

Strong in Our Weakness

By Bobby Schuller

Today we're going to be doing a sermon that's going to be a bit interactive. We're going to be doing some prayer and meditation during this sermon today, and I'll get to that in just a second.

Sort of in preparation for that, we talk a lot about prayer; I talk a lot about silence and solitude, but today I want to talk about ways that we can pray and sort of center our souls on scripture when we're dealing with stress, sin, addiction, anxiety, depression, and these are all useful things that God gives us through His word, ways we can draw closer to Him.

First of all, last week we talked about the importance of walking in Jesus' easy yoke. Isn't that interesting? In Jesus' day, there was this thing called a yoke and of course a yoke literally means the way that two oxen are bound together. You have the older, wiser one who is bound to the younger, teenager version of an ox. But is a greater symbol of effectively denominations in Judaism, rabbinic teachings; that every rabbi had their different take on the scriptures. But most rabbis, and most Jews back then, and Orthodox Jews even today, had so many commands and rules that had to be followed. Maimonides the Ram Bam actually who said that there were six hundred and thirteen commands in Jewish Orthodoxies. So think about that: try remembering six hundred

and thirteen commands. How many of you remember the Ten Commandments, let alone six hundred and thirteen, you know what I'm saying?

So six hundred and thirteen commands is a lot and many Jews who wanted to please God, and wanted to know what it's like to be in the kingdom of God, tried desperately to follow these commands and just couldn't. This is, in many ways, why Paul says that the law is death, right? And so you'd actually see that the Pharisees who taught these laws, they themselves didn't obey them! That's why Jesus called them hypocrites. They were actors. A hypocrite, by the way in Jesus' day, was not a pejorative or negative statement. It was just what you called an actor. It'd be like today in Hollywood we would say like, Leonardo DiCaprio's my favorite hypocrite. It wasn't negative; it literally meant a stage actor.

And Jesus would go around saying they're actors, they're performers. They don't believe this stuff. They're just piling it on. And look at the burden it's creating for you, this religiosity, these rules and all this stuff. You're not actually becoming a moral person, you're not actually loving your neighbor and loving God more, you're trapped in this law, this legalism.

And I think that resonated with people, and obviously it resonated with Jesus, that's why He's preaching it, but He said, the yoke of the Pharisees is death, this is what Paul says, but my yoke, right? Jesus

says come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, right? So Jesus gives this image of when you're yoked to Him, the yoke is easy and it's light. It's the easy yoke of Jesus.

But if you see more of Jesus' sermons, you see things like take up my cross and follow me, right? Be crucified with Christ. So that sounds pretty hard to me. So which one is it? Is it an easy yoke or a hard yoke? Is it easy or difficult? Is it life or is it death?

And I think it's this: when Paul talks so much about training and running the race, I think that it's like any discipline. Remember, a disciple is a person who's disciplined. Disciplined in the way. So a disciple of piano or someone who's disciplined in piano, the training is very difficult. Doing all the scales, and learning how to read music, and playing difficult pieces, but it's the training that's difficult, but once the training has set into the body of the pianist, well now playing: is it hard or is it easy? It's the easy yoke of piano playing. So the training of learning the piano is hard, but the playing is easy.

So this is what the easy yoke of Jesus is. The training into Jesus; death to self; humility and learning and growing, stretching, accountability, these things are hard, they're difficult, but is the life in Jesus difficult, or is the life in Jesus easy? It's easy. You train yourself into the life of the kingdom of God, and so the living, according to Jesus' way, once you're trained, becomes easy. It's the easy yoke of Jesus. You

learn that the field you're plowing is not your field; it's His field and He is showing you how to do it.

And so in life, many people, if you would have looked at the yoke of the Pharisees, the yoke was hard and the life was hard. The training was hard, well it really wasn't training, it was a bunch of rules, and then the life after that was death. People weren't alive in it. And so you had a bunch of hypocrites who couldn't follow it.

So in our world, there's so much sin and lack and stress. Anybody ever feel stressed out? There's anxiety. So you know the difference between anxiety and stress? I wish I had a good joke here. This is a real description. Anxiety is just stress that's become unconscious. Its stress that's woven into your body now because you've held onto it so long. So you hold onto something stressful so long that you just cope with it and it goes into this unconscious place and it creates this constant feeling of little tinge of worry that's going on all the time. That's not from God. God doesn't want you to live anxious all the time.

And so how do we live in the easy yoke of Jesus? And the answer is the indwelling of the spirit; the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit that we're just saturated with God's spirit. That's what makes it easy. That God does the plowing. God does the leading. God makes it happen. You don't have to power up. God powers you up. God powers up the situation. And so we have to train into it. We have to train into the easy rhythms of grace. Amen?

So training, I mean we all know what this is like. I remember when I was in college. Look I grew up here in Southern California, and I just lived in water. I lived in ocean water, I lived in waves, we boogie boarded when I was a kid, and skim boarded, and surfed, and scuba dived, and snorkeled, and every summer if we weren't at the beach, we were in the harbor either fishing or going between dinghy's and boats, working on boats, swimming all the time. We were just in the water. So my whole life, I thought I was this great swimmer. I just thought I was the best. Could hold my breath for two minutes, tell people that all the time. Even though I held it to a minute and a half and I was like I can get to two!

So I remember in college at ORU they had this whole thing about being a whole person, and that meant that you were spiritually and mentally healthy, but it also meant you're physically healthy. So everybody had to take a PE class. And you got to pick whatever your PE class was, so I picked intermediate swimming. The reason you pick intermediate swimming is because you already know how to swim. You think you're really good.

And so I got in and we all got there, and we all thought we were these great swimmers. Most of us from California and Hawaii. And the teacher goes okay, jump in. We had this Olympic sized pool. Jump in, swim there and back. Its 50 meters. Let's see how you do. Fifty meters is the same as 50 yards, for all my American friends here.

So we all jump in and we go there and back, and we think it's going to be no problem. We're all kind of racing each other, even though nobody said anything. And all of us, almost all of us, we get to the end of just 50 meters, and most of us were huffing and puffing and felt exhausted. And all of us who thought we were these great swimmers realized very quickly well we were not that good at swimming.

And then later, she said okay, I just want you to swim and see how far you can go; how many laps can you do. My max, 350 meters, which still pretty good, its three and a half football fields. But I thought after 350 meters, I'm going to die, I can't do this anymore. My time was horrible, I was going slow. And she said by the end of this semester, everybody in here is going to be able to do 1,100 meters in under 26 minutes. And I went what?

And she was right. The problem was, it wasn't like I was out of shape. I was in pretty good shape. I was in college. I was athletic and liked working out and all sorts of things, it was that my form was so bad and that was true of all of us. We didn't realize every time you pick up your head that it's like putting the brakes on; that when you flap your feet, you actually could be slowing yourself down, and all these ways that the shape of the body was affecting. That you have to change your strokes in order to use different muscle groups to go for a longer amount of time. We had to learn those types of strokes.

And so what happened was by the end of the thing, all of us who thought we were these great swimmers, we had to humble ourselves. You know, she had to humble us, really, by proving to us we weren't as good as we thought. And then she gave us a vision. By the end of this, you're going to be able to swim 1,100 meters, and we believed her. And so we acted on that. How did we act on that? By showing up three days a week, every week for six months, training; learning how to swim in the easy rhythms of swimming. We had a professor who was a master and we became her apprentices. We yoked our lives to her and she showed us that although we were trying to swim in our own effort, that we were lacking knowledge. So the first issue was knowledge. We had to gain that knowledge, and train it into our bodies so that we could swim 1,100 meters in the easy time of 26 minutes. Is this helpful?

If you want to be a disciple, you have to understand that you can do a lot on your own, but you can't do what God's called you to do on your own. You have to gain the knowledge that Jesus offers us, and train your body into that knowledge so you can walk in the easy rhythms of grace. Amen?

So today what I want to do, I talk about this a lot, but I realized I don't do it a lot. And there's one big reason for that.. two big reasons. One is it can sometimes be boring, and two its bad TV. So those are two reasons why. You know back in the day when I was at the Cathedral, I started as a college pastor, we did all this crazy stuff where we're trying

to make everything experiential. We had prayer stations everywhere. Hannah and I, we had this dream that we wanted people to be able to taste God through communion, smell God through incense, hear God through the music, touch God through friendships and through all the other elements, so we had people break out into times of solitude and prayer.

And then the other thing I did was in my sermons, almost every sermon I would break multiple times through the sermon for this thing we called Selah. And we're going to do that today. I'm going to bring this old practice back. If any of you were back at The Gathering a million years ago when I was a kid; I'm not a kid anymore. Stop that. When I was a kid, you might remember us doing this.

So the first thing we're going to do is we're going to practice Selah, which in Psalms is a time where.. we don't actually know what it means but conjecture says it's something like maybe a musical pause, or a time where David is commanding the audience to sort of stop and think about this, or pause, or meditate on this. And so we're going to meditate on the scripture today. By the way, do you know the Bible talks about studying the Bible four times, but the Bible talks about meditating on the Bible 18 times. So think about that. That we're supposed to meditate on the Bible. That's what the Bible tells us we're supposed to do with it. It tells us that. And so we're going to practice that today, if you don't know how to meditate on the scripture.

The second thing we're going to do as a part of that mediation practice is we're going to breathe, all right? Now that sounds really Eastern or whatever, it's not. It's a part of meditating on the scripture. It's as old as Christianity. Did you know the average person breathes, in the world, breathes 12 times a minute, but the average American breathes 18 times a minute? So we're like (BREATHING HEAVY), right? It's a sign of our stress, if you're stressed out and industrious and working hard, carrying a lot on your shoulders, your breath tends to get more shallow. But actually the ideal way to breathe would be to breathe six times a minute, which is about a ten second breath, five in, five out, five seconds.

So what we're going to do; remember that in the scriptures, the word Ruach, the Ruach Elohim is the spirit of God. The word Ruach in Hebrew means breath, wind or spirit. It's what God gave Adam and Eve when He created them. He breathed His spirit into man. So He gave Him His breath, He gave Him His Spirit, so when we breathe, we are doing that thing that we did when we were first created. That's what you have when you were born. (BREATHES IN) First thing, you breathed in air. You breathed in, right? It made you alive.

And in Greek it's the same, it's Pnevma or choral conductor says it's Pnevma. I'm going to trust her because she's actually Greek. Is that okay? Should we trust Irene? We trust you Irene, okay. Pnevma or

Pneuma, it's the same word. Breath, wind, spirit, and so we're going to take these deep breaths as we pray together today, okay?

And I'm going to invite everyone at home to do this, and actually when I was praying about this, I said Lord, if I do this my church is going to fall asleep. And the Lord said to me, good! Entering into my rest is part of the covenant promise. And I was convicted by that, so if you need to take a nap, if you need to sleep during the prayer time today, the Lord is inviting you. If you've got a little extra space in the pew, feel free to just kind of.. it's like lucky when you're flying on an international flight and there's nobody next to you, and you can put the arm rest up and just go for it. We're a hospitality church, okay?

All right, so we're going to practice, we're going to do this three times. The first time is going to be now, and we're going to take a deep breath and then we're going to exhale Selah and we're going to quiet our hearts and then I'm just going to lift my hands, we're going to take a deep breath, then exhale. Here we go, lift your hand, breathe in. Say with me – Selah. Lord Jesus, we quiet our hearts. Speak Lord, your servants are listening. Lord, we let go of everything for a minute; all our worries and fears, tomorrow, yesterday, today, this building, it's just you and me, Lord, just you and us. And God is calling you right now to enter into His throne room, and to bring your heavy bags, your heavy load on your shoulder. Carry it with you into the throne room. He's going to take it off your shoulders. All of your sin and doubt and fear, worry, bitterness,

unforgiveness, just bring it all into the throne room with you. So we're just going to bring this, Lord, into your place. Holy Spirit, help us in Jesus' name, amen.

And we're going to mediate on 1st Peter chapter 5. So Peter says in 1st Peter 5b. He begins with the famous proverb, which is the theme of the Old Testament. You see it in the Hannah's song, you see it in Moses' song, you see it in the song of Zachariah in the New Testament, you see it in Mary's song in the New Testament, this idea that God lays low the proud, and lifts up the humble.

So Peter is quoting Proverbs when he says "this God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble." And then He says "humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand that He may" do what? Strike you down? Harm you? Make fun of you? Throw you into hell? So you "humble yourselves under God's mighty hand," so it's like God pressing you down, "that He may" do what? "Lift you up." Okay? So that He can lift you up.

And when? When does He lift us up? "In due time." So it requires patience. So remember God is unhurried all the time. Everything He does is unhurried. Every tree grows slow; everything is slow in God's kingdom. So He presses down and lifts you up. So we humble ourselves so He can lift us up.

And this is the theme of the Old Testament. So we begin actually with repentance. We're going to begin by repenting and renouncing, not

just our sin, but also our worries, our fear, our need to control, our vindictiveness, bitterness, things like that, old wounds. This is, again, how you enter the kingdom of God. You're taking your crown off your head and you're laying it before the throne of the Lord.

The kingdom of God is what Jesus pronounces. You understand it, you're like in the kingdom, I'm just going to preach a little bit for a second. Hold on. So the kingdom of God is like this. Remember, John Ortberg said this. Remember the first word that a child learns is 'NO.' And the second word of the child usually learns is 'MINE.' They learn mine before yes. It's crazy. Anyway, mine and no. So from an early age, children are learning to establish their own little kingdom.

And as those kids kind of grow up, and they're sitting in the back of the car, they start to clearly decide what's theirs and what's yours, and this is mine, and no. And so if they're sitting in the back seat, one kid, a brother and sister draws a little line, right? This is my side. That's your side. Right? Just boom, right down the middle. And then of course one kid violates that, and they start fighting like this, and they're doing all this.

And then they think their kingdom is theirs, until the dad slams on the brakes, both their heads hit the back of the seat, and dad turns around and what does he say? This is my car. I will turn it around.. my kingdom! Your kingdom is only in my kingdom. So he powers up. I will

turn this car around and we will not go to Disneyland unless you both get along. Right? So the kids are stressed out.

So the dad's now stressed out, and he's speeding along to Disneyland, and then all of a sudden he gets pulled over, and an officer says sir, you were going 60 in a 45. In the kingdom of Anaheim, that is an egregious.. right? So you have then a power structure over the driver. And so the world is made up of these kingdoms, these types of authority.

And so as we are weak or strong, we learn to power up, protect what's ours, own, defend, fight, and so the repentance is saying not my kingdom, but yours, God. Not my will, but yours, God. And that says even things like not my children, Lord, your children. Not my church, Lord, your church. Not my business, Lord, your business. Not my house, Lord, your house. Not my country, Lord, your country.

And so these things that we worry about, that are important, that matter to us, we learn to train ourselves that I am not the king of this thing. I'm responsible for it, I need to do what's good and right, but the outcome is the Lord's. I trust it to Him.

So repenting is repenting of trying to enforce our kingdom in God's kingdom. Trying to take part of God's kingdom as our own by saying my will, my way, right? So we're going to repent of that.

Let's do this together. We're going to let this go. Think about the ways that you try to control. Think about the ways that you're afraid. Think about the ways you're feeling stressed. I want you to bring them to

your mind now, and for you watching on TV, too, you're going to join us here, right now. As I lift up my hands, you're going to take a deep breath and as I lower my hands, you're going to exhale with Selah. Here we go, take a breath - Selah. Lord, we think of our sins, our fears and worries; the things that are weighing us down about tomorrow or later today. We repent and renounce our sins. We repent of and renounce all of our fears and worries. We give them to you. We humble ourselves. We let go of the pride that says I can do this. I can handle this on my own. We know that without you, God, we can do nothing, but with you, anything is possible. Lift us up in your mighty hand, in your due time, as we humble ourselves. Amen.

Okay, so we repent first. Then we cast our cares. So Peter says after you humble your house, he says "cast your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." Right? He doesn't say cast your anxiety because it's a sin, or because it's bad. He says because God cares about these things you're worried about. And God can handle them better than you can. Again, God's just unhurried and His timing is annoying. It's just a part of being a disciple. Something to get used to.

So what does anxiety, and the Bible talks about anxiety a lot. The Greek word for anxiety is this word Marimnao. Everybody say Marimnao. Good. Marimnao means to worry, to have anxiety, but it's also the word you use to pull something, stretch something apart, break it up. So it would be like if you took like bread, feel like we're making bread and you

want to make pretzels or something, you had a big wad of dough that had risen and you start pulling bits off of it, when you start pulling maybe lamb apart to make some kind of a stew or something. You ever feel that way when you're stressed or worried or anxious? It just feels like you're pulled in a million directions.

Anybody feel stretched like you're going to die? Always thinking about all this stuff? This is what Peter is talking about. And it's not good. It's not good to feel responsible for other people. It's not good to worry about what's going to happen tomorrow all the time. There's no way we can ever totally get rid of it, but Paul teaches us as a discipline, cast your cares, cast your anxieties to the Lord, because He cares about these things. It's almost like saying you stop worrying about it. Let the Lord worry about it. Anxieties are bad for you. It's like if you had a spider crawling on your shoulder, you wouldn't be like, little spider, here we go. Right? You'd be like AWWW get off of me, right? This is what you do with anxiety.

I remember when we were on a missionary trip in Panama once, and we were sleeping in a tree house, and the guy says we kind of have a rat problem. And in the middle of the night, I was sleeping and a rat started crawling on me. And can I tell you, I was in the rat's home. I was in a tree. I wasn't sleeping on the ground like a normal person. I was in his space. It's not fair. He's where he's supposed to be. He's not like coming into my house down on the ground. But I was not nice at all. I took that

rat in my hand and I chucked him. He probably died. Probably didn't die. He probably didn't die. He's fine. He's like senior, no! Anyway.

But no, that's the thing, you cast it. Get it away from you! Cast it away. Don't gently give it away. Throw it, chuck it, give it to the Lord.

So what are you worried about today? What's weighing you down? We've all got worries, don't we? We've all got this stuff. And this is why we have to every day be entering into God's throne room to give this stuff back to Him. We're going to keep taking stuff on, but then we need to give it back to Him, and when we do that, our thinking becomes clearer, we become healthier, we become more joyful, we actually become better at our work, okay?

So we're going to try this again. We're going to take a moment of prayer and we're going to take a deep breath, and we're going to exhale Selah. Ready? Selah. So imagine you're there, you're standing before the throne of Jesus, and really feel the weight that's on your shoulder. What's that weight? Maybe it's your kids, maybe it's your job, your finances, maybe it's a health thing, and the devil has convinced you you have to carry this on your own. The good news is you don't have to carry it on your own. God's going to carry it for you. So just in your mind, just take that thing off your shoulders and you feel the ease of it coming off your back, and you give it to Jesus and He says I'm going to take care of this for you. It's going to be better than you ever thought.

So Lord, we want to lean into that with faith and trust. I'm just going to give another few seconds just for you to listen to the Holy Spirit. Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Pay attention to your breathing, take deep breaths. Amen.

And then finally Peter ends and 1st Peter 5:10, he says "and the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ. After you have suffered for a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. In Him be the power and glory forever." You know what that is, right? That's Peter saying God will have the last word. He will have the last word. And it will be good. It will be very good.

So trust in Him. Continue to enter into His rest. If you fell asleep today, you're welcome. You received a part of your covenant promise already today. Isn't that great? And let's just pray one more time.

Father, we thank you. We thank you that you care about what we care about and that we don't have to be worried. We are going to outlast the fiery arrows. We're going to outlast the stress, and we're going to do it, not by our willpower, but by giving these things to you by training, by praying, by entering into your space. Lord, we're going to stop always running to entertainment and other things to distract us from our pain. We're going to run to you in prayer and worship, Lord, and give these things to you. We're going to lean on your everlasting arms. Lord, we thank you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.