

HOW TO LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD
From Burnout to Balance
Restoring Margin to Overloaded Lives
Part 5 of 7
May 27-28, 2000
Rick Warren

*“Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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
Matt. 11:28-30 (RSV)*

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1. _____

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”
Matt. 11:28 (RSV)*

“He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; He offers strength to the weak... those who wait on the Lord will find new strength.” Isaiah 40:29+31(NLT)

“Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace.” Matt. 6:6 (Mes)

2. _____

“Take My yoke upon you...” Matt. 11:29a (NIV)

“For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Matt. 11:30 (NIV)

*“Pile your troubles on God’s shoulders – He’ll carry your load and help you out.”
Ps. 55:22 (Mes)*

When I’m “yoked” with Christ, we move together in the same _____ and the same _____.

“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Gal. 5:25 (NIV)

“Our lives get in step with God by letting Him set the pace.” Rom. 3:28 (Mes)

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3. _____

“... *Learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*”
Matt. 11:29b (NIV)

“*Since the Lord is directing our steps, why try to understand everything that happens along the way.*” Pr. 20:24 (LB)

“*When I am ready to give up, He knows what I should do.*” Ps. 142:3 (GN)

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Some of you heard about that PetCo delivery truck on El Toro road this week. As he was making his rounds delivering pets, at every stoplight he'd stop, get out of the truck, take a 2x4 and start banging on the side of the truck. He'd go to the next stoplight where he'd stop, take the 2x4, get out, bang on the side of the truck. He was doing this at every light down El Toro road. Finally the guy behind him, his curiosity got the best of him and he asked, "What are you doing?" He said, "Buddy, I've got two tons of canaries in this truck. It's a one ton truck so I have to keep half of them in the air all the time."

Some of you are like that truck driver. You're on overload. You're battling at everything because you've got stuff in the air all the time because you're on overload. Today we're going to look at "How to Reduce the Load of Your Life." Jesus summarizes the secret of stress management in one sentence. In Matthew 11:28-30 He gives us the secret of stress management. Three things to do. If you do these things your stress will go down, your satisfaction will go up, the overload will be lightened. This is what you need. This could be the turning point of your life today if you will practice these three things that Jesus said.

"Come to Me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens 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 says three things. Circle "come," "take", and "learn". That's all you need to know about stress management.

1. TURN TO JESUS

"Come to Me all you that are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest." So the first point is turn to Jesus. Come to Christ. In the Bible people came to Jesus for many different reasons. Some people came for forgiveness. Some people came for answers. Some people came for healing. Some people came to Jesus for salvation. Some came to Him for eternal life. But Jesus says "You could come to Me for rest." Release from stress, release from overload. He says, "Are you weary? Overloaded? Come to Me."

He says "I will give you rest for your souls." This is much deeper than physical rest. Your greatest problem is not overloaded muscles. In fact some of you need to use your muscles more. You're flabby. It's not that you're overloaded in your muscles. You're overloaded in your mind. You're overloaded in your spirit. You're overloaded in your emotions. You need soul rest far more than you need physical rest. You need release from worry. You need release from tension. You need release from stress, from guilt, from fear, from bitterness, from anxiety. This is soul rest. And He says, "If you're worn out, if you're tired, overloaded, come to Me and I will give you soul rest."

Who or what do you naturally turn to when you are exhausted, when you are depleted, when you're overloaded? You may be a Christian but I doubt that your first choice is Jesus. You may

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turn to food when you're exhausted. You may turn to television and prop your feet up. You may turn to a drink or a pill. You may turn to some other form of escape. But none of these things can give you soul rest. Only God can give you that.

Notice what the Bible says, the next verse. *"He [God] gives power to those who are tired and worn out and He offers strength to the weak. Those who wait on the Lord will find new strength."* It says new strength. It's not just strength you had and you didn't know about. It's strength from God, supernatural strength, strength from outside yourself. How do you get it? It says, *"Wait on the Lord."*

The antidote for your overloaded soul is not a plan for time management. It's not a program for stress reduction. It's not a philosophy on how to simplify your life. It's not a pill. It's a person. Jesus does not say, "Come to church." He does not say, "Come to small group." He does not even say, "Come to the Bible." He says, *"Come to Me."* The answer for your overload is a person. None of these other things can give you soul rest. What you really need is that deep down soul rest when you're exhausted emotionally, spiritually, mentally.

This is the exact opposite to what the world teaches. The world teaches when you're empty inside, do more. If I could just do more then I'll be at rest and peace. If I could just have more then I'll be at rest and peace. If I could just be more then I'll be at rest and peace. You need to do more.

Jesus said, it's not a matter of do. It's a matter of come. *"Come to Me."* No other qualifications. Come to Me. There's a song they sing at the end of every Billy Graham crusade "Just As I Am, I Come". That's how you come. What you really need, the first thing you need in your overloaded condition, is more time with God. *"Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength."*

How do you do that? *"Find a quiet secluded place so you won't be tempted to role play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can. And the focus will shift from you to God. And you will begin to sense His grace."* Get alone by yourself so you're not pretending, you're not acting in front of other people and you will begin to sense His grace.

Why don't we do this? Why don't we turn to Jesus more? Why don't we come to Christ?

1. We think we can handle it on our own.

2. We often forget what God is really like. We just forget that God is a loving Father, that God cares for us like a father cares for a small child. God isn't going to scold you when you come to Him for rest. He's going to love you. We forget this. If you'll just come to God like a little child comes to a father, He will teach you how to really rest. But you've got to turn to Him. That's the first step.

2. GIVE UP CONTROL

Jesus says, *"Come to Me if you're tired and you're weary and you have heavy burdens and I'll give you rest,"* and then He says, *"Take My yoke upon you."* The reason why you get so tired, the reason why you get so overloaded is because you think you have to be in control of

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everything. You think, "It all depends on me. I've got to pull all the strings. I've got to make it happen. I've got to be in control. If it's to be it's up to me." Wrong! It's up to God if it's to be. You need to let go of control.

The greater your need to control things, the more your life will be prone to overload and stress. You have to have your finger in all the pies. You have to have everything under control. You have to do this and that because you want to control it all and that's why you're stressed out. You need to turn to Jesus and then you need to give up control to Jesus. You give up control.

This is Jesus' second solution to your stress. He says, "*Take My yoke upon you.*" You say, "Wait a minute! That doesn't sound too relaxing. That sounds like more of a burden. It sounds like I take something else on my shoulders. You don't know what I'm already carrying. I'm carrying way too much. How can I take Jesus Christ's yoke on me?"

Let's go back and review what a yoke is. Most of you didn't grow up on farms. A yoke is a wooden beam that attaches two farm animals together to lighten the load so they can work together as a team. A yoke is not a harness. A harness you put on one horse or one ox. A yoke is when you put it over two so the burden is shared and the load is lightened. The purpose to make it easier for the animal. They can carry more because they are working together. The load is halved and the load is shared and the load is lightened.

Jesus says, "I want you to take My yoke upon you." Why does He use that symbol? Because first, a yoke is a symbol of partnership. There are two of you working on it and not just one. Jesus says, "I will help you out with your problems. I will help carry your load." He doesn't add to your load. He says, "I'll share your load." He doesn't have a load. He's God! He says, "I will share your load. Stick with Me. Go shoulder to shoulder with Me. Work with Me and I will be your partner and I will carry a part of your load." He says, "*My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" Why? Because we're sharing it. Psalm 55:22 "*Pile your troubles on God's shoulders. He'll carry your load and He'll help you out.*" God has a stronger back than you do. Jesus says "Join up with Me, connect with Me, get attached to Me, put on the yoke with Me and I'll carry the load with you."

If you are overloaded this morning it's because you're not yoked to Christ this very moment. If you are overstressed this morning is because you are not yoked to Jesus Christ this very moment. You can be a Christian but you can take that yoke off. You've got to put it on moment-by-moment and say, "Jesus share this with me." Every time I get detached from Jesus Christ my stress level goes up. Every time I get reattached to Jesus Christ my stress level goes down. It's that simple. "Come to Me - Give up control." Those are the first two things. The yoke is a symbol of partnership. God says, "I will help you out."

It is also a symbol of control because farmers use the yoke to guide and direct and control the farm animals. Where oxen are yoked together they are controlled by the master. When you are under the yoke of Christ you are controlled by God. You have given up control. The load is lighter but you have given up control.

When I'm yoked with Christ we move together in the same direction and at the same pace. When you are yoked to Jesus Christ you can't go in a different direction than Jesus. And when

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you are yoked with Jesus Christ you can't go any faster than Jesus goes. He sets the direction and He sets the pace.

You do need direction in your life but you need far more than that. You need a pacesetter. All of us have a tendency to go faster than we really should or slower. And Jesus knows better than you do what is the adequate, accurate pace for your life. Every time you get away from the yoke of Jesus and you start going another direction you get in trouble. Every time you get out from under the yoke with Jesus and you start going at your own pace you get overstressed. That's why He says, "Come to Me," and then "Take up My yoke". Give up control.

How do you do that?

Galatians 5:25 *"Since we live in the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."* Follow God step by step. How do you do that? *"Our lives get in step with God by letting Him set the pace."*

Who's setting the pace in your life right now? Your agenda or God's agenda. If you're setting the pace it's no wonder you're stressed out because you're looking around at everybody else, seeing they're going fast and you think you've got to catch up. They're burning out too. Why do you want to let other people set the pace in your life?

You need more than direction. You need a pacesetter. When Jesus is connected to you and you are connected to Jesus, you're going to slow down. Why? Because Jesus was never, ever in a hurry. I've read through the Bible many times and not one time have I ever read, "Jesus ran to this place." He never ran. Never, ever ran. He always walked. In fact He kind of sauntered. One time He had a friend die about three miles away and it took Him three days to get there. That's slow walking. Why? He knew God had a plan. God didn't want to heal a sick man. He wanted to raise a dead man. So He wasn't in a hurry to get there and in those three days the man died and was buried. A greater miracle. God had a better idea. God had a plan.

Many times you're rushing to meet a deadline that if you missed the deadline, God had a better idea. You've got to give up control if you want to lower the stress in your life. You have to let Him be the pacesetter.

The Japanese version paraphrase of Psalm 23 goes like this, *"The Lord is my pacesetter, I shall not rush. He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals. He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity. He leads me in the way of efficiency through calmness of mind and His guidance is peace. Even though I have a great many things to accomplish this day I will not fret for His presence is here. His timeless all importance will keep me in balance. He prepares a refreshment and renewal in the presence of my activity by anointing my mind with His oil of tranquility. My cup of joyous energy overflows. Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours for I shall walk in the pace of my Lord forever."*

The truth is you're going to be yoked to something in life. Years ago Bob Dylan wrote a song, "You're going to have to serve somebody." You're going to give your life for someone or something. You may be yoked to your career. You may be yoked to the desire to acquire great wealth. You may be yoked by the expectations of other people. All of those are heavy burdens. They're heavy yokes to carry on your shoulders.

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Jesus said, “Why don’t you get rid of that one and wear Mine. It’s light and it’s easy.” “*My yoke is easy.*” Circle “easy”. In the original Greek that word doesn’t mean “easy”. It means, “perfectly fitted.”

We know Jesus was a carpenter. There’s a legend that carpenters didn’t build houses they built farm implements. So I’m sure Jesus made many yokes in His day. There’s a legend that over His carpentry shop was a sign that said, “Our yokes fit best.” They’d look at the actual animal that the yoke was going to be on and they’d customize the yoke so it fit the oxen perfectly so it didn’t rub against their shoulders; it was comfortable. They were customized plans.

Let me tell you why you get overloaded. You’re trying to do things you were never shaped to do. We talk a lot about shape here at Saddleback. God has wired you up with certain Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality and Experiences to make you you. And when you try to do things that you were never shaped to do but you’re doing them because everybody else is doing them you’re going to get under stress. You’re going to get overloaded. You’re going to get out of control. You need to take Jesus’ yoke because it fits perfectly. It matches your shape. It’s well fitted.

This is an exchange. Jesus says, “*Take My yoke upon you.*” So what do you do? You take off your heavy yoke, the burdens that are on your shoulders – you drop those – and you put on Jesus’ yoke, which is light and easy. The truth is you don’t have one yoke on you. You have a dozen. You’re carrying expectations of a lot of different things and people and events. You’ve got a community yoke. You’ve got a family yoke. You’ve got a business yoke. You’ve got a church yoke. You’re a big yoke! You’re a yoke to somebody else. The yoke’s on you! You don’t have just one yoke. You’ve got a dozen. If it were a cartoon there would be a dozen of them piled up on your back. Jesus said, “Throw all of those things off and put on Mine. It’s easy and light and well-fitting.”

If your burden is heavy, if your load is not light you’re not yoked to Jesus right now. You’re doing something that is out of God’s will for your life. You may be doing the wrong things. You may be doing the right thing in the wrong way. We think the answer to our stress is escape. I’m overloaded – I need a vacation. God says, no, that’s not it because when you go on vacation you take you and you’re the problem. You can go to Tahiti but your mind is going with you. We think the antidote to stress is escape. God says the antidote to stress is give up control. Every time I give up control, God gives me His peace.

There’s one more thing. He says, “Come to Me... give up control. Take my yoke,” and then He says,

3. LEARN TO TRUST

That’s the third key to stress management. Matthew 11:29 “*Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*” Jesus is the outstanding model of history in how to live a life of purpose and peace. He is our model. The third step is learn to trust by following Jesus’ model. Watch how He lived and then do it.

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Study how Jesus lived and do what He did and you'll have the same kind of peace that He had. If you want balance, if you want health, if you want sanity in your schedule in your life follow the model of Jesus. Learn.

Learning is a process. Learning doesn't happen instantly. Learning takes time. The mess you're in right now you didn't get in overnight. You messed yourself up over a long period of time. Those habits of hurried, worried lifestyle, they didn't just start yesterday. You've had years to practice this. You have developed a lifestyle of overload, a lifestyle of stress, a lifestyle of hurry and worry. You're not going to get over it overnight. There's no pill you can take. You've got to unlearn some things. You're going to have to relearn some new things. You're going to have to learn from Jesus. That means you've got to be willing to learn if you want to lower the stress in your life. You're not going to continue to do the same thing you're doing right now. You've got to learn.

What can we learn from Jesus? He tells us.

"Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart." Gentle and humble. How is that going to help me in stress? I can think of a lot of other things I'd like to learn from Jesus about stress management but gentle and humble don't seem to coincide with my needs for stress reduction. I'd rather learn how to have courage and stamina. I'd rather learn how to have confidence and strength. I'd rather learn how to have power and self-assurance.

But God says, If you're overloaded you need to learn gentleness and humility.

Why of all the things that Jesus can teach me when it comes to needing soul rest do I need gentleness and humility? Because the two greatest causes of overload in your life are aggression and arrogance. That's what causes you to get overloaded. Aggression and arrogance.

Aggression – we get in a hurry. I've got to have it now, even if I can't afford it. So we overextend. We buy things we can't afford so we have to hustle to pay for them. We don't want to wait. We don't want to pause, we don't want to delay, we don't want to consider. We want it now. We want to be assertive. We want to be aggressive. We jump into things and we get way over committed before we could possibly fulfill all those commitments simply out of assertion and aggression. We get in a hurry. I've got to do it now! We only go around once in life. So you're out there pushing and not in a gentle way. In an aggressive way – dog eat dog, competition. We've got to do it now. We've got to do it first, we've got to do it best. You're overloaded because of aggression.

You're also overloaded because of arrogance. Ego is responsible for a lot more stress in your life than you want to give it credit for. Ego is responsible for a lot more stress in my life than I want to give it credit for. We go out and think, "I can handle this!" and we take on another responsibility. Ego and arrogance is why you try to control everything because you think you know better than everybody else. You think you know better than God. You try to do it all. You try to have it all and you try to be it all and you try to please everybody. You think you're Superman or Superwoman and you're not. It's pride. It's ego that drives us to buy more than we can afford, to attempt more than we can possibly fulfill in terms of commitment.

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Jesus said, “If you really want soul rest here’s the antidote – gentleness and humility.” You need to remind yourself daily that you are not everybody’s savior. You can’t solve everybody’s problems. You can’t even solve all your own. You need to remind yourself that you are not the manager of the universe. Jesus is. You need to remind yourself that you’re just a tiny cog in a very, very, very big universe. Let’s put it in perspective. Have a degree of humility, which brings sanity, which brings release from stress. Be gentle, be humble. How do you learn that? By watching Jesus. Jesus was gentle and humble. He said that. *“I am gentle and humble...”*

What does that mean? He was totally dependent upon God. What was Jesus’ secret of peace?

I read through the book of John this week and found twelve times where Jesus says, “I only do what the Father tells me to do. ... I only say what the Father tells me to say... I think what He wants me to think... I go where He wants me to go... I stay where He wants me to stay... I do what He wants me to do...” Jesus lived a life of simple humble obedience to the Father. He said, “All I do is what the Father tells me and I don’t worry about anything else.” He said I’m not into crowd pleasing. I only do what the Father tells me to do.

Do you think that would change the stress level in your life if you began to live that way? Where you say, “I’m only going to live for an audience of one. I’m not going to try to please everybody in the whole world because I can’t. I’m just going to work on doing what God wants me to do, what God tells me is most important, what matters most and not worry about the fact that I can’t get it all done, be in all places, have all things.” That will be a breath of relief to every one of our lifestyles. When you only focus on doing what God wants you to do you don’t have to know the answers to life. You don’t have to worry about what’s going to happen in the future.

“Since the Lord’s directing our steps [and I’m yoked to Him] why try to understand everything that happens along the way?” He’ll get me where He wants me to be and He’ll get me there at the right time, with the right direction and the at right pace. What about when I get tired?
“When I’m ready to give up, He knows what I can do.”

This is so important – learning to trust and learning to let go are the secrets of stress reduction.

During this series I’ve received a lot of letters from you. “Dear Pastor Rick, I can’t remember the last time I felt rested and refreshed. My life has been on overload for years. There are too many expectations, too many responsibilities, too many activities and too many decisions. It seems like it all has to be done immediately. I often feel like I’m putting my finger in a hole of a dam that’s leaking but I don’t have enough fingers to stop all the leaks. I am tired of always rushing to the next activity. But when I look around I see that this feeling is not unique. Everyone is overloaded. Nobody has any margin in their lives. Everyone is trying to do too much, so much that we don’t have time to do what’s most important because every moment is packed. This is madness. It can’t be God’s will for us to live this way. I really want to learn how to rest and relax in God’s plan, not just for my own health but I can see how my kids are learning the same crazy lifestyle.”

As your pastor I want you to learn before it’s too late. I want you to learn to let go, to turn to Jesus, to give up control, to learn to trust before it’s too late. I want you to hear Charlie’s story:

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Charlie: I'd like to share with you how Jesus Christ lightened the load in my life and changed me forever when I finally gave up control of my life and learned to trust in Him. I spent most of my life working hard to earn the love and approval of other people. It was a heavy load that eventually caused my life to crash and burn. When I was growing up my father was a strict disciplinarian. He never forgave himself for the accidental death of my oldest sister, Linda, who died after getting an infection on a hunting trip with my dad four years before I was born. In my dad's mind, my sister became a saintly martyr and I could never measure up to her goodness so he had no time for me. My mother on the other hand, refocused all her attention on my sister Ann who is three years older than I am. That left me to care for myself. I grew up feeling very insecure. Although we were never allowed to talk about it, my sister's death created a lot of dysfunction in our family relationships. In an effort to gain the love of my parents and carve out a place for myself in my family I tried making good grades. I was determined to earn their approval. I made all A's and was an honor student but as one of my teachers told me in front of the class "Charles, you're smart but you're no Ann." That comment only made me try harder and harder to prove myself.

Since academics were not enough I also tried achieving the acceptance of my father through athletics. I lettered in football, basketball, track and baseball but my father had been a star athlete in Texas A & M University and no matter how well I did I failed to measure up in his eyes. In high school, I discovered that the acceptance I craved could be earned by having the prettiest girl in school as my girlfriend. Not only did I get validation from her but also by everyone else who thought I must be someone special to have her as my girlfriend. Things seemed to get better. But in my junior year in high school I got my cheerleader girlfriend pregnant. I believed I was in love and with the help of her parents and mine we convinced her to marry me because it was "the honorable thing to do." Although I was still in high school I worked nights at a truck stop and weekends at a mobile home factory. One Sunday morning I came home to find the house cleaned out slicker than a bowling alley and a note from my wife saying she'd left the state with no forwarding address. She wrote that she'd never loved me and that our child did not need a father.

I was absolutely devastated by this abandonment. But instead of turning to Christ to heal the pain of my rejection I turned back to sports to fill the emptiness in my soul. Our local school board had a rule that barred married students from extracurricular activities so I transferred to a New Mexico military institute in Roswell, New Mexico where I could play football. Before I left my father said, "You may be able to leave this town but your mother and I still have to live and work with these people." I can still remember the shame and guilt I felt. The Eagle Scout, the athletic hero had just been run out of town on a rail. The gossip around town was I had ruined our school's chances for having a decent football season. And that's a pretty big deal in a small oil town in west Texas. In military school I picked up a lot of bad habits like smoking pot and using drugs and staying drunk. I felt like a rebel so I did everything I could to live up to the reputation of the tough, wild football player who you never wanted to cross or confront. I was restless and unhappy and had no inner peace.

Soon after I continued my quest to be accepted by my father by accepting an opportunity to play football at Texas A&M University, his alma mater. However military discipline, drug abuse and numerous injuries my junior year took their toll. The football career that I had placed so much faith in was gone. I dropped out of the core of cadets and disappointed my

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parents once again. Looking for love and peace of mind I moved in with a girl from my English class. She wanted an Aggie football player and I wanted someone to run my life. We both got what we wanted. We married and had two children. But every time things went wrong I blamed my wife in terms of someone or something else to validate me. After ten years of living as an alcoholic and adulterer our family finally collapsed. Even after we were divorced I still tried to foolishly control everything myself instead of simply turning to Jesus. I was in control of my life but I went on to repeat the same pattern again with wife number three and child number four.

All the time I was living a double life. I attended church regularly. I even served on the board of deacons. My public life as a businessman was respectable. But my private life was a shambles, falling apart. Try as I might I couldn't hold it together again. In my secret life I was running from God instead of coming to Him. So I was filled with enormous guilt and anger and stress. My life was on overload.

In August 1997 I hit rock bottom. As I drove into Bakersfield from Silicon Valley my car blew out an engine at 3:00 in the morning. I sat in a fleabag hotel for three days waiting to see if my car could be fixed. Needless to say I had a lot of time to think about my life. Instead of turning to God I had tried to fill the hole in my heart with alcohol, drugs, pornography, countless affairs, sex, fast money, fast times and the excitement of living on the edge. But all the things that I used to try to ease the pain didn't help. They only made things worse. I knew I couldn't go on living this way but I felt hopeless. I figured I was not only a failure in my parent's eyes and in my eyes but also in God's eyes too. I was filled with shame and I felt stuck. I started seeing a therapist through my company's employee assistance program. Fortunately my therapist was a Christian who did wonders in helping me see the roots of my addictive and codependent nature. When I told my girlfriend of the excitement of this new process, she told me about a program called Celebrate Recovery in a church called Saddleback. I didn't think it could help me but if this was a way I could get a date on a Friday night I was willing to go.

I started driving up from San Diego on Friday night starting in September of 1997 and I did this for a year. At first I thought I'd never seen such a collection of whining, warped, pathetic people in all my life. After all, being in control, I didn't think the problem was with me. It was just all the people and circumstances around me. Begrudgingly I began to work through the Celebrate Recovery process and because this church is the only place I ever felt really accepted for who I was, I took the 101 membership class and the other Saddleback basic classes. In mid-1998 I started working through the third step, where we made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to the care of God. Although I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior when I was just twelve years old, it took about thirty years to fully understand that turning my will over to Christ is a daily decision and requires a daily recommitment to give the controls of my life over to Him. After I started coming here I began having a daily quiet time with God for the first time in my life. This daily quiet time to listen and learn from Jesus has made all the difference in the world to my life. Before giving up the control of my life to Him I was self-centered and not God-centered. I felt the weight of responsibility for everyone and everything. My motto had been "Perfect planning and practice prevents poor performance." I planned everything in my life on charts. My life was one giant composite Microsoft project exercise. I spent many a night pacing in the backyard, wearing a trench that resembles a dog run and smoking two packs of cigarettes a

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night agonizing about details I might have omitted in the master plan and then the contingencies that would be required to recover from the details that I might have omitted and needed to recover from. In my best efforts to achieve perfection and control I found myself with three failed marriages, four estranged children, no close friends, and a failed joint venture with the Malaysian government. Not a real good track record of me being in control.

Now I know that it is God who owns the master plan and not me. I'm still detail-oriented but I know that God has and will protect and provide for me. He is so good. He gives me a peace and joy that I have never known before. I used to be exhausted from trying to play God all the time. Now as His humble servant I'm finally at peace. I listen when He speaks to me through the Bible, through prayer, circumstances and our church family. Then I make adjustments in my life and obey Him. He's the best boss I've ever had.

Of course I still have problems and troubles but my identity now is no longer in what I do for a living but who I am – God's child. My soul is at rest knowing that God loves me unconditionally and I don't have to earn His approval. My faith is now in Christ and no longer in my own ability to control things. Now by God's grace I'm involved in helping others live a more balanced and sane life through a number of ministries like the Midweek service, Men's Morning Bible Study, and Celebrate Recovery here at our church. It's funny how the relationships that I destroyed when I was in control are coming together the better my relationship with God is. In the life that I craved to control things, God is tying the loose ends together. I now have 25 of the closest friends you ever want to know in your life through my Celebrate Recovery small group who know everything about me and still seem to like me. My son, who is 27 and an officer in the army and probably flew right over this building last night, is coming back from Korea to be stationed in Lawton, Oklahoma. We email each other and we talk. He is breaking the bonds and chains of this addictive behavior that goes from person to person. My two middle sons – one is a freshman at Texas A&M University and the other is in military school. My 15-year-old daughter recently made a decision to move in with her mother and if I hadn't turned the control of my life over to God I would have been absolutely devastated. Prior to this I had put her on a pedestal and centered my life around her rather than around God. But in turning the control of my life over to God, when my daughter made this decision to move in with her mother, I now see this is God's plan and wish her the best and support her and also support her mother.

And the lady who invited me to Celebrate Recovery? She and I were married in December and now God is the head of our family.

This is the time of year where we start to get a lot of invitations – wedding invitations, graduation invitations, dinner invitations. This is the greatest invitation you'll ever get in your life. *"Come to Me all you who are weary and overloaded, stressed out and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble of heart. You will find rest for your soul for My burden is easy, My burden is light."* Where are you going to get a deal like that? Not watching TV.

Some of you right now are at the breaking point from overload. Turn to Jesus. Give up control. Learn to trust. If you have to say that a thousand times a day, memorize it. Turn to Jesus. Give up control. Learn to trust. You will find rest for your soul.

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Prayer:

What's weighing you down? Problems with your children? With your finances? Aging parents? Difficulty with your business or your health? God brought you here today so He could say this to you "*Come to Me!*" Have you ever done that? Have you ever come to Jesus? It doesn't say, come to a seminar, come to therapy, come to church, come to small group. He says, "*Come to Me.*" The starting point is to unload by talking to Jesus about the things that are frustrating you, telling Him exactly how you feel. Sometimes even your best friends don't want to listen to your burdens. It's a little too much. They've got their own. But Jesus will never ignore you or tell you to shut up. Jesus wants to bear the burden. He wants to be your partner. He wants to be the pacesetter.

Pray this prayer in your mind: "Dear God, I am tired of being tired all the time. I'm tired of trying to control everything. I'm tired of a life without rest and peace and margin. Please forgive me for all the times I've turned to other things for release instead of turning to You. Today I come back to You. I want You to be the pacesetter of my life. I want You to set the direction and the pace. I want to stop trying to control all the things I never could control in the first place. Forgive me for my arrogance. Forgive me for allowing my insecurities and my ego to take on more activities than I can possibly manage. Forgive me for pridefully overloading my schedule. Forgive me for filling my life with less important things so that I have no time for what matters most. I want to learn from Your model, Jesus. I want to be gentle, humble like You so I can have the peace that You offer. In my overload, in my darkest hour, I ask You to fill me with Your power, let the light of Your love shine on me. In Your name, I pray. Amen."