

WHEN THINGS GET BAD

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Sometimes, things get bad.

Sometimes, things get bad as the natural consequence of choices we have made. We usually have a hunch about this (AKA the Holy Spirit convicts us). But we may not want to listen, or even be able to hear it yet. Then, things get really bad. If we do listen, we'll have a chance to repent and repair the damage. If not, then things could get worse, or the damage could become permanent.

Sometimes, things get bad as the natural result of *other* people's choices. We may not have a clue about this, or we may be sure of it. But our strong tendency to blame others for the mess we're in needs to be questioned and examined, if we have the courage for it, because what others choose is really beyond our control. If that's the case, we need grace to endure, so we do not grow bitter.

Some people (the ones who imagine they can control everything) think endurance is for wimps and should be avoided whenever possible. They think that endurance is simply marking time while accomplishing nothing. But the Scriptures teach that *"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love"* (Romans 5:3-5.)

Sometimes, there's no rhyme or reason to it; bad things just happen.

Now, then... whether this difficult thing you're facing is your fault, or someone else's fault, or no one's fault at all, the question remains, "What should I do about it?" Maybe, repent. Or, maybe, patiently endure, while you pray. But there is one answer that rises above all others, and encompasses all others, and it is this:

Matthew 11:28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Jesus answered three vital questions for us:

1. When things get bad, *who* do you go to? "Come to Me."
2. When things get bad, *what* do you do? "Take My yoke upon you."
3. When things get bad, *how* do you grow? "Let Me teach you."

Come To Me

When things get bad, we all need some help. We all need someone to help us. We always need encouragement. We usually need prayer. We may need advice. Why is it, then, that we often turn away from others, instead of reaching out to them? In a word, pride.

When things get bad, we immediately do a mental comparison of our situation with that of other people. Are we doing worse than others, or better?

If everyone is going through the same thing, as in a major calamity, pride tells us, "Don't bother them, they've got enough to handle on their own."

If others are doing better than us, pride tells us, "Don't bother them, you'll just bring them down."

If others are doing worse than us, pride tells us, "Don't bother them, they'll just bring you down."

Are you going to listen to your pride, or will you listen to your Lord? Jesus says, "Come to Me." What can Jesus do for you?

If the mess is a result of your own choices, pride will tell you, "Jesus won't do anything for you. You made your own bed; now, lie in it."

If the mess is a result of other people's choices, pride will tell you, "Jesus can't do anything for you; it's that other person's fault."

If the mess is no one's fault, pride will tell you, "Jesus doesn't want to help you; He's messing with you."

But Jesus patiently urges you, "Come to Me." If He's responsible, He can help you. If others are responsible, He can shield you. If you're responsible, He will forgive you. Go to Him. Don't hesitate; *run* to Him.

There are many songs of worship that express this theme of "running" to Jesus, in order to help us overcome a very human hesitation, due to pride. If you must, drag yourself to Him. But if you can, RUN to Him.

When you come to Jesus, what can you expect?

First, He will receive you; He will never reject you. He said, "*The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out*" (John 6:37).

Second, He will listen to you. As the psalmist acknowledged, *“Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!”* (Psalm 116:2).

Third, He knows what to do for you. If you need it, He will forgive you. He will counsel you. He will encourage you. He will empower you. He will guide you. He will accompany you through whatever comes next.

When things get bad, come to Jesus.

Take My Yoke

When things get bad, beware the tendency to withdraw and isolate. There’s always something you can do. You may not be able to immediately remedy the situation, but you can do something. But what?

Jesus said, *“Take My yoke upon you.”*

A yoke is an instrument (usually of wood) to join two animals together to share a load. Jesus is inviting you to let Him join you in bearing the load of your circumstances. Troubles shared are reduced by half. No one has said it better than wise King Solomon:

*Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.
10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.*

Don’t “fall alone.” Fall at the feet of Jesus Christ. Take His yoke on your shoulders.

When things get bad, Jesus will do the heavy lifting for you. He’ll help you to move forward, when you thought you couldn’t move at all. God has said, *“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand”* (Isaiah 41:10).

Taking Jesus’ yoke, means walking with Him every day. Talking with Him every day. About everything. He will listen, and He will respond. He said, *“There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth”* (John 16:12).

Walking in His yoke includes running every idea past Him. Telling Him all your hopes and dreams. Asking Him all your questions.

But remember this, when Jesus is in the yoke with you, you will also be in the yoke with Him. You are the weaker member of that team, so the yoke will follow Jesus' direction. He has not come alongside you to follow you in your weakness, but to lead you in His strength. He has not come alongside to support your selfishness, but to reveal His selflessness.

Taking on His yoke means following His lead, moving according to His direction, doing things His way. Taking on the yoke of Jesus is tantamount to saying, "I haven't done well, just going where I wanted to go and doing things the way I wanted to do them. I choose to walk with Jesus now and from now on. Where He walks, I will walk. His speed will be my new pace. His goal will become my aim. As long as I am with Him, He will always be with me. He will never abandon me."

Jesus' amazing promise is this: "*My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" Didn't He also say, "*In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world*" (John 16:33)? Walking with Jesus may look daunting from the outside, looking in, but it's actually easier than the weight you will bear if you walk alone.

When things get bad, don't cinch up your belt and go it alone, take Jesus' yoke upon you.

Let Me Teach

When things get bad, is all hope gone? Will the dawn of day ever return? How should I move forward? The gloom may be thick. The mess may be deep. You will need a very bright light to see your way through it.

Jesus said, "*Let Me teach you.*"

Teaching is a process of instruction. It is not the content of a book or lecture, but the learning experience of apprenticeship. It's the same concept as discipleship.

Matthew, John, Andrew, and Peter joined themselves to Jesus as His disciples. They got into the yoke with Him in order to learn from Him. Lacking the answers to life's biggest issues, they sought the wisdom that Jesus offered. They let Him teach them.

Do you *let* Jesus teach you? I ask this, because many people do not. Not just those who oppose Him or choose to follow some other path, but also many of those who call themselves Christians. You see, many people prefer their own level of knowledge to that of Jesus Christ. I know it may sound absurd to hear it said like that, but many people only appeal to Jesus for confirmation of their own preconceptions. If He offers a different point of view or another conclusion or an alternate plan of action—well, they just ignore it. By their actions, they prefer their own "wisdom."

So, I ask you again, when things get bad, do you *let* Jesus teach you? Do you let *Him* be your Teacher, your Guide—the One with all the knowledge and experience?

He holds special qualifications for this kind of trust: He is “*gentle and humble in heart.*” I have always wondered why some people prefer harsh, heavy-handed, and proud leaders. I think it is because the illusion of control appeals to them (in other words, they hope one day to wield such controlling influence over others, themselves).

Of course, gentleness and humility bring their own challenges. A gentle leader makes you think harder. Instead of just telling you what to do, he or she will illuminate your values and desires, forcing you to think about your choices and take full responsibility for your decisions. If, instead, they would just prophesy to you, then you can imagine that the responsibility for any error would be theirs.

A humble leader does not force his will upon you, because a humble person does not confuse his role with his personhood. Who you are under God’s anointing is not who you are; it is God’s power at work in you. To God belongs the glory. None of us is as good as our best day. And none of us is as bad as our worst day.

Jesus is both gentle and humble. But make no mistake about this: He is the Head of the Church and the Sovereign Lord of the universe. His breath can shake the mountains, and His word can calm the storm. When wicked men executed Him unjustly, He broke the chains of death and Hell and rose up from the dead. Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

Nevertheless, in the yoke with you, He will always be “gentle and humble.” That is His heart toward you, because He loves you.

Rest

And, as a result, when you come to Him and take His yoke upon your shoulders and let Him teach you, you will find rest for your souls.

Soul-rest is better than a long night’s sleep. Soul-rest is ease and readiness for whatever life brings your way.

It is satisfaction with less than we want.

It is generosity in a season of poverty.

It is steadiness when the ground is trembling.

It is presence of mind under threat or accusation.

It is peace in the midst of a raging storm.

It is confidence in the face of opposition.

It is joy in the midst of sorrow.

It is hope in the grip of pain.

Soul-rest is all that, and more. That is what Jesus gives.

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What should you do about it?

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Will you come?