

Some loads are too heavy to move or get out from under. What is the burden for a parent who has lost a child to death, or a child whose parents are too busy to hug and say, "I love you?" How intense is a struggle for a young woman living far away from family and friends or when a parent with a mortgage and kids in college loses a job?

How have and do you handle such heavy loads? And more importantly, do such moments undermine or strengthen your relationship of faith? How is one to find rest and peace when it is difficult to carry a burden any further?

Our culture has all sorts of gadgets and suggestions to help make life easier and give us more time to rest. Software supposedly makes bill paying, scheduling, and finding products online real time savers. iPhone and internet can access soothing music or meditation for whatever is ailing your spirit. And yet, even such searches create stress and often are temporary help, at best.

If someone assured you they could lighten your load and ease your burden, wouldn't you perk up and listen? Jesus said, "*Come to me (when you are tired from carrying more than you can handle) and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for my yoke is easy and my burden light.*"

What do you think about that. And remember, in Jesus' day there were no such things as movies, a 40-day work week, or vacations. People worked from sunup to sundown just to scratch out a living, and feared plagues, famines, and death. The intensity of life never ended, and yet he offered to bring peace. Who would ever refuse to allow someone to carry the load, if they really could pull it off?

Sounds nice, doesn't it? But what did Jesus mean by taking his yoke? There were two types of yokes in Jesus' day. One was a wooden plank, placed over the backs of two oxen, tying them together so that together they would pull equally on a wagon or plow. The other was a carved piece of wood, placed on one's shoulders to equally distribute the weight and balance of two buckets.

A yoke distributes a burden or weight and eases the effort needed to do what needs to be done. For a simple community of farmers this is a wonderful illustration to explain how Jesus' offers to help.

His promise is to help with weight limits that have been exceeded! His loving concern is to ease burdens that have stretched us to the limit. He offers to shift the burden. The burden still exists, but He says I will help!

Not only does he say he can help, but by explaining it is his yoke, he reveals he already is equipped for such a burden, and ready to start sharing our load. If our burden feels like 500 pounds on our back and we could probably handle only some of it, he says he will carry the rest. If we are frozen by whatever and can't even move, he says, "I will pull with you and get you moving!"

His yoke is his offer to tie himself to us forever. Even if we are coping, and capable, and doing well, his promise is to walk alongside should we suddenly exceed our limit. What

a change that makes as we face what we face, knowing Jesus not only understands our limits, but will overcome them.

It is like traveling late and night and finally reaching a rest stop and realizing it is open, and the highway exit offers exactly the service we are looking for. This is what Jesus means by saying he invites us to receive the rest stop we need.

We are too used to having someone say, "Call if you need anything?" And when you did, you realized they really didn't have the energy or time or gifts to help? Or someone has said, "I know the feeling," as if that would help and then walked away. Our earthly experiences with heavy loads aren't always great, and that is why God's loving offer to us is so out of this world.

As Jesus says, "my yoke," he reveals his mission. Before we were born, He lifted a yoke on his shoulders. Before we even lifted a finger, he already was carrying the burdens of sin and death. Anticipating the realities that would overwhelm us, Jesus (ahead of time) already started the heavy lifting. Such is the power of God's love for you! He offers to help with every burden. Every fear. Every loss. Every grief. Every moment of our living.

His promise has credibility because he has done what he says he will do. His manger was a yoke that tied him to you and me. He carried on his back the weight of an entire world as he was nailed to a yoke called the cross.

He yoked himself to the oppressive darkness called death and pulled life out of that infinite darkness. Because he has carried these burdens alone -- and triumphed -- how easy for him to deal with our personal situations and needs. He is in shape. He has power. His love is committed to our care and keeping.

So, the question no longer is "how much are you able to carry?" Or "what is your weight limit or breaking point?" For there is no weight or burden our loving God cannot handle, and when you are willing to let go, you will find what he means.

Several days ago, we remembered sacrifices that began this nation -- how others shared the burden and how their heavy lifting has given unbelievable gifts of freedom to all of us. In a more perfect way, Jesus lifts life out of death, for us, and says live now in freedom.

If you have played baseball, you know how much easier it is to catch a ball with a glove already broken in. Well, Jesus offers tools are worn with love and broken in by his blood, sweat and tears. When you go to a surgeon or a therapist for the first time, you don't want it to be their first time, right? In a most perfect way, Jesus offers us the experience of his passion and the skills of a God who has created a universe and conquered even death. His experience is our gift.

Where would you rather live -- struggling with a load that you just can't move or resting after having help in finishing the task? When Jesus promises us the gift of peace, what he is really talking about is the rest of body, mind and spirit that comes because he shares the burden of every weight, care, and concern, all from the gift of his love.

*"Come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, 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."*

There is a difference between leisure and rest, and too often our culture assumes they are both the same. But they are not, and we have become people accustomed to leisure who often don't know how to find true rest.

Jesus never promises burdens won't exist, but that whatever and whenever, we never again have to pull or carry or struggle alone! Now that in itself is a burden lifted! That is the gift of God's rest. And that alone brings true peace. Amen