

Rhythms of the Way

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Wayform number 7, Easy Yoke Rhythms of the Way. If you come around to the Shanks house, that is my house, on a Monday night, you might find a whole lot of activity happening in the garage, in what is affectionately known as the House of Pain.

A bunch of guys, up to 11 men, from teenage through to age 60 and every decade in between, meet at my place on a Monday night to lift weights and do some exercise together. Sometimes we do a circuit.

On a circuit night, we've never finished without someone feeling like they're about to faint, and needing to lie down with their head low and feet high, which is my cue to break out the frosty fruit ice blocks or chewy snakes.

There is some technique to learn in doing the exercises. There's also some self-awareness if you're running out of puff, or your heart rate is maxing out, or you're getting lightheaded.

You need to take notice of the type of nutrition you've had that day, because it might have an effect on how you feel. Your level of fitness, even the sleep you've been getting will affect how well you can exercise.

Certainly the rest time between sets has a big effect on how well you will cope with the training.

I always say to someone starting out new, take it easy, pace yourself, or there's a good chance you'll end up out on the driveway with your head between your legs feeling ill. I can't help but think this picture is a lot like the way of the master.

It's a picture of our spiritual lives with the wrong coach. With the wrong coach, you can get messed up in life. With the wrong coach, you can get pretty darn sick.

So who is setting the rhythm of your life? Who is setting the cadence of work, rest, work, rest? Jesus says in Matthew 11, 28, 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. Jesus is saying following me involves learning the easy yoke rhythms of the way.

The yoke is an oxen's yoke. Jesus is saying, come to me, and like the older oxen, I'll teach you how fast to go, how to pull straight, and how to be productive in the work of your life. Jesus says this yoke is an easy one.

Hence, we are looking at easy yoke rhythms of the way. I'd like us to think about four key words in our consideration of the easy yoke. Unhurry, love, rest, and work.

So beginning with unhurry. Here's a quick test for fun. All you have to do is keep a score of which ones you say yes to, and which ones you would say no to.

So just count the yeses on your fingers. Are you often in a hurry, rushing from one thing to the next? Count it on your fingers, yes or no.

During a typical day, do you work with intensity on something that seems urgent? Number three. Do you tend to do two or three things at once to be more efficient?

Are you productive, busy, or active almost all the time? Number five. Do you regularly rely on caffeine to feel energetic and focused?

If you're not working on something, do you rely on stimulation from activity, entertainment, or noise? When you're resting, do you feel fidgety, pace, drum your fingers, tap your feet, or chew fast? If you're idle, do you feel guilty or restless?

When you're waiting, are you usually uncomfortably impatient? When you go to bed at night, do you typically think about all the things that you didn't get done and need to get done? When you go on holidays, do you feel empty, bored, or depressed?

Do you often have physical stress symptoms like gastric distress, rapid heartbeat, headaches, muscle pain, teeth grinding at night, and sleep problems?

If you have four or more, you might be on the way to what cardiologists Maya Friedman and Ray Rosenman coined to be hurry sickness. 21st century life has a vibe of hurry about it, and you may well have been swept up in the vibe.

There's not enough time to get everything done that needs to be done. It's the prevailing spirit of the age, busyness and hurry. Jesus said, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

It seems that this hurry sickness or hurry syndrome, constantly moving from one overwhelming state to another, might have been around back in the first century too.

The irony, of course, which has been pointed out ad nauseam, is that in our modern world, everything is designed to save us time. Everything is fast and immediate and accessible from the phones in our pockets, but we feel more stressed than ever.

I read recently from a respected social research company that the latest generation of new adults, known as Generation Z, or the Zoomers, though having a lower alcohol consumption and lower sexual promiscuity as teenagers, have higher anxiety than

any other generation and are more likely than any other generation to be sleep deprived. The generation who were raised on the immediacy of the internet have become in general very stressed.

Dallas Willard, the great thinker and writer on spiritual formation, was once asked by a pastor named John, What do I do to become more like Christ? What should I focus on? Dallas said, John, ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.

John was taking notes and famously he said, Okay, got that. What next? Unhurry.

Spiritual formation in the way of the master involves unhurrying your life. Unhurry. It's the way of the easy yoke.

Jesus didn't give a crash course in Christianity for his disciples. It was a three-year live-in apprenticeship, an unhurried course of training. How does your life look like right now regarding hurry?

Is it sustainable? Is the cadence of your life providing you space to spend unhurried time in the presence of God? Unhurried time with people who matter to you?

To truly unhurry is a profoundly impactful thing to do. When our eldest child was in year eight and our youngest of four in kindergarten, we decided to pull our kids out of school and home school them. We home schooled them for 11 years.

Home school done well isn't school at home on Zoom. It's a different type of education. It's unplugged from the system, though we were in fact registered.

Our kids could go to church on Sunday night because Monday morning had a different rhythm. Ever found that going on holidays takes a few days to unwind? In a similar way, it takes a few months to get the school system out of your system.

My wife is a school teacher and two of our grown up kids are teachers. So we're not anti the system, but I share our story as an example of unhurrying. Jesus said, all you who are weary and burdened, Jesus wants to give you rest.

Unhurry. Word number one. Word number two is love.

Love is an essential component of the easy yoke rhythms of the way. Have you realized that love moves slowly? 1 John 4, 8 says, God is love.

And that means since Jesus is God, Jesus is love. 1 Corinthians says, love is patient. Jesus is therefore patient.

Not just in dealing with others, he was patient in becoming the saviour of the world. He lived all of the minutes of his 33 years one by one. He didn't start his public ministry until 30 years of age.

We're not told much at all about his younger years, but we know he was a carpenter. These days, carpenter-builders can make a really great living, but not so much in the first century.

Jesus was a labourer, slowly fixing chairs, building tables, wooden structures, an honourable vocation, but not a fancy one. Jesus lived a patient, slow life because love moves slowly. Love endures and suffers long with people.

The Bible says love is not easily irritated or impulsive. Love is not in a hurry. Jesus had trained himself to live in God's presence at an unhurried pace.

The spiritual disciplines require time. Silence is not silent for a minute. It's a period of time.

Solitude isn't seconds. It's minutes and hours, maybe even days. Fasting takes time to go without multiple meals.

The strangest thing is that when the mechanical clock was first invented in the 11th century by a Benedictine monk, its purpose was to remind everyone to stop working and pray. Clocks were designed to limit work, not frame up a day of work.

They were designed to make time for prayer, which is part of a love relationship with God. How much of your life is lived under the tyranny of the urgent, the tyranny that clocks manage with the taskmaster's whip?

How much of genuine agape love, God-like love, is only experienced or shared in an unhurried space? How many of us feel loved when a person is looking over our shoulder, waiting for us to finish speaking?

Or as a child, who really appreciated mum or dad saying, sure, you've got my attention for the next 20 seconds? Love moves slowly. Lust, on the other hand, moves fast.

Greed moves fast. Phoniness moves expediently. The easy yoke rhythm of the way is a rhythm of unhurried love.

Do you love God slowly? Do you allow God to love you slowly? When Scripture says God demonstrates His love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly, that love arrived slowly.

It was given slowly. 33 years and then a slow death on a cross. Unhurry, love.

And our third word is rest. Take my yoke upon you, Jesus said, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. I began by sharing about the guys lifting weights in my garage.

People get lightheaded when they neglect to rest. The same is true in life.

Very frequently a person who finds themselves in a particular way of life which is sinful will identify that the thin edge of the wedge, the start of it all, began when there was no time for healthy soul care.

Rest for souls comes from a recognition of the need of care for souls. Rest is part of the sacred easy yoke rhythms of the way which care for souls.

Remember in this series we have been using the concentric circles as a visual representation of the entirety of a person's being. In circles coming from a small one in the middle like a bullseye and then progressively wider.

At the start you have spirit, heart and will at the core of us, and then mind, emotions, body, social context and soul. The first six days of creation tells us in chapter 1 verse 3 of Genesis. God said, Let there be light.

And there was light. God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day and the darkness he called night.

And there was evening and there was morning the first day. And God said, Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water. So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it.

And it was so. God called the vault sky and there was evening and there was morning the second day. Days come out of evenings.

Work comes out of rest, not the other way round. We tend to see rest as something you fall into after the day's work. Genesis flips it and makes rest preeminent.

Who is setting the cadence of rest work, rest work for you? Is your soul disquieted, anxious, lightheaded, or is it healthy? Look up Dr.

Matt Walker, a sleep studies guru with a great TED talk called Sleep Is Your Superpower, and see how important sleep is for your life. He claims short sleep equates to a short life. Jesus, I think, was onto something.

We need to learn the rhythms of the way. Rest happens daily, but also weekly. God the Creator took the seventh day off.

Why? Not because he was tired. He was modeling for us a sacred rhythm which embraced limits.

Following God's example, we who are made in the image of God can reset our heart and mind on what is true, right, good, and eternal on a weekly cycle. Sabbath is the God-given seven-day rhythm of renewal.

Physically, emotionally, and spiritually, also socially, Sabbath is part of a much bigger subject, the theology of limits. Jesus said, learn from me, and he meant it.

Look through the gospels with an eye to find examples of Jesus stealing away to be with his father, and you'll quickly notice he does it frequently.

At significant times of decision-making, like choosing his disciples, or when he first told the disciples about his imminent death on the cross, Jesus prepares in solitude with his father. Unhurry, love, rest.

When we fail to care for our souls in these ways, we become vulnerable. An excellent way of remembering when we are at risk is the acrostic HALT. H stands for hungry.

A stands for angry. L stands for lonely. T stands for tired.

Soul care takes notice of the signs of HALT. Our last word is work, which might seem weird in a chapter about rest, but work, Jesus says, is what he came to accomplish. God created us to be like Mary and Martha.

Mary and Martha were two friends of Jesus. Mary is commended for her still and worshipping posture at the feet of Jesus. Martha is remembered for being a little too zealous to get the job done.

In reality, the way of the Master is both and. Both Mary's stillness and Martha's diligence. We were created to work as stewards of creation.

The easy yoke rhythm of the way goes something like this. Pruning, rest, and then growth fruit. It's the cadence and pendulum of life.

So you imagine a pendulum swinging back and forth. On one end you have pruning and rest, and then it comes forward to growth and fruit, and back to pruning and rest, and then back to growth and fruit.

Jesus said in John 15, verse 1, I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

As I said, imagine the semicircle represents a pendulum, which is swinging from work to rest at varied speeds, depending on whether it represents a day and night rhythm, or work week Sabbath rhythm, or a longer life season.

You'll see it if you have the book, the multiple semicircles in the diagram. Pruning leads to rest, heading off to the left, and as it comes back to the right, growth leads to fruitfulness.

Like a field being allowed to lie fallow, pruning rest, growing work. Pruning rest to the left, coming back to the right with the pendulum, growing fruitfulness. These are daily rhythms and weekly rhythms.

Pruning rest, growth, fruitfulness. I once met a guy called Murray Robertson, a 46-year veteran pastor from what used to be called Spraydon Baptist Church in Christchurch, New Zealand.

I'd been a pastor of the church I was at for 14 years, I think, at the time, and I remember Murray said, that's a good start, 14 years of ministry. He reflected that he'd noticed God moved in periods of time in local churches, that is, seasons.

There might be a seven-year period of blessing, he said, and then a five-year lean time, and then a challenge to unity for ten years, and then a revival for three. I think he's right, and it's true in our lives.

There are seasons of rest and seasons of work. The easy yoke is an unanxious yoke. When we learn to hand over outcomes to God, we learn that God controls the seasons of our life, and this is a good thing.

Doing our best and then handing over outcomes to God is the way of the easy yoke. Matthew 11 once again says, 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. You know, Jesus is the smartest person who ever lived.

He will teach us, if we will listen, about hurry and unhurry. Love, rest, and work. Each day has just enough time to do the good works God has called us to do.

Here's a breath prayer to start your easy yoke reset. Find a chunk of time and pray this breath prayer. Breathe in, and as you breathe in, pray, be still and know.

And then as you breathe out, say the words, that I am God. That's Psalm 46 10. Breathe in, be still and know.

Breathe out, that I am God. And then change to a slightly shorter version of after a few breaths. Breathe in, say, be still and know.

Breathe out, that I am. And then breathe in with the words, be still. Be still and breathe out with and know.

Be still and know. Be still and know. And then breathe in with be and breathe out with still.

Be still and breathe in with nothing and breathe out with be.