

“COME TO ME – SHATTERED & BROKEN”

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Ash Wednesday**Text: Matthew 11:28-30 NLT****God’s Word: Psalm 51**

In 1989, a musician named Bill Withers wrote and recorded a song entitled *“Lean on Me.”* I’d imagine most of us have heard it before; it’s been very popular for the past 30 plus years. And its popularity is due not only to its catchy melody—one that might be running through your head right now—the song also deals with a topic that applies to all people of every generation: *“We need someone to lean on.”*

And so Bill Withers sings: *“Lean on me, when you’re not strong, and I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you to carry on, for it won’t be long, til I’m going to need somebody to lean on.”*

We need people to go to and talk to. We need people who will listen to us and help us. We need people to lend us a hand when we can’t do it on our own and to lift us up when we are down. That’s why the song *“Lean on Me”* still strikes such a chord with so many people today.

But leaning on someone else doesn’t always work, does it? It’s great to have those people in our lives that we can count on, but sometimes they aren’t strong enough and sometimes they aren’t smart enough and sometimes they aren’t stable enough.

I mean, they are human beings as well. And all human beings have limitations. We are all in the same boat. None of us have all the answers. None of us are gods.

Bill Withers encourages his friends: *“Just call on me, brother, when you need a hand. We all need somebody to lean on. I just might have a problem that you understand. We all need somebody to lean on.”* Sadly, this doesn’t always solve our problems.

Long before Bill Withers put his idea to music, Jesus Himself said words that are very similar, but much more powerful: *“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 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.”*

Life and stress...they go hand in hand. We will all experience this. There is no getting around it. Many of us turn to food as a way of coping with stress. Others use drugs. Some turn to alcohol. Some burn the midnight oil surfing the internet and pay for it the next day because they haven't had enough sleep. Ultimately, the only way to find the rest we need is to turn to Jesus.

A yoke is a wooden instrument that yoked two oxen together and made them a team. And Jesus is saying: "Be my teammate and together we will pull the load. Together we will deal with the stresses of life. Together we will carry your Cross. Together we will lift your burdens and help lift the burdens of others. Together we will be victorious over those things that seek to destroy you. Together we will live the life you have been created to live."

Being yoked with Jesus means that we are in a relationship with Him where we have the opportunity to learn from Him the art of gentleness, warmth, love and assurance. Being yoked with Jesus means to walk with Him and do the things He does—to be humble, putting the cares and needs of others before our own.

And in this relationship with Christ we find life—eternal life and life abundant. We experience true freedom because we no longer need to go it alone. We no longer need to be "looking out for number 1." We no longer have to be in competition with others or worry about what other people think about us.

Because, when we are walking with Jesus Christ—we are too concerned about the feelings, the well-being and the salvation of our fellow human beings...that we don't have time to be all wrapped up in self. And when we are all wrapped up in self—that is a terrible burden indeed! It's a burden no one can carry.

"Come to me," says Jesus. "Come to me with anything that wears you down. Come to me with any burden on your heart. Come to me and I will give you rest."

Not only is a yoke a wooden instrument that was used in farming. The term was also often used to refer to the task of obedience to the Torah. Later in Matthew, Jesus has some hard words for the religious leaders of His time. He says that they *"tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other peoples' shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."*

The religion of Jesus' day was based on rules and regulations. It was a weight and a burden that was loaded onto peoples' shoulders. The Pharisees—the leading sect of Jesus' time—had 600 rules and regulations having to do with just about every aspect of life. They made people feel guilty and “not good enough” as no one was able to follow all the rules to a “T.”

Jesus came teaching the “heart of the Law” which is to love God and Neighbor. He taught people not to judge one another. He said that “God desires mercy, not sacrifice.” And He told folks over and over again how much God loves us.

And then, to prove the full-extent of God's love and to save us from our sins—Jesus went to die on the Cross—only to rise again, defeating sin and death and the Law that stood against us once and for all.

A survey of college students honed in on one thing most of them could agree on. The majority of them were convinced that God was terribly disappointed with them. That is the kind of thing Jesus came to erase.

So many of us deal with feelings of “I'm not good enough for God to love me.” And so, we try all the more to be some kind of “perfect person”—which is an impossible task. And the more we try the more disillusioned and depressed we get until...perhaps, we finally give up.

I remember a time when I truly felt like I had missed the mark with God. I felt as if I had messed my life up beyond repair and I would never be forgiven. And it's easy to fall into this trap.

Many of us think of God as being some divine Policeman who is watching our every move...and if we happen to step out of line...which we will since everyone does...God will arrest us or think badly about us or no longer love us.

But that is not what God is like; that is not Who God is. And Jesus came to show us Who God really is. In the verse right before our Scripture Lesson for this evening Jesus says: *“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.”*

When we look to Jesus we see God. And Jesus is compassionate, merciful, unconditionally loving, and forgiving. I mean, just look at the folks who Jesus called to

become His disciples. Some of them were considered the very worst of sinners. And yet, they were Jesus' closest friends. What more proof do we need that God loves us?

When I felt my worst, as far as being too bad a sinner for Christ to forgive and love I came across these words from Colossians 2:13-17: *"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."*

Jesus died for us once and for all. He died to forgive us. He died to set us free from sin and self-hatred. He died so that we may live—and live abundant, fruitful lives in Him.

And so He calls us. He calls those of us who are carrying enormous burdens around...He calls us during times of trial and trauma...He calls us as we mourn...He calls us from our self-destruction...He calls us as we are stressed out and burned out...He calls us saying, *"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 I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yolk is easy and my burden is light."*

And if we heed His call we learn that the yoke Jesus gives us is not packed with the dead weight of sin. Instead, it is the yoke of Christian freedom, the joy of serving Him, the thrill of helping others, the opportunity to live a life of praise and thankfulness instead of living a life of fear and impossible obligations.

We are not meant to go through this life, struggling on our own. So, let's not try. Don't attempt to just suck it up and bear down and get through the pain and the stress and the trauma of this world by yourself. You can't do it. I can't do it. We've all got to find someone to lean on. And there is no person on earth who is strong enough to hold us up.

But Jesus is. He is our Savior. He is our Foundation that will never crack. He is our Rock that will never give way. He is our God Who is right here every day and will never stop calling out in love: "Come to me." Won't you come to Him today, right now?

Amen.