

A Light That Brings Hope

“Light of the World, Part 1” Series, June 6 & 7, 2026 (Communion) | Matthew 11:25-30
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According to the headlines, many people today are weary and burdened.

The headlines are heavy.

The National Institute of Health estimates that more than **59 million people** are struggling with mental illness, mostly anxiety and depression.¹ In 2024, roughly 1 in 4 Americans ages 12 and older reported using illegal drugs in the past year. More than **64 million people** reported having used marijuana.² The Surgeon General of the United States has put out a warning about an **Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation**.³ The rate of divorces has fallen but so has the rate of marriages.⁴ Those are just some of the headlines, but it’s in our everyday experience of life that we feel the biggest strain.

We carry a hidden weight.

In 2024, a Time magazine author wrote, “People are tired. Like, really tired.”⁵ People feel a great crush of work on their calendars and their spirits. We’re ordering takeout because we don’t have energy to cook. We’re working from home, so we don’t have to commute. We are socializing less because our schedules don’t allow it. And forget hobbies. Our lives are not sustainable. Our stress level is not sustainable. Frequently, our finances are not sustainable. From the outside, we look fine. But we’re carrying a hidden, but heavy, load.

We are like Tucuecito, a village in rural Panama, quietly cut off from what we desperately need.

The road connecting Tucuecito to the outside world just goes down to the local river and ends there. During the dry season, villagers can get to healthcare, jobs, and school. But when the rains come, the river rises and the village is cut off. Kids can’t get to school. Jobs and healthcare are out of reach. Tucuecito becomes a tiny enclave, alone and cut off from the outside world.⁶ We can be like Tucuecito in the rainy season—alone, cut off from people around us, missing out, and hurting.

It’s becoming more acceptable to ask for help.

We’re seeing that here at Valley. Life is sometimes difficult, and we are becoming transparent about our struggles. We’re talking about hurts we carry from the past, about ways that marriage is wonderful and can be hard, and about how we wrestle with mental health problems. People from the community

¹ <https://www.usa.edu/blog/mental-health-statistics>

² <https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/release-2024-nsduh-leveraging-latest-substance-use-mental-health-data-make-america-healthy-again>

³ <https://www.decadeofhealthyageing.org/find-knowledge/resources/publications/u.s.-surgeon-general-s-advisory-our-epidemic-of-loneliness-and-isolation-and-the-healing-effects-of-social-connection-and-community>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>

⁵ <https://time.com/6694092/exhaustion-increasing-causes-essay>

⁶ <https://www.psu.edu/news/academics/story/student-built-bridge-provides-access-education-health-care-rural-panama>

are coming to us for help with the same issues. They believe that God might have answers available through the Church. That's a beautiful thing!

All of this opens a door for the Gospel.

When we are hurting, we're more willing for God to help. The Gospel doesn't always solve our problems quickly. But it does unleash the Holy Spirit to work in our lives—healing some of our hurts, giving us new life, and putting us on a new pathway. In Jesus Christ we are never alone. God is with us and in us. Brothers and sisters listen to us and share our journey. Caring for hurting people can advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what we want to do. Jesus shows us how.

Jesus calls the weary and burdened to Himself and promises rest.

God's ways don't make sense to everyone.

In Matthew chapter 11, as Jesus preached and worked throughout Galilee, people asked questions, pushed back against Him, and opposed Him. This didn't surprise Jesus at all because the Kingdom of God doesn't make sense to everyone. Jesus declared in **Matthew 11:25**,

... "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 ..."

If God's ways don't make sense to you at first, don't get frustrated and give up. He knows and understands something that we simply don't. Keep seeking. Keep asking. Keep open.

Jesus promises rest to the weary and burdened.

Listen to this gracious invitation from Jesus in **Matthew 11:28**,

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Imagine how this call would sound in the first century when many people did manual labor for little pay. "Come to me," Jesus said to them. But think about how this invitation sounds to us. We struggle with problems, we are perpetually tired, and we constantly feel a sense of weight. "Come to me," Jesus says to us. To all who are hurting, "Come to me," Jesus says. He promises us rest. That word "rest" is not just meant to be an end to our labors, a day off, or a vacation. It points to the kind of peace the Bible calls "shalom". It means that God is in charge, we're right with God, and we are right with each other. Jesus offers us that kind of rest! But how will we get it?

Jesus gets into a yoke and pulls alongside of us.

In **Matthew 11:29**, Jesus says,

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

A yoke is the kind of thing you'd put two animals into—like two oxen—to pull a plow or a cart. Jesus is saying, "Get into the yoke with me." Jesus will help us carry the loads of life. He will also teach us how to carry them—the way an older, stronger ox would teach a younger ox to work. Jesus is saying that He will be our mentor. God, who created us, wants to teach us how to deal with life one step at a time!

He gives us a burden we can handle.

In **Matthew 11:30**, Jesus adds,

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

He isn't saying that following Him is easy. Nor is He saying that we will ever be perfect in this life. What He is saying is that doing life by ourselves and proving our own worth aren't working. That was the way of the Pharisees, who piled heavy loads onto people. It's usually our way, too. But it's too difficult; it can't be done. Jesus gives us a new way rooted in forgiveness, God's grace, God with us in Jesus, and God in us in the Holy Spirit. It's the way of the Kingdom of God.

Our views of God tend to be too hard or too soft and rarely “just right”.

In Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Goldilocks happens into the home of three bears who are on a walk. She comes to three chairs and tries each. Papa Bear's chair is too hard. Mama Bear's chair is too soft. Baby Bear's chair is just right. When we think about God, some of us think of Him as too hard and demanding—like Papa Bear's chair. Others of us think of Him as too soft—almost a pushover, like Mama Bear's chair. God doesn't split the difference between the two, but He is like Baby Bear's chair—just right. The burden He puts on us is easy, and He shares it with us. God's heart is always better than we can imagine.

Caring for hurting people is God's nature.

The raising of the widow's son in Luke 7:11-17 shows us Jesus' heart.

Jesus went into a town with His disciples. As He did, He met a funeral procession. People were carrying the body of a man who was the only son of his mother, who was a widow. She was now alone in the world and with no one to support her. In **Luke 7:13** we read,

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her ...

Jesus raised the man from the dead. But why? In **Luke 7:15** Jesus did something surprising,

... Jesus gave him to his mother.

Jesus did it out of compassion for a widow. We see Jesus' heart for the hurting.

The clothing of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21 reveals God's caring nature.

I find **this** to be one of the most surprising instances of compassion in the Bible. Adam and Eve had just disobeyed God. He was in the midst of giving them consequences for their actions. They were feeling deeply ashamed of their nakedness because of their sin. Before God sent them out of the Garden of Eden for good, He made clothes for them. **Genesis 3:21** says,

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Notice the care here! The text suggests that God killed the animals, tanned their skins, sewed the garments, and fitted them to Adam and Eve, that the couple might be clothed and protected. If you wonder who God really is, here He is!

God imprinted His image in us.

We are created in God's image. Consequently, something of His character and His caring heart is in us. We don't do everything God does, nor do we even feel everything God feels. That would be impossible! But, like God, we are created to feel care for each other. We are created to give care to each other. It's natural to us. But what does it look like?

Legacy House workers bear God's image to women caught in addiction.

Legacy House is a recovery program for women who are looking for restoration and healing from addiction. Addiction is a massive and heartbreaking problem for many, destroying lives and ruining souls. Legacy House brings women together in a Christ-centered home for residential treatment. Women go deep in the Bible, they get skilled counseling, and they do everyday things like chores and maintaining a garden—things that make life feel normal. They get education and leave ready for life with changed hearts, heads, and habits.⁷ What a beautiful picture of the image of God working through a disciple's hands and feet.

How can we not care for hurting people just as God does?

God's heart beats for the hurting. God acts to give life and a future to the hurting. God's image is in us; His heart beats within our chests. We care as He cares, and we act in His name!

How can we learn from Jesus to care for hurting people?

We all long for the rest Jesus promises.

We want shalom. We want God to rule, we want to be right with God, and we want to be right with each other. That's true rest. That's the Kingdom of God. True rest will never be complete or permanent, though, in a fallen world. But we long for the true rest Jesus promises us, so we pray as He taught us, "Your Kingdom come and Your will be done on earth, in me, and in us, as it is in heaven!" We want what Jesus offers us!

Jesus calls you and me to come to Him for rest!

As we talk about caring for others today, it would be a mistake to pass over you and me. Jesus is speaking to us! He sees us; we, too, are weary and heavy laden. You may be particularly weary and heavy laden today. Jesus sees you. And He calls us to come to Him. That's a personal invitation to come to Jesus and lay down all our burdens. We lay down our sin and find forgiveness. We lay down our need to prove our own worth to heaven and earth and find that, by grace, we are adopted as sons and daughters of God. We lay down our hurts and find healing for our souls. We lay down our grief and find comfort. How are you weary and heavy laden? Jesus offers you rest for your soul today!

When we take on His yoke, we walk with Him and learn from Him.

We don't just learn how to carry our own loads. We learn how to carry the loads of others! We learn to love as He loves and care as He cares. Like Jesus, we learn to see the hurting—there are grieving widows all around us, people struggling with shame, and people facing consequences, just like Adam and Eve. We learn from Jesus to love them. And that love comes out in practical ways. We listen to people as Jesus listens to us. We walk alongside them—just as Jesus is walking alongside of us. We help carry burdens. Sometimes you have to give something back that has been taken away. Sometimes you have to clothe a person who has nothing and protect a vulnerable person.

⁷ <https://www.legacyforwomen.org/mission-and-purpose>

Celebrate Recovery Sponsors walk with people—side by side, pointing them toward Jesus.

CR Sponsors are people who have walked the recovery journey and are ready to help someone else walk it. They've done the step work. They have been free for a year. They're active in Celebrate Recovery and are surrounded by support themselves. When that's the case, they're ready to sponsor someone. To listen. To have the conversations that are too tough to have in groups. To walk with someone through their step work. To be there when a crisis hits. To point people to Jesus.⁸ They are caring for people the way Jesus cares for us. That's a role we are all given!

Jesus makes us all ambassadors of reconciliation.

We are out representing God. We have His heart; we're His hand and feet. We are quietly and persistently inviting people to come to Jesus Himself. We want people not only to receive care and get rest and help for their souls now; but we also want them to get rest and help for eternity. That's why Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 5:20**,

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

We are ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, calling people to Jesus!

Caring for hurting people builds bridges to faith.

Students from Penn State built a bridge in Tucucito that opened up new opportunities in life.

The students—mostly engineers and architects—are part of Bridges to Prosperity, a non-profit that helps students build bridges linking impoverished villages like Tucucito to the rest of the world. They spent months designing the bridge. It's a pedestrian footbridge—like something out of an Indiana Jones movie—except built with steel, concrete, and wooden decking. Ten students spent four weeks building tiers and towers, positioning cables, and pouring an anchor. They trained villagers to complete the project, and within a few months the locals finished the bridge and gained steady access to education, health care, and work.⁹ Building that bridge is a powerful symbol of what caring does for those who are isolated—and even more, of what Jesus does for us.

Caring for hurting people builds bridges to faith that people can cross.

People are naturally separated from God—like a rural village cut off from life in Jesus and the thriving life He offers now and forever. When we care for people, it's like we are building a bridge from the Kingdom of God to them. Our concrete expressions of God's love make the Gospel accessible and attractive. Jesus says as much in **John 13:35**,

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

We've built a bridge, and we've invited everyone who will to cross it and come to Jesus!

Our own baptistry has been filled with people whose stories you know.

People have stood in that pool and said that they were separated from God, cut off from life, and hurting. They were grieving, addicted, struggling, lonely. Then someone reached out to them. They built a bridge of care that made God's love real. They took the helping hand AND came to saving faith

⁸ <https://cr-centerpointnh.org/the-12-steps/cr-sponsors/>

⁹ <https://www.psu.edu/news/academics/story/student-built-bridge-provides-access-education-health-care-rural-panama>

in Jesus. Now they're comforted AND saved. Now addiction isn't the final word on them; life in Christ now and forever is! Now they're no longer alone; they're part of the family of faith. God used our hands and feet to build bridges from the Kingdom of God to the places where people are lost and apart from Him. Now they have new life AND eternal life! That's the story we've heard from that baptistry over and over again.

In our next season of ministry, we want to build more bridges.

We see God shining the Light of Christ on hurting people and bringing hope. We see God drawing people to Himself and using us to be His hands and feet in the process. We see God advancing the Gospel as He proclaims good news to the poor, freedom to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind, and the year of the Lord's favor. We say "yes" to God's invitation to join Him in what He's already doing. Let's do more of that!

Let that start where we live, work, and play.

The people in our own backyards are probably hurting, too. That means we have the chance to care for people, be the hands and feet of God, and build bridges to faith. That may start with having coffee with a friend, sharing your life (struggles and all), and then listening—really listening—to their story. That may mean creating room in our schedules for interruptions—4 pm calls on Saturday afternoon from a friend, a cousin, or a co-worker who needs help. That may mean joining a team of people who are passionate about the same needs and hurts we are because oftentimes we work better together. We're caring for people, building bridges, and listening to the voice of the one who says, "Come to me ... and I will give you rest." With our words and our lives, we carry His offer to the world.