

Growing Closer

Week 1: Relationship, Dummy

Matthew 11:28-30

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- June 2, 2024

We're going to start a series today called *Growing Closer*. And the series is about growing closer in our relationship with God. The series is going to look at what are called "the disciplines of the faith," the practices of Christianity. In church history sometimes this is referred to as practicing the presence of God. They are disciplines or practices like Bible reading, prayer, fasting, solitude, silence, worship. Mark your calendar—we thought when we talk about worship we should do something about it, so June 30 we will have a night of worship this summer. June 30—mark your calendar. It will be an enjoyable time together.

So, as we're working through these things, you need to foremost—that's what we're going to do today, look at maybe the slab, what we build these disciplines and practices upon, and the purpose of them—that's the point. The purpose of the disciplines is to have a deepening relationship with God. I mean, we're going to learn new skills, some of us. Some of us will just be fine-tuning the ones that we have. That's awesome.

When we were looking at the series itself, we thought, *A lot of people in this audience are practicing these already*. And we just thought, *Well, that's okay. We can help them*. Sometimes the best thing to do is just change the rhythm a little bit, maybe do it from a different angle. Then it adds a fresh, new look at things.

These are the fundamentals. These are the basics. And by the way, if you perfect the basics of various disciplines, like sports, you just do the fundamentals. You could find yourself on the center court of Wimbledon or wearing some green golf jacket. You don't have to be fancy; just good.

Others of you, when you hear that we're going to do a series all summer long about the disciplines of the faith, you think, *Oh, no, not again. I did those. It didn't work. It wasn't like it was a labor of love. It was just labor*. And I think the disciplines are rightly named. You know, the disciplines are great if you're disciplined. Me? Not so much. I mean, I'm kind of

disciplined—I don't know. But I understand. They don't work. And that's what we're going to talk about today: why don't they work?

Here's the primary truth. And I come to this through my own personal experience and that of a lot of people around me. But I want you to see that it's bigger than that: it's throughout the entire Bible. It is in the history of mankind. There is one reason why you can do these things and not have fruit to show for it. There's this single critical factor that shows that no matter how hard you try, it won't help you become like Christ in all of life. There's one usual suspect that shows up every time. And the goals and the habits end up making it worse.

Here it is. People that do the habits aren't doing them wrong; they're not doing them for the right reason. Shakespeare: "The motive makes it so." If the purpose of the discipline is lost and the motives aren't what they are to be, it short circuits the effectiveness of the disciplines themselves. They won't work. They can't work.

Here's the thing. We sabotage it all the time. We sabotage the motive. So, I thought today we'd maybe try to keep things simple and memorable. Let's make a memory, Grace. Let's try to remember this one thing before we go on to all the different ways that are means to know God more intimately. What is the purpose for the practice of the disciplines? What is the "why" of the disciplines? Here it comes, folks. It's relationship, stupid. Now in my house "stupid" is a cuss word, so we're going to take the edge off that a little bit. Let me try this a second time. Why do we do the rhythms of the faith? It's relationship, dummy. We're just going to say "dummy" instead. To not know or to forget that you're out to deepen your relationship with God—if that's lost, that's the thing. It has been and always will be the single issue or consequence in practicing the disciplines. If you don't know or you forget that you're out to deepen your relationship with God Almighty, that has been and will always be the single issue or consequence when practicing the practices.

It transcends human history—all cultures, all times, everywhere. Can I prove it to you? When Jesus comes and walks the planet Earth, here's a question. Who did the best job of practicing the disciplines of the faith? I mean, who looked the most like Jesus in His lifestyle? What group of people could keep up with Jesus in prayer, fasting, giving, worship—whatever it might be? I mean, not just the amount of time, but in technique and intensity and frequency. Who could keep up with Jesus in the disciplines of the faith? The religious leaders. How did that work

for them? Umm... I think it's an eternal, epic fail. It's the great illusion. And here's the thing. It's not what they were doing; it's why they were doing it. It was the reason that they did it.

No one did a better job of the disciplines than the greatest offenders of the disciplines. It's not the disciplines' fault; it's the motive. And that's why you see throughout the Gospels, Jesus saying in some version or the other to these religious leaders, *It's relationship, dummy*.

But it's not just the religious leaders. Here's proof number two. When Jesus is talking to any and all hopeful followers of Jehovah, He comes as one of His offices as prophet, priest, and king. The prophet speaks for God. He's going to tell people, *This is how you should live*. He does that whenever He teaches, but certainly in the single most famous sermon that's ever been given, called "The Sermon on the Mount" or "The Sermon on the Hill." And guess what? Jesus talks about the disciplines, the disciplines that we're going to be talking about. He's working through the practices. And He comes in and He says, *It's not so much how you're doing it; it's why you're doing it*. In Matthew 6 He's literally going through the disciplines like it's a summer series for them. And He says, *When you give, give for the right motive. Remember the why*. He says, *When you pray, pray for the right motive. Remember why*. Hey, you guys, *when you're fasting, you've got to do it for the right motive. You've got to know why*.

What's the why? Jesus says, *It's relationship, dummy*.

When Jesus teaches on the disciplines, it's two percent how you do it, and it's ninety-eight percent motive. It's why you're doing it. Because it won't work if you don't get the motive right. It breaks it.

So, He talked to the religious leaders that way. He talked to the masses of people like that. I'm going to look at a passage today very specifically, and this is the very point of it. Now this is one of the most famous invitations that Jesus gives, and most of you actually know this passage. You might have even memorized it because it's so endearing. Because Jesus is giving this heartfelt, welcoming "Come unto me." And the point of it is twofold. One, it's this active pursuit of God to have an intimate relationship with you. And the second part is that He's saying it's the only motive that works—the relationship part. Anything else is going to hurt you.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ 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.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Here's the passage—Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus says, “Come to me, all of you, all who labor 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.”

Look at the passage and answer the question. Here's the question. What is the problem that Jesus is solving? What is the ailment that He's coming and saying, *I have a cure for that?* It's restlessness. Rest is used twice here. *You want rest? I can give you rest. I can give you rest for the soul.* So, the problem is restlessness. What are we getting rest from? That's the key to the passage. What is Jesus offering this heartfelt cure for? What's the rest from?

Here's the thing. The primary application of Jesus giving rest for the soul here is not rest from difficult circumstances in life. It's not when we find ourselves being ground up and powdered in the crucible of life choices or just life. It's not circumstantial. That's true, but that's not what He's talking about. The concepts of this passage are clear in the preceding passages and definitely in the next chapter, chapter 12, verse 1 and on. What He's asking people is, *Hey, you want a release from this?* His loving invitation is to religious leaders and to regular followers, anybody and everybody, to all people He says this: *Are you worn down by religion?* Jesus is coming here and saying, *Are you heavy laden by the disciplines? Have you grown weary of practicing the presence of God?* That's what He's giving an answer to. This restlessness is about this burden that we carry, the one He's referring to.

And throughout His teaching, when Jesus refers to this burden that He's releasing us from, it's the burden of trying to prove to God your worth. The burden is earning acceptance. In Matthew 23 He's using almost the exact same vocabulary when He's talking about the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He says, *You guys are heaping heavy burdens upon the shoulders of people with all the rules that you have about having close proximity to God, trying to prove yourself to God.* It's a constant theme.

Acts 15:10

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved ...

In the early Church, when the Church was brand new, in Acts 15 they have non-Jewish people become followers of Jesus and they have to figure out what it means to be a follower of Jesus. And a number of people say, *Well, let's give them a bunch of rules. Let's have them prove themselves to God.* And in Acts 15 this is the response: “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of these new disciples a yoke”—there’s the word—“that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved ...”

They try to inflict a merit-based system of approval, and the apostles say, *No, we're not going back there again.* The motive of trying to prove yourself to God and others is this spiritual anxiety that causes Jesus to say, *Anybody need a break from that?*

In this famous passage—“All who are weary ...”—the weariness is spiritual weariness. “All who are restless ...” is a spiritual restlessness, that you have to prove yourself to God and try to earn other people’s respect. And it’s easy to project that message on just that audience, but that’s not the case. It’s not just Jewish people living under the law. He says, “If anyone is burdened” that way. Every religion in the world has this intuitive sense of duty-based merit—earn your way. And Jesus says, *That's going to destroy you.* That merit-based stuff has two destinations. You’re either going to be so self-righteous and proud because you’re doing okay, according to you; or you’re so guilt and shame-ridden that you can’t live with yourself.

But it’s not just in the context of the religious community—any and all religions. He would speak to the secular person that maybe doesn’t even believe or isn’t sure if there’s a certain god. Because the nature of man ... we’re in the image of God, and because of that, we have the law written in our heart. So, wherever you go, anytime, any culture, any place in the world, you can find this natural law that’s speaking to us. And we know intuitively we’re to be

honest. We know instinctively that we should be loving. There's a moral code that's in us. That's one.

Part two of it is we know we're not living up to that. And we have to do something about that higher call of absolutes that we keep missing. And the go-to, automatic response of how to get well from that illness is that we're going to earn our way out of here. We're going to work on it. We're going to prove ourselves. We're going to earn it. Other people will like the way we look. Maybe God Almighty will as well.

And you can see that in the lives, obviously, of people who are perfectionists or workaholics, because they can pedal faster than some of us. But even people who don't have that temperament, underneath they're still trying to figure out a way. We're just trying to figure out a way to prove ourselves. And Jesus comes and say, *You know, it's exhausting, isn't it? Your souls will never find rest with that value system, that worldview, that way to keep score.*

So, listen, friends. While that secondary application of "life gets hard and He's there for you" is true, listen to what He's talking about in this story: that deep-seeded guilt and anxiety and trying to prove yourself over and over again, that just leads to shame or some kind of attitude of judgment—Jesus says, *I can take that from you.* It's such a kind-hearted "Come unto me" and "with me you're going to find rest." *I've got a cure for that.*

Look how He does that. Let's take a closer look at the passage and we'll see how Jesus gives us this rest. The first thing that needs to be understood is (and it's somewhat stating the obvious) that everybody has a yoke already. So, He says, "You are weary and heavy laden"—that's because we're carrying a yoke. And then He's going to say, "Well, I have a yoke—you ought to give it a try." So, it's not about whether you have a yoke or not. Basically (here's the hard part), life is hard. There. So, choose your yoke. Jesus is saying, *You want to trade yokes?* Everybody's getting a yoke. If you're looking for a place to go where there are no yokes, that's not available here. But anyway, that's the first point.

The second one is, what is a yoke anyway? We're a bunch of city people. That goes over the fireplace in some campsite, right? Here's a yoke. This is just 101 stuff. A yoke is this giant beam that goes across, and it's made to fit around the shoulders of a beast of burden.



If you put two together, you get four times the power. And so, a farmer or a rancher would put two cows, bulls, whatever—horses—strapped in.



They have those iron rings underneath that are supposed to go around the neck. They're not pulling from the neck, they're pulling from their shoulders. And you want two because of the power. But you want them to be equally yoked so that they're pulling at the same pace, same

strength. If you put a bull next to a cat, you know, that bull doesn't like that. The cat's not going to do anything anyway. And it's going to pull your burden anywhere it wants to. Anyway, never mind the cat thing, but that's why you want to be equally yoked. That's part of the illustration here. Jesus is saying, *You want to wear my yoke. I'll pull you at the pace you're supposed to run. And we'll be together.*

Think about that. Jesus is saying, *Hey, why don't we get harnessed together, just the two of us, for life. How does that sound? It won't crush you. We'll do this the right way.*

So, He says in verse 28, *Anyone, everyone, are you weary and heavy laden?* And then here's what He offers. *How about you leave that yoke of approval by merit?* He says, *Why don't you take my yoke?* The personal pronoun is the emphasis. "Take my yoke upon you. And you can learn from me. I'm gentle and I'm lowly in heart. And you'll find rest for your soul there. My yoke is easy. My burden is light." *You want to trade yokes?* That's what Jesus is saying.

With your yoke you have to prove yourself. There's a word for it: slavery. You're a slave unto God, you're a slave to your fellow men, to whatever they say is the appropriate standard. You answer to them.

Or, Jesus says, *Why don't you take my yoke and we pull through life together? You don't have to prove yourself. You don't have to prove yourself to others. You don't have to be overworked, overcommitted.* Why are you overworked and overcommitted? Have you thought about that? Why are you overworked and overcommitted? So that somebody approves of you. Why don't you leave that yoke somewhere else? You don't have to prove yourself to God Almighty. You don't have to show Him that you're a good provider for your house. You don't have to show Him that you're the perfect mom. You just get in that harness with Him and enjoy who you're with. It is so easy for us to say, *Oh, yeah, I am absolutely saved by grace and by grace alone. And now I'm going to prove to God that it was worth it, and maybe He'll like me better.*

Here's what I want us to do right now. Let's just visualize this for a second. Literally, in a beast of burden's harness, two rings. It's Jesus the Christ and you. I mean, think about what that would be like, for life. And you're pulling together, and you pull ahead, and He just looks ... think about it ... you're literally right next to Him. He just looks at you as if to say, *What are you doing? Where are you going? Oh ... you think you have to show me, right? No, no, I'll set the pace. It's going to be faster than you want sometimes, slower than you want sometimes. But*

you're already with me. And I love you. And I enjoy you. So, how about you just rest while we pull through life together?

Think about what that would be like, to be literally harnessed to Him.

Look at what kind of yokemate Jesus is. This is one of the few passages in the Bible where Jesus identifies the nature of His soul. He says, "I am gentle." *I'm not a perfectionist. I'm not waiting to count the things that you've done wrong or the things that you missed that you should have done.*

And then He says this: "I am lowly of heart." Your yokemate says, *I am humble. Not proud. I'm not judgmental. I think you're really going to like being yoked to me.*

And because He's humble and gentle, it says that your soul will have rest. And your soul will have rest because of the spiritual nature of why we're restless. We try to earn approval from God. *Once you finally accept that I accept you, then you're going to find yourself at peace, because you can't prove yourself to me.*

Watch this conversation. You're there pulling, huffing and puffing, and He says, *What's all that about? You can't prove yourself to me. And here's why. I know everything about you. I know the depths of evil within your dark soul in places that you are too insecure to investigate. And I have been there, and I said, "We're good." Now you want to pull with me, or do you want to go back to that old yoke? You can't prove anything to Him. And that's just like, Relax, that would cause you to say, Wow.*

Let's do a little drill. Let's put our hands out and our palms up. Let's try this. Who would you be if in the subatomic recesses of your spirit you sincerely believed, absolutely, that the Creator of the universe, God Almighty, accepts you, loves you, and enjoys you, no matter what, even if you did nothing? Receive that. Receive that and say, *I belong to God and He belongs to me.* Hear God's voice say, *This is the yoke we're speaking of.* Receive that yoke of absolute acceptance. Who would you be? You wouldn't care about what people thought about where you live or what you drove or if you got a promotion or if you put on five pounds or if your kid acted up at the playground. You wouldn't care. Because you have this other thing, this easy yoke.

Jesus says, "My yoke is easy. My burden is light. And it will give your soul rest." Amen.

So, that's the passage. Let's circle all the way back around. Why do we bring this up? Here's why we brought this up. Because this fact is to be feared: that the primary expression of our sin is that we forget or ignore why we are to do good, and then we just end up wrecking it by

ruining the motive. We've got to stay with "Relationship, dummy," or else we go straight to the old yoke system and we're trying to prove to God by doing the very same disciplines, and those very same disciplines become counterproductive. I'm trying to show you it is the nature of a bent soul to take good relational practices and turn them into laws and wreck everything. Because it's relationship, stupid.

How many times have I wrecked a vacation and I wish someone would have given me a post-it note and said, *It's relationship, dummy*. Or does your house have to be perfectly clean? *It's relationship, dummy. Remember?*

Here's another way of looking at how the motive makes it so. It purifies it or it ruins it. It's the fuel you run on. I just realized two days ago—I had this epiphany in the middle of the afternoon—I think I forgot to add oil to my gas for my two-stroke engines (I do my own yard work—I don't know if I've ever told you that, but I do). Anyway, I've got three really awesome ECHO tools, and I hope they don't break. They've been running great. When you run it without the oil it runs great hot. As a matter of fact, it runs so hot it melts the piston inside the head. So, that's running on the wrong fuel.

When you run on the wrong fuel in life, the same thing happens. Sometimes you can get what you want, but you don't like what you get when you get there.

I met a beautiful woman two weeks ago. And she had some theological, psychological issues, and we were talking about it. And when she told her story, I said, "You're like a two percenter. Why are you even functional? You should be washed up somewhere in a really bad way in light of your background."

And she said, "No, no, I have a happy place to work and I'm making money and I have a wonderful husband and I have three children that I love—they're little bitty."

And I said, "Yeah, but how did you overcome?"

She said, "Oh, I wanted to make sure that the people who tried to ruin my life as a child would never see me fail. And I worked harder than anyone else. Anger—I've been running on anger."

And I said, "Oh, have you?"

She said, "Yeah."

I said, "Here's a song I quote a lot. 'Anger's crude, but it's a power we can draw upon if it fuels the right machine.'"

She said, “Yeah. Anger that fuels the right machine—ambition, family, all that.”

I said, “Wait, the song doesn’t end there. It says, ‘But then when you tried to love, you didn’t know how.’”

She said, “That’s why we’re talking today. I don’t know how to love. I know how to rage.”

Running on the wrong fuel ... and Jesus would say to this woman, *Hey, are you growing weary of doing the right things on the wrong fuel? Come unto me, and I can have you doing the right things for a whole different motive. Unconditional acceptance, unrelenting love—do you want some of that? My yoke?*

Here’s the primary application. Before we learn another thing about how to do relational practices, this is it, the first discipline in practicing and growing closer to God. You’ve got to think about what you think about. You have to ask yourself, *Why am I doing this particular discipline?* When you do—I don’t know—an act of service and nobody says thank you and you kind of get a little bit riled—that’s not why you did it. You didn’t do it for the thank you. You did it for a growing relationship with God. You do that when you’re praying and God says no. *Wait, I didn’t pray to hear a no.*

It’s going to help us understand this: it’s relationship, dummy. As we go through the whole series together, we need to remember this; that turning relational work into law is the single easiest mission drift known to mankind. Let me say it again. Just turning relationship work into a law is the single easiest mission drift known to mankind. I’m telling you, it happens everywhere all the time if you just look around. We take a set of three things and say, *Here, let’s do these three things together*, and we turn them into a rule, and then the rules either make us arrogant or shame-filled with regret.

Let me tell you how it’s in the Bible from cover to cover. I took a class in 2015 on the Book of Deuteronomy. It was a graduate class by one of the best guys in the country, Daniel Block. And it’s on Deuteronomy. And I don’t know if you know, but the word “deuteronomy” literally translates as “second law.” So, we’re going through the Book of Deuteronomy together and his theme of the entire teaching series was this: he ended pretty much every lecture with, “We’re missing it. We’re completely missing it.” The Book of Deuteronomy is *Relationship, dummy*. We named the book “Second Law.” That’s not the name of the book in Hebrew. The name of the book is “These Are the Words.” But we turned it into a book of laws.

And the name of the book, by the way, that he wrote, and the name of the class, was “The Gospel According to Moses.” But we turned it into a rule book and wrecked it. We spent a whole lecture on the name of God. He said, “Watch this. You know, the whole story up to this point is God revealing himself to this one group of people, and He’s revealing himself by giving them His name, His formal name. *My name is Yahweh. Let’s get together. Let’s have a relationship. You are mine and I am yours.*”

And then the third commandment comes along and it says “Don’t use my name recklessly or disrespectfully.” And the Jews say, “Okay, we can take that and make it a law. We won’t even say Your name.” And again, this professor is saying, “ ‘You won’t say my name?’ Can you imagine walking into a relationship with your husband or wife and you say, ‘Hey, I want to know you. My name is Matt.’

“ ‘Okay, but I’m not going to say your name. I respect you that much.’

“ ‘But how can we—what?’

“So they say, ‘Sure, we’re not going to say Your name, we’re not going to write Your name.’

“And Yahweh says, ‘Well, then why would I give you my name?’ It’s relationship, dummy.”

We just do that, and we do it well. We take relationship words and turn them into laws and ruin them. It’s all about relationship.

Hey, in closing, let me give you a picture. How do we look at the disciplines in the context of love and relationship as opposed to duty and rules? Let me show you how it can still work, but it’s not the same kind of work. I want to paint a little picture so you can say, *Oh, I get it now.*

So, watch this. I hope this works. Can you imagine somebody in Austin who is maybe a hero to you or you want to be groupie for? Go back to your fourteen-year-old self and say, *I’m a groupie. I’m going to be a groupie to this person.* And the point of this goal as a groupie person is that you’re going to want to meet this person and you’re maybe going to want to befriend this person, and maybe they’ll be friends with you, and you’ll have a relationship. That’s the goal. Okay, can you think of that person? We’ll name them Skylar, if it’s a girl or a guy—whatever you want to do.

Watch this—here’s how the story unfolds. You find out Skylar’s calendar. So, what would you do about your hero’s calendar? Oh, yeah, he’s going to attend Camp Gladiator five days a week at 6:00 in the morning. And so are you. Oh, hey, look at you.

And then he goes to Chick-Fil-A after that, so you go to Chick-Fil-A. He washes his car every Wednesday at 9:30. And look at you sitting out waiting for him or her to show. *Hey, is it Skylar? Is that your name? I can’t remember, superhero/sportsman/celebrity person that I want to know.*

On Sundays he or she goes to fly kites, and you make sure you’re at the right park at the right time.

You’re three weeks into this thing and Skylar’s saying, I get it. So, Skylar comes over and says, “What’s going on? We seem to have a lot of overlap.”

“I kind of think we do, don’t we? Funny that would happen. Anyway, I was wondering, Skylar, if you could talk with me every once in a while and spend time with me, maybe be friends.”

Skylar says, “Well, sure. I’d like that. I’d like that a lot.”

Then you say, “Well, I’d love to spend a lot of time with you.”

Skylar says, “Sure. Here’s how it works. I work out from 6:00 to 7:00 five days a week. Let’s do that. And then we can go to Chick-Fil-A after that. On Wednesdays I wash my car. Want to come join me? And then maybe fly a kite once a week, just for fun.”

And you say, “You bet.”

You’re doing all these things that are work, but the work is pointing to a relationship, and it’s deepening that relationship, and it’s what Skylar was doing anyway.

Can you see the jump? What if you were a Jesus groupie? What if you wanted to have a long lasting, deepening relationship with Jesus Christ? And you followed Him around, you got hold of His calendar, and then you finally met Him, and you said, “Will you spend time with me?”

“Yeah.”

“Can we get to know each other?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, what should we do?”

He says, “Well, you need to be yoked to me. But here’s my schedule. Later on this week I’ll be serving people. So, if you come to serve with me, we can know more about each other. And then later I’m going to be doing acts of generosity, because that’s what I do anyway. So, why don’t you do acts of generosity, and then we can develop our relationship. Have you read about or seen my prayer life? Every day I’m involved in prayer because I want to know what the Father’s will is and I want to be empowered by the Spirit so that we might do great things for the glory of God the Father. Maybe you could join me in prayer. This is what I’m doing anyway.”

You see? It’s labor and work if you’re in slavery. But if it’s in a relationship, you’re hanging out. So, everything we look at doing in the next several weeks together, could we look at it all in the context of being Jesus’ groupie? Because that’s where He is. Let’s go where He is—worship, fasting, solitude, silence, generosity, prayer. Because if you do that long enough, you’re going to find yourself acting like Jesus, speaking like Jesus, and enjoying Jesus in a new and intimate way.

The foundation is that motive is everything. And the motive is relationship, dummy. Let’s get that part right, okay?

Let’s pray.

And then Jesus said to you, “So, are you weary? Are you kind of tired of this other thing? You want some rest? You want to try my yoke? I think it will look good on you. Why don’t you try my yoke and learn from me. I’m gentle, I’m humble, and I’ll give your soul rest. My yoke is easy. My burden is light.”

Lord, I’d just ask that every soul that hears the voice of this invitation would receive You in joy for who You are, for Your absolute and complete acceptance; that we’d find ourselves confessing in shame that we’re trying to prove ourselves to You, and that You would bless us with a church of people who are accepting, open and loving; that we would express our love for others the way You love us.

Let us be evangelists for this yoke—Your yoke—and let the world know that there’s another way to live. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.