to the right school, then I'll feel good about myself.' 'If I get a certain position in the company, then I'll feel good about myself.' 'If I can buy a house, then I'll feel good about myself.' But each time our brain experiences a success, it moves the goalposts, and pushes us to want more.

The movie *Cool Runnings* is a story based on the Jamaican bobsled team that entered the 1988 Calgary Olympics. The night before the final competition, the captain Derice studied the bobsled course, believing that if he could just win Gold, his whole life would be successful. His coach said, 'Derice, a gold medal is a wonderful thing. But if you're not enough without it, you'll never be enough with it.'

If you've ever felt burdened to prove yourself or are looking for something to bring a lasting 'enough,' Jesus has some great news for you. In Matthew 11:28, He says, 'Come... and I will give you rest.' Literally, 'I will rest you.' He's not making a *demand*, but an *offer* to give us rest. But how? Jesus said by receiving His yoke and learning from Him. A 'yoke' is a wooden bar placed across the neck of an ox, enabling it to pull a heavy load.

When Jesus first spoke these words, most people in his first century world were living day-to-day in a farm-based subsistence economy. They felt weighted down about whether they would have enough food for the next day. Or they may have been worried about their children's health, since most newborns in the first century Roman empire didn't live to see the age of 20. Like people in the first century, we also have concerns about our finances or health matters, but *unlike* them, we also feel burdened over whether we've done enough, are achieving enough, or are good enough. So when Jesus said, 'Let me place my yoke upon you,' He went further and added, 'For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

What did Jesus mean by an 'easy yoke'? The context begins in verse 25 where Jesus celebrates the wonder of his Father's love. And so Jesus' yoke is the perfect love of his Father. When we wear the yoke of a perfect Father's love, our sense of 'enoughness' and the accompanying inner rest is something we *receive*, that's *gifted* to us, not from what we *achieve*.

How do we live with the Father's yoke of love? In his book, *Survival Guide for the Soul*, Pastor Ken describes practices that can help us wear the yoke of the Father's love.

Morning Meditation is a most powerful habit that awakens us to God's love. Sometimes when Pastor Ken wakes up, he feels anxious, burdened or depressed by all he has to do. On those days he breathes in slowly and deeply. Then he opens an app called *Centering Prayer*, and sets the timer for a certain number of minutes. When his to-do list comes back to mind, he takes a phrase from the Psalms like, 'Be still and know that I am God,' and repeats it when his mind wanders. When mental garbage surfaces—*anxiety, resentment or envy*—Pastor Ken lifts those up to God. When finished his meditation, he feels less burdened and more aware of Jesus' love throughout the day.

The Prayer of Gratitude. The Prayer of Examen was introduced by St. Ignatius of Loyola. The App, called *Reimagining the Examen*, prompts Pastor Ken to reflect on the past 24 hours and give thanks for two or three things. The effects of gratitude are long-lasting—we savour the good things in life and experience more peace and joy. How does this work? If you've ever been in the market for a car, say an Austin Mini, you start noticing Austin Minis everywhere! In the same way when you engage in gratitude, you start noticing more of God's good gifts. And when you associate them with God, you experience more of His love.

The gift of Sabbath enables us to physically work and live from a place of rest, rather than desperately needing to *find rest* from work. How so? This gift reminds us that our primary identity is as a beloved daughter or son of God. Even if we struggle, God doesn't love us any less. In fact, His love for us grows. Pastor Ken's young son Joey got into trouble at school and was pulled out of class. The anxious parents worried that he would fall behind. What would become of him? Even if he didn't become a worldly success, his parents' love for him increased as they felt more love for him in his struggle.

And so, in our relationship with God, we're empowered by a deep sense of God's rest and gratitude.

If the concept of wearing the yoke of a perfect Father who loves and cherishes you seems foreign, know that 2000 years ago God became a human in Jesus. He lived a perfect life and then died on a cross to absorb the penalty for your sins. You can turn from your sins to ask God to forgive you, free you from shame and make you his beloved child. No matter where you're feeling in relation to God, Jesus' words are for you: 'Come, all you who are weary and heavy laden.' As you accept the yoke of the Father's love, you will discover the warmth and shelter of God's love that will set you free.