

# The Cost of True Discipleship

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When we consider the theme scripture for this conference, "Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love" (D&C 6:20), our eyes and hearts leap toward the concept of being encircled in the Lord's love. The Lord's promises instill fervent hope and glorious anticipation.

In one of my sets of scriptures, I have underlined God's promises in a separate color. Then during scripture study, I will at times read only those promises, one after the other. As a result, I am rejuvenated to again face life's multiple demands. Recently, however, I have become increasingly interested in the teachings that immediately precede these promises. Such consideration has invited me to recognize the power that is inherent in the *requirements* associated with a particular blessing. In other words, even before I see the blessing of being encircled in Christ's love, I am now learning to feel gratitude for the portion of the verse that reads "be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God."

These requirements of obedience, upon which all blessings are predicated (D&C 130:20–21), I refer to as the cost of true discipleship. As a result of this presentation today, I hope that your reverence and gratitude for the "costs" connected with being true disciples of Christ will deepen and increase, instilling in each of us a greater faith and willingness to do what he wants us to do, say what he wants us to say, and be what he wants us to be (*Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985], no. 270).

## **Discipleship**

First, let's make sure that we are together in our understanding of the meaning of discipleship. Most simply, a disciple is one who not only follows Christ after accepting his gospel but who also spreads his good news to others. The goal of a disciple is not to be different from everyone else but to be more like the Master. Likewise, discipleship is not to

pray that God be for us but to pray that we be for him.

Consequently, being a disciple is not a single event but a spiraling process that begins at baptism and continues throughout our lives. Years ago, one of my seminary students taught in his devotional thought: "Simply going to Church on Sunday does not make a disciple out of you any more than sleeping overnight in the garage will make a Chevrolet out of you." It is not enough to have once had our lamp filled with oil, or to have once felt to sing the song of redeeming love; we must be able to sing it now, to have our lamp full today (Matthew 25:1–13; Alma 5:26).

Disciples are not without weaknesses, but their mistakes neither paralyze them nor preclude them from serving. Similarly, disciples do not require perfection from others in their attempts to assist. True disciples know that a sinless life was realized only once in mortality. It is their faith in that perfect one, Jesus Christ, that fills them with hope and commitment to carry on and find good in others.

### **Scriptural Focus**

I have chosen to focus on Matthew 11:28–30 to discuss the cost of our discipleship. This passage was spoken by Jesus during his mortal ministry. It is probably one of the most frequently cited scriptures, mainly because we feel so strongly the inherent promise as we hear or read it. But in this scripture, the cost, or requirement, is found not at the beginning but in the very center of the passage, flanked on either side by the promised blessing, which in turn is surrounded by reminders of our condition if we ignore the Savior's invitation, which prefaces the entire passage:

"Come unto me, (*the invitation*)

all ye that labour and are heavy laden, (*our condition without the Savior*)  
and I will give you rest. (*the blessed promise that attracts our souls like a magnet*)

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart:  
(*the cost*)

and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (*the promise repeated*)

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (*a contrast to burdens we are currently carrying*)

I would like to explore each of these concepts.

### **"Come unto Me"**

The scriptures are replete with teachings that Christ is "no respecter of persons" (Romans 2:11; see also 1 Nephi 17:35; Acts 10:34–35, 15:9). We are often touched by his compassion to both Jew and Gentile, the physically ill as well as the physically whole. He healed men and women, Samaritan and Pharisee, publican and harlot. This invitation for the great blessing of "rest" was likewise not restricted to a representative sample of people, nor to those with the right pedigree or who lived in a particular area during a particular time. His

invitation was to all.

At times, the Savior expanded the invitation to "Come and see," underscoring the opportunity for each individual to experience, or "see," his message firsthand. We can never know him, trust him, and willingly follow him if we do not first come to him and see what he alone can offer us. John the Baptist understood this critical step in discipleship. He always sent his followers to experience Jesus themselves, so they could see and hear that there was one greater one than he. For example, when John the Baptist was in prison, he assigned his disciples to go to Jesus and ask, "Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?" (Luke 7:19–20; Matthew 11:2–3). These disciples of John could never recognize the superiority of Jesus if they did not come to the Savior and see for themselves. After their association with Christ, they could then return to John and report the tremendous things that they had seen and heard, as the Spirit bore them personal witness that Jesus was the Messiah and John was his forerunner.

The overarching purpose of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to invite individuals and families throughout the world to come unto Christ. The phrase "All Are Welcome" is placed on the exterior of our meetinghouses, reminding visitors and members alike that Christ's invitation is still applicable today. Furthermore, before we make covenants with the Lord, each of us has occasion to "see" the Savior and witness that he is the Redeemer of the world. In other words, before we are baptized or enter one of the Lord's temples, each one of us is asked whether we know and have felt, through a personal witness from the Spirit of God, that the teachings of Jesus are true. We cannot talk about, let alone appreciate, the costs of true discipleship unless we have first come to Christ and received a testimony of his divinity and goodness. He never requires us to commit to discipleship before we first have an established trust in him.

Footnote *c* to Matthew 11:28 in our LDS edition of the Bible connects "problem solving" with the Savior's invitation to come unto him. Christ is the only source for all solutions. We are not talking temporary, Band-Aid treatments here but eternal solutions. The overriding assumption that likewise emerges from this scripture is that we all carry burdens or have problems that yearn for resolution. Each of us is personally called to come unto him to have our problems solved. That is where the cost, or "yoke," comes in.

## **The Yoke**

A yoke is most commonly a wooden beam that is worn on the shoulders of a pair of oxen or other draft animals. With their massive, broad shoulders and working together as a team, the oxen are able to pull extremely heavy loads, such as the wagons that carried our pioneer ancestors and their belongings across the plains.

Recently, I had opportunity to visit some high school friends, Eli and Carol Anderson in Bothwell, Utah. Eli has an impressive and extensive collection of wagons and horse-drawn carriages. After showing me all his wagons, including some yokes made for animals to pull those wagons, I asked Eli his thoughts about the scripture in Matthew 11. He took me into their home where on the wall were hanging numerous archaic tools. Among

the display was a yoke designed to be worn by a human. Such a yoke is a crossbar generally fitted to a person's shoulders with ropes or cables hanging from either end to which buckets or baskets are attached to hold the loads. It is a tool that allows the user to carry heavy burdens for a longer period of time. In other words, it gives a person endurance to perform life's labors. The yoke distributes the weight of a balanced load over the broadest and strongest part of the body—the shoulders—allowing the individual to use the rest of his body, braced by the spinal column, to support the shoulders in their labor.

The superiority of using a yoke in carrying heavy loads is best seen when compared to other ways we transport weighty and cumbersome commodities. When we hold a loaded basket in our hand by an extended arm, or slung over the end of one shoulder, or dangled from around our neck, we know how uncomfortable and taxing it is to our hand, arm, shoulder, or neck. In each of these cases, all the weight is concentrated at one point, causing extensive stress to that one part of the body.

Historically, yokes for humans were used for evil purposes. Conquering armies put yokes on their captives to subject them to humiliation and forced labor. A tongue connected to a wagon or other load could be attached to the yoke, requiring the captive to take the role of a work animal in heavy labor. I wonder if our ancestors, as slaves in Egypt, wore such yokes to build massive monuments and buildings for Pharaoh's glorious cities before Moses delivered them.

From reliefs commemorating the Assyrians' many victories, we know that the Assyrians used yokes on their captives. While the prophet Isaiah was teaching the Israelites living in Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, about Jesus Christ and his mission of deliverance from bondage, the Assyrian army was capturing the northern kingdom of Israel and removing them from their homelands to occupy the land themselves. Although the Israelites of the northern kingdom had turned from the Lord and followed after other gods, Isaiah promised that the Lord had not forgotten these scattered ten tribes. Isaiah powerfully testified, "The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, . . . I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders" (Isaiah 14:24–25).

These two very different uses for yokes evidence that a yoke may symbolize either slavery and oppression or empowerment beyond natural abilities. In reality, every one of us wears a figurative yoke in an attempt to carry our important responsibilities and burdens in life. We are therefore among those whom Jesus described as "all ye who labour and are heavy laden." But you knew that before you came to this conference. I believe that through this passage in Matthew 11, the Lord teaches us how to carry our burdens successfully.

### **"All Ye Who Labour and Are Heavy Laden"**

Let's take a look at these burdens we are carrying. What is causing us to be heavy laden today? I do not pretend to be able to name all burdens in a finite list, but several examples may help us to clearly recognize that the Savior is talking to each one of us in this scripture. Arguably, the heaviest burden to weigh us down is sin. When we know "to do

good," but we "[do] it not" (James 4:17) or when we knowingly commit evil, we offend the Spirit of God and are left to our own strength.

But we become cumbered with noxious burdens in many other ways. Financial concerns are particularly weighty, whether we have spent more than we can repay, or we have never had what we need to properly care for our own, or we have too much and do not know how to best use it. Other burdens may involve fear of the future, worries about being alone, attempts to live up to others' expectations, or browbeating ourselves for falling short of our own impossible expectations. We become heavy laden when we continually compare ourselves to a neighbor who appears to have it all together when we are filled with ignorance and doubt—ever learning but never able to come to the truth (2 Timothy 3:7), when we get sucked into the relentless pursuit of status or wealth, when—as a new convert in the Church—we feel inferior and lost because we can't understand or speak the LDS cultural lingo.

The heavy laden would also include those who have not yet received the saving and exalting ordinances of the gospel, as well as Saints who suffer from illness, betrayal, persecution, irony, unreciprocated love, or concern for a loved one who resides in a nation at war. Our burdens are heavy when we are bent under the pressures of time and have lost perspective concerning how to best use our time and talents. In certain circumstances, even service in the Church, care and time with our families, and worship of God may seem cumbersome.

When the Savior taught Matthew 11, he was addressing a group of Jews who were weighed down with the minute particulars of what had become the redefined law of Moses. The law's demands, reshaped and embellished by scribes and Pharisees, had become impossible to live successfully. Even Peter, as head of the Church after the Lord's resurrection, referred to the law of Moses as "a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). Jesus chastened the scribes and Pharisees of his day who continued to subject the Jews to their interpretation of the law and yet refused to give any support to assist them. He warned, "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4).

To the humble Jews who heard Jesus teach in mortality and to us who are heavy laden today, the Lord calls, "Come, . . . every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price" (2 Nephi 9:50; Isaiah 55:1). These great promises are totally without price as far as money or material possessions are concerned, but they are not without cost as far as our priorities and desires. When we realize we have too much to carry alone, the Lord asks us to willingly take, not just any yoke but specifically *his* yoke upon us. That means we will have to set aside the faulty, yet by now very familiar, yoke we have been using, and with utmost trust in the Lord replace it with his yoke and all the cargo that goes with it.

**"Take My Yoke upon You"**

Willingly taking his yoke upon us at first appears ludicrous when we obviously have too much to carry already. Perhaps, we may reason, Christ promises us that our burdens will become light with his yoke, because, like an Aesop's fable, when he finally removes the yoke, our former problems will suddenly look rather easy. Or maybe we hope it means that we simply deposit all our responsibilities and cares upon the Lord and leap off to play, never turning back to see if all is well. But neither is at all what the Lord is offering to us. He sees much greater potential in us than we ever do in ourselves. He also knows what is necessary to help us reach that potential.

What, then, makes his yoke different from the others? He told us that his "yoke is easy" and his "burden is light." In Greek, the word translated *easy* means "kindly." One way that yokes may be more kindly is to fit them properly. Ill-fitting yokes may be roughly hewn, causing chafed necks and gouged shoulders. A yoke may also be too long and consequently concentrate too much weight on the ends of the shoulders. Jesus was a carpenter by trade and undoubtedly made yokes for both animals and humans. He would know that the most kindly yokes would be sanded smooth to protect the parts of the body it touched rather than cause sore spots. He would know that a strong yet flexible wood could receive a design in which the yoke bowed slightly in the center, relieving pressure from the neck when the heavy burdens are attached. Jesus also knew about the importance of having the load perfectly balanced when it is attached to the yoke. The Savior knows a lot about perfect balance.

Elder Spencer H. Osborn, a former member of the Seventy, shared an observation about yokes while traveling in the Philippines. He passed a farmer "carrying an enormous load of vegetables and produce hanging from both ends of a wooden yoke carried across his shoulders." After Elder Osborn stopped to take the farmer's picture, the man lowered his burden to visit. Elder Osborn reported their conversation: "I asked my friend if his load wasn't really too heavy to carry a great distance. He replied, 'No, it isn't, because it's balanced.' 'Doesn't that yoke hurt?' I asked. 'At first it did, but I carved and sanded it with a rough stone, and now it fits and is comfortable'" (*Ensign*, November 1984, 76).

When my friend Eli showed me the yoke for a human from his collection, he invited me to put it on my shoulders. The yoke had been hollowed out to fit around the shoulders and was carved and sanded smoothly to go behind the neck without rubbing. I was surprised at how comfortable it was. When he pulled down on the two ropes that were attached to the ends of the yoke, I could feel the added weight, but it didn't hurt.

I talked about that to my brother who is a mechanical engineer. He helped me to understand the optimum design of a yoke as I have described, including the importance of a balanced load. When the load attached to the yoke is not balanced, the person is also thrown off balance and required to use his or her energy to compensate. More specifically, a torque is forced upon the spinal column, causing instant and sustained discomfort that requires the person to use extra exertion to counterbalance the load and restore a semblance of equilibrium.

A knowledgeable carpenter could design and create the perfect yoke for an

individual, one that fit the person's frame precisely, and could calculate a balanced load considering the person's height, weight, and strength. Jesus Christ, the Master Carpenter, fulfills those expectations and more. He designs a yoke for each of us that not only is designed to fit our physical stature but considers our personality, talents, and personal circumstances. President Howard W. Hunter taught of the Lord's sensitivity to the personalized loads we carry: "Obviously, the personal burdens of life vary from person to person, but every one of us has them. Furthermore, each trial in life is tailored to the individual's capacities and needs as known by a loving Father in Heaven. Of course, some sorrows are brought on by the sins of a world not following the counsel of that Father in Heaven. Whatever the reason, none of us seems to be completely free from life's challenges. To one and all, Christ said, in effect: As long as we all must bear some burden and shoulder some yoke, why not let it be mine? My promise to you is that my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (*Ensign*, November 1990, 18).

The Lord's yoke perfectly equalizes our individual responsibilities and personal burdens and distributes the weight so that it is not only bearable, but "easy." His yoke isn't harsh, sharp, or debilitating but accommodating, encouraging, and enabling.

While doing research about yokes for this presentation, I secretly hoped to find evidence that in some way a good yoke actually diffused the weight of the load somewhere else, transferring it someplace away from the person, freeing the person from bearing the burden. For those of you who are hoping for a similar discovery, I am sorry to report that I found no such magical solution. But what I did find is even better.

The Father did not send us to earth to learn how to escape burdens and responsibility. He sent us to decipher which of our burdens are unnecessary and debilitating, to learn how to divest ourselves of that extra baggage, and how to successfully carry our God-given loads. We are here to learn to become more like the Savior, and we don't do that by having someone else carry our pack for us. The Lord's yoke not only enables us to carry the load he has called us to assume but it allows us to carry it for as long as he requires. As one biblical scholar described it, "The weight of Christ's yoke is wings to the soul" (George Arthur Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. [New York: Abingdon Press, 1951–57], 7: 391).

### **"My Yoke Is Easy, and My Burden Is Light"**

I have identified five things that make the Lord's burden light when we use his yoke.

1. *Dispose of unnecessary baggage.* When we assume the Lord's yoke, we know immediately that there are things we are carrying that must be left behind. Often these are burdens that we almost insist on packing with us, even though they never help us and take up needed space for important cargo. Sins against God are the heavies that first come to mind. Once we repent of those favorite sins that we think aren't adding much weight, we will be amazed at how light the overall load suddenly becomes.

Next among baggage that must be discarded are sins we have repented of, for which

we have already received the Lord's forgiveness. If we continue to cling to them, as though we were wearing a massive medallion of guilt, our load becomes overwhelmingly burdensome and heavy. Through his atonement, Christ has already picked up these burdens and has authorized us to let them go.

In addition, we need to jettison attitudes that insist we do things our way rather than the Lord's way and habits that encourage others to put energy-zapping burdens into our buckets. Besides adding excess weight, accepting others' defeating judgments concerning our attempts at progress makes our load immediately topsy-turvy, much like a washing machine shaking radically out of balance. President Spencer W. Kimball taught, "When you do not worry or concern yourself too much with what other people do and believe and say, there will come to you a new freedom" (*Teachings of President Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], 236).

Christ clearly taught that a person cannot "serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24; 3 Nephi 13:24). He also said, "They who are not for me are against me" (2 Nephi 10:16). President Brigham Young identified the chaos caused by insisting on carrying unnecessary burdens, whether burdens of our choosing or burdens chosen by someone other than the Lord: "They who try to serve God and still cling to the spirit of the world, have got on two yokes—the yoke of Jesus and the yoke of the devil, and they will have plenty to do. They will have a warfare inside and outside, and the labor will be very galling, for they are directly in opposition one to another. Cast off the yoke of the enemy, and put on the yoke of Christ, and you will say that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. This I know by experience" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86], 16:123).

Christ's yoke becomes easy and his burden light when we dispose of unnecessary baggage, including the yoke of Satan. The apostle Paul encouraged us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). From his perspective, eliminating Satan's yoke of bondage makes our burden so light we can even run while carrying our load.

2. *Sustaining power through covenants.* Covenants are the primary source of power in our lives (M. Russell Ballard, *Ensign*, May 1999, 86). When we make covenants with the Lord, he promises us his strength to support us in carrying our loads, making our burdens lighter. At baptism, we covenanted to be willing to take Christ's name upon us, or figuratively speaking, to take his yoke upon us. In return, the Lord promises that his Spirit will always be with us. In all reality, we could not possibly handle the total weight of mortality without the Lord's support. The psalmist therefore counseled us to "cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee" (Psalm 55:22). The fact that he sustains us suggests that we still carry his yoke but we are not alone. Neither are we merely appreciative spectators while he does all the work. The demands are real, so he promised he would not leave us comfortless (John 14:18). President Howard W. Hunter reasoned: "Why face life's burdens alone, Christ asks, or why face them with temporal support that will quickly falter? To the heavy laden it is Christ's yoke, it is the power and peace of standing side by side with

a God that will provide the support, balance, and strength to meet our challenges and endure our tasks here in the hardpan field of mortality" (*Ensign*, November 1990, 18).

That tremendous show of support is shown in context of a commandment he gave to missionaries in the early days of the Church: "And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (D&C 84:88). That is some evidence of sustaining us in our burdens!

3. *Mutual support from others.* The covenant of baptism also includes the promise that we will watch out for each other and help whenever there is a need. The Lord's yoke is easy and his burden light because we have the Lord's sustaining power and also help from each other in carrying our load. When we work together, we create a synergism in which each participant is strengthened and more is accomplished with significantly less stress or pressure on everyone's shoulders than when we work alone. In addition, when we vicariously feel the heartache of another, we often gain the strength and wisdom from a particular trial without having to experience that trial ourselves.

As early as the Creation, we can see that the Lord never intended us to face the burdens of mortality alone. Eve was essential to the plan. She was identified by the Lord as a "help meet" for Adam (Moses 3:18; Genesis 2:18). An understanding of the original Hebrew words gives powerful insight to the meaning of the term and the reciprocal nature of men's and women's God-given abilities. The first word, translated as *help*, combines the meanings "to rescue or save" with the idea of "strength." The second word, translated as *meet*, means "equal." These words, considered together as one term, *helpmeet*, suggest one who has equal strength to rescue. In other words, the Lord provided Adam the partnership of Eve, who was given equal capacity to help him as he was given to help her. It is important to note that nowhere in scripture does the term *helpmate* appear. That term suggests the Lord gave Adam a companion who would carry his load for him, quite a different meaning from that communicated by *helpmeet*.

We are not all fortunate to have a spouse who provides the service of a helpmeet. Nevertheless, the Lord has organized his Church whereby we help each other with our burdens in additional ways. Consider the people of Alma who desired to come unto Christ and take his yoke upon them. Consequently they covenanted "to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; . . . and mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8–9). When we make this same covenant with the Lord at baptism, we become members of a community of Saints who have all made the same covenant. When we faithfully keep that covenant, every individual in our ward or branch will feel the lift, or boost, that comes from the larger community. When we forget that covenant, individual brothers and sisters may feel overwhelmed and discouraged to the point that they will leave the yoke of Christ behind and search in vain for a seemingly easier way to carry their load.

4. *The Lord makes us stronger.* Increased service in wearing the Lord's yoke gradually strengthens our back and shoulders so that we become capable of carrying greater

loads and carrying them with greater ease. We all know that muscles that are consistently used and stretched become stronger whereas those not in use quickly atrophy. Likewise, if you go to the gym and ask for advice to increase your body's strength, the trainer may start you off on five-pound weights. After you master the five-pounders, the trainer is unlikely to say, "Okay, you're strong." She will probably hand you an additional five-pound weight and encourage you to lift ten pounds.

The same principle applies when the Lord commissions us to carry beneficial burdens or responsibilities. It is like a new mother, feeling completely overwhelmed at all her new responsibilities, wondering how she will ever have the energy or wisdom to nurture this baby to adulthood. Then she notices a mother with five children, and she is astonished. How does she do it? The mother of five will explain, "I got them one at a time." As we mature in the Lord's service, he increases the weight of our responsibility, and our overall strength increases as a result. We are learning to become more like him.

Let's return to Alma and his covenant-keeping community of Saints, warned to leave the waters of Mormon and settle in Helam, outside the purview of their neighbors. They did not enjoy their Zionlike society undisturbed for long because they were discovered by a band of Lamanites and Alma's former associates, the wicked priests of Noah. Amulon, the chief of the wicked priests, immediately put these good people into bondage, "exercis[ing] authority over them, and put[ting] tasks upon them, and put[ting] taskmasters over them" (Mosiah 24:9).

But Alma and his people had already enjoyed many experiences carrying the yoke of Christ, so they were able to handle their captivity with remarkable grace. They knew from whence their strength would come, and they prayed continually, even when Amulon placed guards over them to stop them from praying. In addition, they did not complain at this imposition. Because they already had considerable strength, the Lord knew that this experience could only strengthen them further. Naturally, the Lord remembered his covenant with them.

"And it came to pass [perhaps suggesting that some time has passed without any sign of divine assistance] that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage" (Mosiah 24:13). Their complete release from bondage, however, was not imminent. First, the Lord told them that he would "ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs" (v. 14). Interestingly, the Lord did not ease their burdens by removing the yoke and the accompanying weight thrust upon them by their enemies. Again, the Lord had greater things in store for them than finding ways to escape responsibility and hardship. He was teaching them about godhood. Then we read: "It came to pass [more time passes] that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord" (v. 15).

What a stunning example of how the Lord incrementally strengthens us with his

yoke resulting in lighter burdens. The Bible Dictionary teaches us that through the grace of Jesus Christ, not only does he provide his divine support and strength but *we* actually "receive strength and assistance to do good works that [we] otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to [our] own means" (LDS edition of the Bible, s.v. "grace"). The burden is light because we become stronger.

5. *Christ teaches us how to carry burdens.* This is the Savior's own explanation in Matthew for his easy yoke: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart." It is very instructive to note that in the Greek, the Lord did not say, "learn of me," but "learn *from* me." One biblical scholar observed: "The yoke . . . symbolized discipleship. When our Lord added the phrase 'learn from me,' the imagery would have been familiar to Jewish listeners. In ancient writings, a pupil who submitted himself to a teacher was said to take the teacher's yoke" (John A. McArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988], 112). Jesus is our teacher when we wear his yoke. What does he want us to learn from him on the subject? How to be meek and lowly of heart.

Christ showed us what it means to be meek by never being weary in well-doing, by being patient in times of tribulation, and by submitting his will to the will of the Father in all things. Jesus knows what it is like to carry a yoke, one that is not easy, one that carries a burden that is anything but light. He carried his yoke without complaint and with total trust in his Father. Consider how he carried his cross, much like a yoke, on his remarkable shoulders so that our burden would be light. It is also noteworthy that he allowed another to assist him in carrying that burden. That is the kind of meekness we need to learn from him to ease carrying our burdens.

The scriptures not only tell us of Christ's supreme meekness in all circumstances but give us examples of those who learned to be meek and humble from his tutelage. Moses was described as "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). That was after Moses had delivered the children of Israel out of bondage, brought them through the Red Sea, and was camped with them in the wilderness.

But that was not always the description of Moses. In reviewing the history of Israel with Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, Stephen spoke of Moses before he fled from Egypt: "Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:21–22). That is not typically the way we remember Moses—mighty in words? Wasn't he the one who said "I am not eloquent, . . . but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exodus 4:10), and so he was given Aaron, his brother, to be his spokesman? (Exodus 4:14–16).

What happened to change Moses from being mighty in words to being slow of speech? I don't think Moses' speech necessarily changed as much as his standard of greatness changed. Moses was taught by the Lord himself, not at all like being taught by Pharaoh, even if it was in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. After receiving instruction from Jehovah, Moses exclaimed, "Now, . . . I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10). If we turn to worldly powers to receive instruction on how to carry

burdens, we will become either arrogant and proud or self-deprecating and depressed. If we learn discipleship from Christ, we will become even as he is, meek and humble.

Meekness is rarely a characteristic we remember to list among those we hope to obtain and even less likely to be recognized by the world as a means to success. President Howard W. Hunter wisely observed: "In a world too preoccupied with winning through intimidation and seeking to be number one, no large crowd is standing in line to buy books that call for mere meekness. But the meek shall inherit the earth, a pretty impressive corporate takeover—and done *without* intimidation! Sooner or later, . . . everyone will acknowledge that Christ's way is not only the *right* way, but ultimately the *only* way to hope and joy. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that gentleness is better than brutality, that kindness is greater than coercion, that the soft voice turneth away wrath" (*That We Might Have Joy* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994], 9).

King Benjamin described meekness with several words that are closely related. Listen for the cost of true discipleship in this list: "submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19). Did you also hear another way the Lord teaches us these traits? Christ taught us that through our association with little children we can learn from him. Most children are trusting, curious, eager to learn, instantly willing to volunteer to help—all characteristics that make the yoke of Christ easier.

Compare scenes from a typical scenario at Church. Imagine yourself leading Sharing Time in Primary. You ask the children for a volunteer to say the prayer. What happens? You ask for someone to help you during singing time. What happens? Arms fly up and wave enthusiastically. Multiple voices plead, "Choose me! Choose me!" Now go to the Gospel Doctrine class. You are the teacher. You ask for a volunteer to say the prayer. You ask for help in reading a scripture. What happens? Heads go down; silence is all too often the only response you receive.

Two summers ago at Brigham Young University, I taught a young man whom I will not soon forget. The first day of class, I asked for a volunteer to offer the prayer. His hand immediately shot up. The second day, I made the same request. Again, this young man instantly raised his hand. The same thing occurred the third and fourth days. Finally, I asked him, "Why? What motivates you to volunteer every day? In all my years of teaching religion classes, I have never had a student so quick to volunteer." His reply was simple. He had been taught as a deacon by a quorum advisor who told them that every chance they had to volunteer to serve would be a tremendous blessing in their lives. He had obviously never forgotten. That day, I saw in this student a type of Christ, who in turn taught me about the Savior. In premortality, the Father asked, "Whom shall I send?" There was one who did not hesitate. He reverently volunteered, "Here I am, send me" (Abraham 3:27). Christ is meek; therefore, he submits his all to the Father. When I lack meekness, I do not trust the Lord in what he requires of me. I think that I can do it better and consequently add unnecessary burdens to my load.

Consider the Savior as the greatest example of meekness in yoke-carrying. When we

learn meekness from Christ, we submit our all to God and gladly serve wherever and whenever he calls. As a result, the yoke becomes easier and the burden light.

Let me review those five things that make Christ's burden light:

1. Taking his yoke prompts us to eliminate our sins and all unnecessary burdens.
2. The Lord supports and sustains us in our responsibilities through covenants.
3. When we keep our covenants, we lift one another's burdens that they become light.
4. The Lord increases our strength and our ability to carry our load.
5. We learn to be meek and lowly of heart from Jesus Christ himself.

### **"And I Will Give You Rest"**

The final concept in our passage in Matthew is the promise. In many ways, after attempting to understand more fully the cost of discipleship, the cost putting on his yoke, we almost forget about the promise. There are so many powerful blessings in the cost, we realize that he has already showered us with promises. But the covenanted promise will still be given when we faithfully cling to his yoke and diligently carry our responsibilities.

In addition to the miracles that occur in our life by willingly taking on the yoke of Christ, he promises us "rest." Alma directed his son Helaman to teach his people "to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly of heart; for such shall find rest to their souls" (Alma 37:34). The promise of rest is not restricted to the next life; the Lord promised us "peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come" (D&C 59:23). President Joseph F. Smith explained: "To my mind, [rest] means entering into the knowledge and love of God, having faith in his purpose and in his plan, to such an extent that we know we are right, and that we are not hunting for something else, we are not disturbed by every wind of doctrine, or by the cunning and craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive. . . . The man [or woman] who has reached that degree of faith in God that all doubt and fear have been cast from him, he has entered into 'God's rest'" (*Gospel Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939], 58).

The blessed promise of rest restores our much-needed strength and energy to continue to carry our burdens with the sustaining power of the yoke of Christ. In other words, with the yoke of Christ and his blessing of rest, we are empowered to endure to the end.

### **Conclusion**

As we come to better understand and appreciate Christ's enabling yoke, we begin to love the cost as well as the promise. Christ has designed a kindly yoke for each us, made to fit our individual abilities and circumstances. It does not chafe and gouge but fortifies and protects. When we cheerfully receive his yoke as a gift and submit to the balanced load he commissions us individually to carry, there comes into our lives a renewed reverence and awe for our Redeemer and Deliverer. In a most powerful manner, we learn that he indeed

loves us and is teaching us in every possible manner to become like him.

May we remember his yoke the next time we renew our covenant to strive to keep his commandments, take his name upon us, and always remember him. It is his yoke alone that carries the guarantee "[you] cannot fall" (Helaman 5:12) as we strive to stay upright in an increasingly disoriented world. Strengthened by faith in Christ, renewed in hope, and filled with his promise of his Spirit to always be with us, we will know rest through the assurance that we will successfully finish our course and be grateful for the journey.