

## "Whose burden is light"

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First Presbyterian Church  
Independence, MO  
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**Old Testament: Psalm 16**  
**New Testament: Matthew 11:25-30**

One day a certain father went to visit his son's preschool on bring-your-dad-to-school day. When he got there, he was shocked to discover that only a handful of fathers had come. Later, when all the children were sitting on the floor in a circle, the teacher asked them to tell something about their fathers, something that was special.

One little boy said, "Well, my daddy is a lawyer. He makes a lot of money and we live in a big house." Another child said, "My father is very smart. He teaches at the college and a lot of important people know him." Finally it was time for *this* father's son to say something special about his dad. The little boy looked up at his father, then he looked around the circle of his friends, and then he just smiled and proudly said, "My dad ... my dad is here!" What more praise could a father want?

Jesus, in our New Testament lesson, begins by saying, "I thank you, Father..." Fatherhood – parenthood – It's all about being here, being there for your child; and once a child, always a child. Jesus could always count on God being there for him. And so can we. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we have the assurance that *God is always there for us*.

But what does that mean, having God there for us? Jesus prays to God, saying, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things (*the mysteries of our faith*) from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

There's something about being a child of God that gives us access to that which other people don't have – that which eludes those who throw off their identity as God's children and instead cling to their worldly identities. They put their job, their money, their status, or maybe it's their hobby first; they put these things first. But maybe you're not like that. For some of us, maybe it's our pride, our common sense, or the memory of who we used to be when we got that degree or certification; maybe it's how good we look (*or our yearning to look better or different than how God created us*) – maybe it's these things that we put first in our lives. Whatever it is for any of us, it's that thing we think of when first opening our eyes in the morning and closing them at night. It's whatever we let get in between us and God that robs us of God's blessings. So how do we access these blessings that God has for us – and when I say us, I mean all people, and when I say all people, I mean you? How do you access these blessings that God has for you?

***You have access to the blessings of God*** the Father – God, who puts the *parent* in parenthood. You have access to these blessings when you reach out for them as a child of God, or as Jesus says it, as “infants.”

Why does God reveal Godself most fully to “infants,” to those who approach God as a child of God? Some of you have children, I know. *And* I suspect that many-if-not-all-of-us here were once children ourselves. Children – well, really infants – approach life with no preconceptions. They take life at face value, loving what they love, hating what they hate, all because that’s the way God made them. They are dependant, vulnerable, and unfiltered by all the learning we do as we grow into older children, teens, young adults, older adults and all adults in between. Those who approach God as children, as infants, have special access to God’s blessings.

A 5-year-old at the beach ran up to his grandpa, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore. A sea gull was lying dead in the sand. “Grandpa, what happened to him?” the little boy asked. “He died and went to heaven,” said the grandfather. The boy thought for a moment, and then said, “And God threw him back down?”

That laughter you’re experiencing right now, I hope that’s how the grandpa responded. I hope he tickled that little boy, swept him up in his arms and they laughed together until they cried. And then I hope that grandpa told the little boy God would never throw anything down from heaven, not even a bird. And then I hope they went on with their lives, with no long explanations about life and death and heaven and God. With no “great moments of wisdom” from grandpa, whatever it is he might have tried to teach a little boy about all he had learned through his lifelong struggles. Because whatever blessing that grandpa had to give to that child was given in laughter and hugs and reassurances, not knowledge and fact and life’s lessons.

While it’s important to learn as we grow, it’s even more important to grow as you learn – ***grow in your faith*** and your connection to God and to one another. That’s what gets us through life even when life is getting us down.

Can I talk to just the children; here today. You adults, stop listening, if you can (not really). Okay, just me and the children, here it goes, Ten Rules You Won’t Learn in School:

- No. 1. Life is not fair. Get used to it.  
(*The average teenager uses the phrase “It’s not fair” 86 times a day.*)
- No. 2. The real world won’t care as much about your self-esteem as your school does. This may come as a shock.
- No. 3. Sorry, you won’t make \$40,000 a year as soon as you get out of high school. You may even have to wear a uniform that doesn’t have a designer label.
- No. 4. If you think your teacher is tough, wait until you get a boss.
- No. 5. Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger flipping. They called it “opportunity.”
- No. 6. It’s not your parents’ fault if you mess up. You’re responsible. (*This is the mirror image of “It’s my life” and “You’re not my boss.”*)
- No. 7. Before you were born, your parents weren’t boring. They got that way by paying bills and listening to you.
- No. 8. Life is not divided into semesters and you don’t get summers off. Not even spring break.

You are expected to show up every day for eight hours. And you don't get a new life every 10 weeks.

No. 9. Smoking does not make you look cool. Watch an 11-year-old with a butt in his mouth. that's what you look like to anyone over 20.

And finally,

No. 10. Your school may be "outcome-based," but life isn't. In some schools, you're given as many chances as you want to get the answer right. Standards are set low enough so nearly everyone can meet them. This, of course, bears not the slightest resemblance to anything in real life – as you will soon find out. Good luck; you are going to need it; and the harder you work, the luckier you will get.

– Signed, Ann Landers, The Washington Post<sup>1</sup>.

Jesus lived a pretty rough life to, you know particularly toward the end, and still he says to us. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." "Whose burden is light? Not mine; particularly not after hearing that list from Ann Landers. (I know you adults listened, too: and that's okay; you're sorry for it now because it struck a little too close to home.)

But keep in mind Jesus dealt with stuff like what's on Ann Landers' list *and then some!* His earthly life was not fair, the real world didn't care about his self-esteem, he "*didn't make no*" \$40K a year. Jesus felt bossed around plenty – particularly toward the end, and washing feet wasn't even beneath his dignity. He lived – and died – responsible for the consequences of *his* life. And Jesus' true Father is never boring. Jesus didn't have summers off and he got no spring break. Never smoked, either, as far as we know. But as for "outcome-based" learning, well, now that's where life with Jesus differs from life with Ann Landers. With Jesus, life *is* outcome based! You *are* given as many chances as you want to get it right, standards *are* set low enough so everyone can meet them, *and* of course, life with Jesus bears not the slightest resemblance to anything in the "real world" – ***life with Jesus is so much, much better!***

Even with all the frustration, disappointment, sadness, anger, hunger and thirst, betrayal, attacks, criticism and belittling *that Jesus* endured, he invites us to "take his yoke upon us," saying, "my burden is light." But what is he talking about? We've heard about Jesus' life – Jesus' burden – and it was as hard and thankless as they come.

To understand how a life like Jesus' earthly life can be easy – and how a life like our earthly lives can be easy, too – and how such a life *can* provide "rest for our souls," we have to go beyond our physical, earthly constraints. Jesus lived his life from a spiritual perspective. And that's what he teaches us as children of God: how to gain access to our spiritual nature, to enter into the heavenly realm of life - - our earthly lives. And that's a lot easier said than done. It's easier to talk about spirituality than to live into it. It's easier to set heaven aside as some far off place we'll get to later if we're good.

It's easier to live based on everything we've learned to get through life than it is to access our spiritual nature and to claim the blessings of a life lived with Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> June 7, 2000, C13

Because to do that, to live with Jesus, it's not heaven we need to set aside, but rather our obsession with the "real" world. It's our conviction that we know what's what that needs to be set aside. It's all the stuff we learned and went through to become self-sufficient adults that gets in between God and us, that keeps us from accessing heavenly blessing even amid our earthly struggles.

Because anybody who ever "got it" and anybody who will ever "get it" in the future – get closer to God and access to heaven on earth – anybody who does will only "get it" ***by coming to it as a child, an infant***; coming to our faith, to God, to life with Jesus, just as dependant and vulnerable as infants, unfiltered by all the learning we cling too for protection.

This is how we access the blessings of God, by making ourselves dependant upon God, by being vulnerable – confident in God's care and protection - - by setting aside all *our* hard-won knowledge in order to gain access to God's ways. Next week, we'll look at what it takes for us as young people and adults to gain such access to God. This week, I invite you to just do it – without knowing what it takes.

In a moment we will celebrate the Lord's Supper; we'll celebrate the Lord's Supper eating and drinking in communion with the crucified and risen Lord. If you receive it as a child, as an infant, wholly dependant on God for all that you are, all that you have, and all that you ever will be, God will bless you – bless us, individually. God will bless you and me in this moment, and in as many other moments of our lives in which we have the presence of mind and the foundation of faith to approach God as infants, confident in God's care and protection in all situations, knowing that with Jesus, our burden is light, when we receive Jesus as if we were infants in the presence of a loving parent. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious Redeemer, we give you thanks and praise for the gift of your word and for its power to encourage, comfort, convict and transform.

We hear the word and are keenly aware of our struggle to follow it in both letter and spirit. We need the Lord's mercy, which sees us for who we are, not as we often portray ourselves to be.

We thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, that through him you understand our weaknesses, sympathize with our brokenness, and reaches out to us in love, compassion and grace.

It is because of Jesus' life, lived without sin, and his powerful work on the cross that we come to you with confidence, knowing that you welcome us home and hear us with tenderness and concern.

Help us to respond in like fashion to those in our lives. Grant us an overflowing sense of love so strong as to embrace the lost and the rejected. Give us compassion to comfort those who grieve, restore those who suffer illness, and lend support to those who are laid low.

For it was with mercy such as this that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to meet us in our need, guiding us in the way of wholeness and peace, showing us justice and liberty, and teaching us to trust in you.

We do trust in you, Lord, joining our voices in the prayer that you taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.