

this topic and tonight we're going to look at another common reason for why we struggle with anxiety and worry and stress and it is one of the most beautiful beautiful passages in all of scripture Matthew chapter 11 verse 25 so if you're able to stand please do so as we honor the reading of God's word Matthew 11 and verse 25 says that at the time Jesus declared I thank you Father Lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children yes Father for such was your gracious will all things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone whom the Son chooses to reveal Him come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me because I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls because my yoke is easy and my burden is light are there more beautiful words in all of the Bible let's pray

God help us now then come tonight to Jesus and to experience this freeing of our burden the heavy laden of life of the heaviness that we deal with with worry and anxiety help us understand the core of what the gospel is all about as I preach this text God do the work that only you can do in the hearts and in the souls of your people and I pray this in Jesus name and God's people said amen amen you can be seated Madison Holleran was a track star at the University of Pennsylvania Madison was very very popular she came from a very large and supportive family out of New Jersey and when she was in high school everyone knew that Maddie was going to be successful she was destined for great things and when she arrived at the University of Pennsylvania she picked up right where she left off from high school she immediately began to make a lot of friends she excelled in the classroom and had great grades and she absolutely dominated on the athletic field listen no one could outperform

Maddie in fact everything looked perfect on the outside it looked like she had it all together but on the inside Maddie was falling apart she struggled with extreme levels of anxiety and depression so much so that what she did on the morning of January 17th left her family and friends in both sadness and shock Madison got up went to class took a test hung out with some friends and went by the campus bookstore while she was at the bookstore her dad called and said Maddie have you found a therapist yet and Maddie said no but don't worry dad I'll be fine she proceeded in the bookstore to buy some gifts for her family some chocolate for her dad a necklace for her mom ginger snaps for her grandparents clothes for a nephew a book for a friend and later that evening as the sun was setting on the city of Philadelphia

Madison took those gifts and she spread them all out on the ninth floor of a parking garage right before she jumped Madison was 19 years old major media outlets began to investigate the factors that led to Madison's death one reporter from ESPN a woman by the name of Kate Fagan she wrote a book about Madison's life called What Made Maddie Run The Secret Struggles and Tragic Death of an All American Teen and in the book she details Maddie's struggles with anxiety and depression because she was so captured by a success driven culture she wrote quote Madison was beautiful and talented and successful she was the epitome of what every young girl hopes to become but she was a perfectionist who struggled when she performed poorly close quote faith family listen

[9 : 28] Maddie never found peace because she felt like she always had to perform and stories like hers are tragic and they're all so common and I'm not referring to the suicide I mean the anxiety that comes from the performance and success driven culture that you and I live in right I mean we know this does not everybody in this room tonight know this have you not felt this have you not experienced this anxiety it's the anxiety that you feel when you're doing everything you can to please your parents and make them happy and proud of you that anxiety that comes from having to live up to a standard of beauty that is put forth by our culture the anxiety that comes with having to keep your boss happy so maybe you can get that raise or their promotion the anxiety I gotta keep my grades up because if I don't keep my grades up I won't be able to get into that college that anxiety that comes if you're a parent with you're doing everything that you can to be a good mom everything you can to be a good dad pastors struggle with this anxiety a lot it's the anxiety you gotta keep everybody happy so they'll keep coming back again and again and I could give probably a hundred other examples here's the point

I'm making faith family one of the biggest enemies to our peace is the need to perform one of the biggest enemies to our peace is the need to perform and this anxiety is not just something we experience in this life it's something we experience in our spiritual life listen to me what I mean is

one of the biggest and I know there are some of you here tonight you are dealing with this you are struggling with this you have dealt with this before here's what I'm talking about it's spiritual anxiety that you feel when you're not living up to God's standard you feel like you can't approach him because you haven't done enough I could give you a hundred examples either from scripture or from church history of men and women who struggled with this spiritual anxiety of having to perform probably one of the ones that comes to my mind immediately is

Martin Luther Martin Luther before he discovered biblically that justification that is our righteous standing before God comes by faith and not by works that is not by what you do until he discovered that he was terrified to come before God in prayer he was horrified to approach God back before the protestant reformation when he was just a catholic monk and he had to lead in communion because catholics teach that the wine is actually the blood of Jesus which we do not believe we don't believe the bible teaches that but he was terrified that he might spill one drop and if he spilt one drop what would God do to him given all his failures and shortcomings this man was terrified he was full of spiritual anxiety because he knew his shortcomings in life and he knew that he couldn't live up anybody struggle with that if you've never struggled with that you're more spiritual than your pastor because

I'm going to be honest with you there's been many times in my life I've struggled with that it's an idea that actually gets illustrated in C.S. Lewis's famous work the Chronicles of Narnia it's either Lucy or Susan one of the children of a man who on one hand is very very excited to meet Aslan the great lion but on the other hand is a little nervous she says is he a man Aslan a man certainly not Aslan a lion a great lion oh then is he safe listen to what he said she said I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion of course he's not safe but he is good have you ever felt that nervousness that anxiety of coming before a holy

God anxious because you fear whether or not he will accept you I'm telling you because of the religion and denomination I grew up in this was ingrained in me that I gotta do enough in hopes that God will accept me well that's bad news if you're constantly aware of how you keep falling short and it creates an anxiety and a worry because you feel like you haven't performed enough for God's love am I the only one here tonight who struggled with that and if you have ever or are currently dealing with that anxiety do I have wonderful news for you look at Matthew 11 verse 28 Matthew 11 verse 28 come to me Jesus says all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for

[15:20] I am gentle and lowly in hearts and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden! light the first thing I would have you note here is that Jesus exposes the source of our anxiety now where I get the idea of anxiety here is from words like heavy laden the idea of carrying a burden Jesus here is speaking about the heaviness of life the stress that we carry and he's doing this in a context where he's speaking to the people of Israel and what he's doing is condemning the religious leaders for the burdens for the anxiety for the worry and stress that the religious leaders are putting on the people of Israel it's why he uses this word yoke now my guess is most everybody here tonight knows what a yoke is it looks like this it's that long wooden beam with two circles on it and it's used for cattle specifically like a farmer who's plowing a field and the idea was

I want you to get this in the idea was a younger animal who doesn't know the way of the master who doesn't know how to plow the field who doesn't know how the whole thing works would be yoked with an older animal that would show them how it's done and so these Jesus' times this would be used as it relates to your teacher or your mentor you would be yoked with them that is you don't really understand how the Bible works you don't really understand how it works to worship God and so you have a teacher you have a mentor in Jesus' day it was the Pharisees who were the teachers of Israel and so the people of Israel would be sleep and breathe whatever the Pharisees said are you with me say yes in our day if you go to college you just kind of show up for class and then you leave right

I mean you might get to know the professor a little bit you spend an hour and two in class and you go but that's not how it works in Jesus' day they devoted their life in fact in many think about the disciples they actually lived with Jesus and followed him and went with him everywhere he went these were truly examples of being yoked to their teaching now what's the problem here they're under the yoke of the Pharisees the people of Israel and here's what the Pharisees are doing here's what the religious leaders are doing notice this on the screen rather than helping them know the

blessing of living in relationship with God they placed them under the burden of having to perform for God let me read that again here's what the Pharisees were doing to those they were yoked with under their yoke was rather than helping these people experience the blessing of living in relationship with God instead they're placing them under the burden which caused anxiety and worry and stress because they're having to perform for

God and in doing so faith family rather than helping the people of Israel experience peace they were creating more anxiety the people of Israel were stressed out they were having an unhealthy fear of God because the whole system that they were being taught is you have to perform for God and this is something that not only Jesus addresses later in fact look at Matthew 23 verse 1 Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples the scribes that is the teachers and the Pharisees sit on Moses seat so do and observe what they tell you but not the works they do here's why they preach and do not practice they tie up heavy burdens!

hard to bear and they lay them on people's shoulders but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger the apostles address this you remember in our study in Acts look at Acts 15 verse 10 now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing a what?

[19:57] a yoke on the neck of these new disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear but we believe that we will be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will in other words they're saying you're going to be saved not by how you perform but by how Jesus performed and it's going to be by grace and not by work so why would you put them under the yoke of the law under the yoke of performing and having to live up to God's standard here's another one Galatians chapter five Paul takes this on verse one by the way this is if you want to further study this idea like the entire book of Galatians okay the whole book of Galatians is about this and Paul says in Galatians five one for freedom Christ has set you free so stand firm therefore and don't submit again to a what yoke of slavery here's the point listen listen rather than letting the law because some of you are like but listen didn't

God give the law didn't God tell them to obey the law weren't they supposed to try to obey the law yes but what was the point of trying to obey the law to prove you can't the whole point of the law was not for you to obey the law but to expose!

your inability to obey the law and therefore drive you away from a system and to a savior that's the reason for the law but rather than letting the law in fact Paul even says the law was a tutor it was a school master to lead you to Christ the standard was high not so that you would keep trying to sustain it but that you would realize I'll never be able to sustain that to be able to reach!

I need grace! Then you've come to the right place that's what the law was intended to do but the Pharisees were yoking the people of Israel underneath a performance based system and it was making the people's life look like this it was burdensome it was heavy it was heavy laden and difficult and so Jesus as well as the apostles expose this burden and the anxiety that comes with it that the religious leaders are putting on the people by making them follow the external rules and traditions and the fundamental teaching that was underneath this law based or performance based system was this I've talked about this many times because it's one of the cores of my teaching ministry so if you're around me for very long guess what you're going to hear it again the idea is what you do is who you are what you do is who you are it's a performance based system and if you apply that spiritually it goes like this what you do for

God is who you are before God right if you do good if you're a good person if you obey the Bible then God is going to love you because what you do is who you are or what you do for God equals who you are before God and how many of us have had that kind of relationship with God before it's like it's almost like did any of you ever do the whole little flower game he loves me he loves me not he loves me he loves me not like that represents the way we feel about coming before God right oh you know I had such a good week like I witnessed to somebody and I helped a little lady across the street and I don't really know why she was trying to cross the street but it doesn't matter like I just had a really good week you know what and you come to church and God is really proud of me he loves me and then you come the next

[24:13] Saturday night you are like man that week was awful like you don't even want to know how many times I fell short and my mind wasn't right my life wasn't right there were so many things that fell off track he loves me not and the whole cycle you're in is he loves me he loves me not he loves me he loves me not because you're under a yoke of teaching that is law based that what you do is who you are or what you do for God equals who you are before God so if you do things that

God loves then God loves you in return if you do things that he does not love then he does not love you and here's the question I have for you!

how can you experience the peace of God if you're always worried about performing for God will you let that sink in how are you ever going to have the peace of God if you're always obsessed with performing for God and this idea of I an I do system that is I have to do I have to work I have to perform it it's experienced in a lot of different ways both religiously and irreligiously let me give you just a few first of all a religious example would be how have I lived up to the religious standards right have I been baptized do I go to confession for those of you that were raised catholic or keep the sacraments or the church traditions am I reading my Bible enough am I praying enough and the more you perceive yourself as doing good in those areas religious things you feel like you are a pretty good Christian or you are certainly better than the person seated next to you you know what heathen they are right and so you begin to think like okay religiously

I'm doing okay now let me just take a moment quickly and talk about the aspect of baptism because I talked to you about if you! never been baptized you should be some more righteous standard before God you already have that in Jesus you simply want to publicly let the world know you're not ashamed to be a follower of Christ so you don't take from what I'm saying oh well good we don't have to do anything the Bible commands us to do of course not it's saying we don't do that to perform for God we do that simply out of you assess yourself like am I a good person am I a bad person am I better than my neighbor or who I work with at work what about am I better now than I was in my past and so we're constantly assessing ourselves morally or financially where am I on the ladder right am I the most wealthiest person in my neighborhood or in my network am I lower down the ladder where do

I fit have I saved enough am I good with money am I bad with money we do this relationally how do I fit within the social standards how many friends do I have am I liked by the people that I want to be liked by or am I not liked by the people I wish would like me so we're constantly assessing ourselves and our performance relationally we do this physically am I attractive enough am athletic enough am I in good pleasing to the social standards you live in and on and on and on and on we go what you do is who you are how you perform determines your identity and notice this is Jesus point notice this on the screen these yokes are the core of a lot of the anxiety you experience are you with me tonight these yokes all of which are performance based all of which are based on what you do these yokes that you've attached yourself socially religiously financially to is a major reason why you're so heavy laden why you're so burdened why you're so worried all the time think about it the reason why you feel guilt is because you didn't do what you were supposed to do or you did what you shouldn't have done or what about frustration you feel frustrated because you're not able to do the thing that you really want to do or think about worry you're worried because you feel like you're not doing enough or think about being tired or weary you're tired and weary because you can't

Martha stop doing you just keep like putting one more pot on the stove and you just keep over committing to things and the reason why I've got to perform or what about pride pride is the idea that well at least I'm doing enough to not be as bad as she is at least I'm doing enough to not be as imperfect or whatever as someone else and so you look at what you do and assess it with everyone else the point I'm driving at is that all of these are I do burdens it's a performance based yoke and living this way Jesus says listen listen living this way produces burden not blessing fear not freedom exhaustion not edification worry not worship and judgment not joy and if we don't start living a different way it will spiritually kill us it will spiritually take the life from us we're like tattoo remember tattoo the eight month old basset hound from

[30 : 23] Tacoma Washington his owner accidentally shut his leash in the car door and took off tattoo did the best he could to keep up with the car which reached about 25 miles per hour until the police officer pulled it over reminded me of poor guy probably kept up for the first mile or so right you gotta like that movie reference right now be of good cheer tattoo wasn't injured by this but he had to do a lot of running just to keep up right and it made me think that's our life we look like this we're running and running until we just collapse we're running and trying to keep up and perform and do enough and then eventually we become so burdened and so heavy laden that we absolutely break down are you with me tonight am I reading your mail am I speaking your language am I talking to your heart this is the yoke of

Phariseeism it's the yoke of performance based living and Jesus offers a different way look again at what Jesus says here if you're struggling with the anxiety of performance if you really want to be anxious for nothing well here's what Jesus tells you to do verse 28 again come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden that is burdened and I'm going to give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I'm gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls and here's why you'll find rest because my yoke unlike the yoke of the Pharisees is easy and my burden unlike the burden that they'll produce in you is light so first Jesus exposes the source of our anxiety but now

Jesus invites us to surrender our anxiety what is Jesus doing here he's providing a better way and I shouldn't even say a better way I should say the only way this is the only way to be anxious for nothing if you struggle with an I do based anxiety and what Jesus is doing is contrasting his yoke with the yoke of the Pharisees so for instance when he says in verse 29 this won't be on the screen but when he says take my yoke upon you what's implied there is in opposition to their yoke if you live under their yoke you're going to continue to live burdened and heavy laden but if you take! on I have a better way of life contrasted with that of the Pharisees and the four things that Jesus invites us to that will bring freedom from anxiety or performance is this number one and you must have all four of these number one you must come to Jesus let me be clear here this is not an invitation to be a religious person in fact I will do everything I can possibly do to keep you from being a religious person the Pharisees make religious people Jesus makes Christ followers because you are coming to a person you are not trying harder you're not going to be spiritual rather you are by faith coming to the real person of Jesus Christ this is not about a system this is about a savior listen faith family this is so important notice this on the screen the first step of being anxious for nothing is realizing life is about a person and that person ain't you because the whole reason why you're struggling and heavy laden and burdened and anxious is because you think it's all about you and you might put on some kind of modest humility to say oh

I don't really live for me and yet you're running on the treadmill of performance which is energized by what you do the electricity of which that that treadmill runs on is what you do do I look good enough have I made enough money am I pleasing God you see Jesus is saying you're like stop being yoked to yourself and come to me life is about a person and it's not you that's where it starts here's the second thing is then receive the life of Jesus so come to Jesus and then receive the life of Jesus I take this from Jesus words take my yoke that is you're going to have to receive something Jesus didn't say come to me and if you have enough money I've got something you can purchase come to me and if you've got enough spiritual credibility

[35 : 51] I've got something you can buy no no no this this is the core of the gospel amen come and receive come take I'm not asking for payment I'm not asking for you to do anything just receive what I have to give that is my yoke and what is his yoke it's his life come take receive my life it's no longer I who live Paul says but it's Christ who lives in me for Christ who is my life I have come that you might have life look at 1 Corinthians 1 verse 30 and because of Jesus you are in because of him because of God you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption so that as it is written let the one who boasts boast not in yourself but in the

Lord what's Paul saying everything you need in a life you get in receiving Jesus why here it is notice it on the screen because his life Jesus' life is the only life that's performed perfectly life so come to Jesus and take take take that is receive receive receive what the perfectly performed life thirdly then learn Jesus says learn remember the yoke analogy you're hooking yourself up to a teacher we would call this you're becoming a what starts with a d a disciple you're now going to learn from Jesus you've come to Jesus you've taken his yoke that is his life the perfectly performed life and now what are you going to do you're going to start learning what Jesus is doing here is inviting you to transfer schools stop attending the school of the

Pharisees Matthew 11 I would say stop attending the University of America and the reason why is this if you continue to live in the success driven culture and school that we are all students of in this world you're going to end up with so much spiritual student loan debt you're never going to be able to repay it instead transferred to the school of the gospel where guess what the tuition is free and so is the life because at this school the school of the gospel the school of the life of Christ listen you learn to live by the life of another joy it's no longer I who live it's Christ who lives in me what does Jesus say I am the true vine and he that abides in me she that abides in me is going to produce fruit

what is fruit the life of

Jesus Paul says the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience and one of the beauties of that analogy is not come and try really hard to be like Jesus no no no come and abide come and learn come and worship come and be with Jesus and what he will do is transfer his life just like a vine would do through you and the very fruit you'll begin to realize is something you could never have produced on your own you could have never performed that produce that's good that's not even in my notes that just came to my brain you should write that down right that is of God you could never produce that produce produce the produce of spiritual life you can't perform but his life can be lived through you so you come to Jesus you receive from

Jesus his life and you realize that this is about him and then as you learn from him and walk with him and worship him and abide in him then you learn how to live his life not your life notice this on the screen faith family becoming anxious for nothing doesn't happen overnight it's by being daily yoked to Jesus it's not religion it's not following traditions it's not external conformity it's daily being yoked with the perfectly performed life and then here's the last point is that you can finally now rest in Jesus you can rest in Jesus when you begin to realize it's about the person of Jesus and not a church program you realize it's about his life and not your life you begin to learn how Jesus lives his life through you as you walk by the spirit then and I would say only then will you finally be able to breathe and you will experience what

[41 : 21] Jesus says tell me this isn't beautiful rest for your souls your soul will finally be able to step off the treadmill of performance and rest because you don't have to perform anymore and you think about a lot of the things that we struggle with I just mentioned that begin to take on a whole different calm guilt I didn't do what I was supposed to do well but you're resting in the one who did what he was supposed to do I'm really frustrated because I'm not able to do the thing that I want to do but Jesus has already accomplished all that needs to be done I'm worried what if I don't do enough well good news Jesus did enough I'm tired and weary and burdensome because I keep doing I keep doing yeah but why do you keep doing when it is finished you don't have to be tired Martha be like Mary for a moment and spend some time at the feet of Jesus or even pride at least

I'm better than so all of a sudden you begin to experience true humility because you realize even if you performed as best as you could it wouldn't be better than what Christ did so how could you possibly be arrogant towards your brother or sister amen this is the key to experiencing the freedom of the gospel we're able to experience true peace because we no longer have to perform our life isn't about advancing and enjoying his and then and only then can we begin to be anxious for nothing so maybe you're here today maybe you're here tonight and you're carrying a lot of burdens when I read the words you're heavy laden you're like that's me I'm exhausted I'm tired I'm worried I'm stressed out

I'm anxious I'm heavy laden listen to me and what I'm about to say I mean with respect honor and every bit of sensitivity I can to this issue but I need to say it if you don't stop living this way and get out from underneath the weight of success and performance it will spiritually kill you just like Madison it will spiritually kill you it will drive you to the place where you are spiritually ready to jump off this Christianity thing I know because I've been there but that's when I learned through the impression of the Holy Spirit

Wes this ain't about you you see the reason why you want to jump off the Christianity thing is because you haven't understood the Christianity thing you think the Christianity thing is about your performance true Christianity thing is about his performance so jump on the real Christianity train that is taking you to a place of rest for your soul because you don't have to perform anymore where is this freedom found where is this peace found it is found in the one who has already performed everything that needs to be performed there's nothing left to accomplish and that is why Jesus is able to offer you the most amazing and gracious invitation ever offered and it's this come all you who are weary and heavy laden and

I will give you rest and God's people said amen let's pray together let's pray let's pray God that needs to be preached every week because the gospel that we're told in this culture is that what you do is who you are and you got to live up you got to be enough you got to meet the standard got to make everybody happy got to make good grades got to be successful at your job got to keep all the church traditions and it is enough to make you spiritually want to jump and until we feel the weight of that

[46 : 29] I'm not sure we feel the freedom of of Jesus words when he says but I have a better way I have the only way where your soul can rest so take my yoke forget all the yokes of this world that's telling you that how you look and what you do and how much money you have that that defines who you are forsake those things and take my yoke take upon you the life that has already been perfectly performed and accomplished everything that God the Father required to be accomplished and rest learn how to abide in that and there will be rest for your souls

God I believe this is the essence of Christianity I believe this is the essence of the gospel the exchanged life that we receive when we come to Jesus and that is why he is the prince of peace so help us tonight as we enter in just a few moments of remembrance and meditation to really really think on what you've taught us tonight from Matthew 11 because if there is a message that ought to scream at us in the culture that we live in it's the message of Matthew 11 so we come now in these next few moments and just spend time abiding in you and resting in you and learning from you in Jesus name we pray amen amen