

## introduction

In the relentless pace of the Upper West Side, we are surrounded by creators — people of immense talent building, performing, and innovating. Yet, beneath the drive for excellence lies an exhausting restlessness. Whether it's the pressure of a career or the weight of personal expectations, the underlying narrative of our city is often: "I am what I achieve." In this study, we look at the only passage in the New Testament where Jesus pulls back the curtain to reveal his deepest heart for his people. He doesn't offer a mere weekend getaway from our stress; he offers a third way beyond moralism and irreligion — a rest that redefines our very identity.



**In a city that never sleeps, what is the one thing — besides sleep — that truly makes you feel rested? Why is it so hard to find that feeling consistently?**

read

**Matthew 11:28-30; 12:15-21 (NIV)**

<sup>11:28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

<sup>12:15</sup> Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. <sup>16</sup> He warned them not to tell others about him. <sup>17</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>18</sup> “Here is my servant whom I have chosen,  
the one I love, in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

<sup>19</sup> He will not quarrel or cry out;  
no one will hear his voice in the streets.

<sup>20</sup> A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,  
till he has brought justice through to victory.

<sup>21</sup> In his name the nations will put their hope.”

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

## context

Matthew 11 and 12 present a portrait of Jesus that stands in stark contrast to the aggressive "Messiah" of popular expectation in first century Judaism. While the Pharisees placed heavy legalistic burdens on people, Jesus identifies himself with the "Servant of the Lord" from Isaiah 42 — a gentle Messiah who renews the weak rather than snuffing them out.

## the weary and the burdened

Jesus invites those for whom life has become a grind. In our context, this weariness often comes from performing our identity. As Samuel James notes, "Beyond the Christian gospel lies just endless performance. In the absence of a Savior, atonement must be performed... Call our *Age of Mirrors* the burn-out age, because it's true."

*Jesus' heart goes out to those from whom the juice has gone out of life and all that's left is the rind.*

—Frederick Dale Bruner

## discuss

1. Jesus uses a word for "burdened" that refers to the Pharisees' legalistic demands. What are the "secular liturgies" or legalisms of NYC that leave you feeling bone-tired today?
2. How does the performance-based identity of our city make Jesus' invitation to "come to me" feel like a necessity rather than just a religious option?

## the yoke of relief

Interestingly, Jesus offers "rest" by giving us a "yoke" — a work instrument. This isn't a vacation from responsibility, but a new way to carry life. To take his yoke is to enter a disciple-relationship with one who is "gentle and lowly in heart."

*A yoke is not a sitting instrument; it's a walking instrument... the most restful gift he can give the tired is a new way to carry life.*

—Frederick Dale Bruner

### discuss

3. **Jesus' yoke represents his teaching on how to be human — for example, handling money, purpose, service, conflict, and relationships. How does walking beside Jesus change the way you view your daily responsibilities?**
4. **Why is it good news that Jesus describes himself as "gentle and humble" rather than demanding or abrasive?**

## the bruised reed and smoldering wick

Matthew 12:20 gives us a beautiful image of Jesus' tenderness: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." We are often like damaged reeds or flickering candles, yet Jesus does not discard us for our low vigor; he mends us and fans us back into life. Dane Ortland writes that Jesus is "Gentle: not trigger happy, not harsh or reactionary, or easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe."

*He doesn't break bruised reeds or snuff out dimly  
burning wicks; He mends them, fans them into life.*

—Sinclair Ferguson

## discuss

5. Christians sometimes live in fear that our failures will cause Jesus to "snuff us out." How does the portrait of Jesus in Matthew 12:15-21 challenge that fear?
6. Sinclair Ferguson suggests we must "behold" Jesus—to look at him until we admire and love him. How can you behold his gentleness in your life this week?

## group application

As a group, pray together about people in your life who are bruised and need to know the gentle lordship of Jesus to lift their burdens.

## upcoming

- Friday, April 3 | **Good Friday Services, 12 pm or 7pm**  
*Consider attending one of the special services on this date as a CG to be led in a pointed reflection on Jesus' death and return on Sunday for the good news of his resurrection!*  
[redeemerws.com/lent](https://redeemerws.com/lent)
- Tuesday, April 7 | **Alpha begins, 7-9 pm**  
*Alpha is a 10-session series designed for people who are exploring or are skeptical of the Christian faith, or have given up on church. If you have a someone in your life who fits that description, consider and pray about inviting them to participate.*  
[redeemerws.com/alpha](https://redeemerws.com/alpha)