

# Stuffed

November 27, 2022

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Text: Matthew 11:25-30

Welcome to Crossroads! My name is Jonathan Cordle, and I'm one of the pastors here. I hope you had a great Thanksgiving. I don't know about you, but that meal is one of my favorites of the year. I don't understand why we don't have it more often! So, if you feel the same way as me, I'd like to let you in on a little secret for next year. As a proud Pittsburgher, one of the things I love to do is give restaurant recommendations to others so that they can experience the best of what our fine city has to offer. I want to make sure you know about one of the greatest culinary inventions -- the Gobblerrito! [Photo shown on the screen.] What's a Gobblerrito, you ask? It's all of the classic Thanksgiving ingredients -- turkey, corn, mashed potatoes, stuffing -- all crammed into a burrito wrap. This delectable ball of carbs is served by Mad Mex starting in late September and clocks in around 1500 calories. Why go into a food coma for only one meal of the year when you can relive the magic for the entire fall season?!

And that's a primary feature of Thanksgiving, right? Way too much food! Having too much food every once in a while is not so bad, especially when it's one of your favorite meals. But it's another thing entirely when you feel like there's too much stuffed into your life. Some of us have already been in Christmas mode for a month now. But now that Thanksgiving is behind us, the Christmas season really gets underway. It's where our maximalist tendencies as a society can be on full display. For many, this is a season of balancing multiple pressures -- our time, our money, our relationships. What should be an enjoyable season of generosity becomes a holiday that heightens our anxiety because of our impossible expectations. Sometimes, there can be too much of a good thing.

For many of us, this isn't an isolated season but a perpetual state of existence. Maybe you are already feeling dread for the month ahead because you're already exhausted from the never-ending list of to-dos, relational tension, or inability to separate your life at home from your work. Even when you get to do something that you should enjoy, it feels like a chore because you've spun too many plates for too long to the point of exhaustion. We can wonder, how did I get here?

**Life gets overstuffed when we believe there's "not enough."** There's an inner narrative that says there's not enough possessions, not enough fun, not enough accomplishments, or I'm not enough. Scripture points this out from the opening pages of the Bible. The serpent gets Adam and Eve to think that God is holding out on them by forbidding them to eat fruit from one tree in the garden. Mind you, God creates the whole world and puts it at their disposal, and this is the *one thing* that He sets a boundary around. They fall for the serpent's deception. They believe that even though they've been given everything, that it's still not enough, and so they take the fruit. We can relive this story in many ways today.

In my own life, I remember getting the idea sometime in adolescence that I needed to accomplish things in order to get others to approve of me. I didn't approve of myself, so I needed others to approve of me. So, people-pleasing became a way I tried to be enough for others. This would often lead to a jam-packed schedule because I could

never say “no” to what I was asked to do. But I was also unable to be alone and comfortable just being by myself, because when that would happen, I could actually hear the inner monologue of anxiousness and self-doubt. It caused me to be consumed with performing well with my career, and no amount of success was enough to satisfy me. Ultimately, I felt crushed under the weight of my own impossible expectations. I know I’m not alone in this. Many of us here today can identify with the “weary and burdened” from the scripture reading. If that’s you, then good news -- Jesus wants to offer a better way.

So let me give some context to this passage. Jesus has just pronounced judgment on the towns where he was preaching and demonstrating the kingdom of God through miracles and signs. Despite all that he did there, they would not be moved to change. The people there rejected him and his message. In essence, they said “that’s not enough for us.” So, Jesus makes an observation about how God’s kingdom works. In **verse 26** he says, *“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.”* The ways of Jesus are often looked down on by those with power and credentials. Why? Because the cross looks like foolishness to them. If you are concerned about your status and position, then following Jesus will threaten your way of life! But the reality of God’s kingdom, Jesus says, is embraced by children -- the simple and innocent -- those who are unconcerned by status.

Jesus then makes a statement about who he is in relationship to God in v 27. *“No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son...”* This is Jesus saying, “If you want to know the mysteries of God, that’s why I’m here -- to make it clear to you what God’s plan and will is.” As a Jew, Jesus saw firsthand that the Jewish religion had grown incredibly complicated and burdensome to many of its adherents. God had made it clear that they failed at following His ways as His chosen people, which explained why Israel was occupied by other powerful empires. Rather than admitting their dependency and need for God, many in the Jewish community just tried to fix the problem themselves by developing a system that would ensure that they don’t stray from the law that God gave them. And they had quite a lot of laws to keep track of. 613 in total! So they developed even more restrictions in order to keep all the commandments.

Many of us have done the same thing today, even if not through a religious system. As we journey through life, we work to gain security, success, and status through our own means and stuff our life full of ways to try and achieve that. Maybe you start to notice the nice stuff that other people have, like their clothes, cars, whatever. When you see their nice stuff, you realize you don’t have that nice stuff yourself, but you wish you did! Marketing agencies are banking on the fact that we feel this each and every Christmas. How are you going to get all that stuff unless you have a job that can make it happen? What’s more, we tend to get the idea from an early age that who we are is somehow connected to what we do. We ask kids, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” We try to get them every advantage in education because it’s a competitive world. It’s not that having a career is bad. But when it becomes elevated to become the core of our identity, it becomes extra weight we carry around. Because we have to get a lot done to beat out others, we have to pile more and more onto our schedule. Many of you parents, I’ve noticed, are part-time taxi drivers for your kids’ packed

calendars, too! If you're single, you start to notice from movies and music that having a relationship with a significant other seems important. You get the idea that somehow if you're single, there's something wrong with you, and you're incomplete without someone else, so you start to carry that weight as well. Our happiness can be connected to the happiness of people around us. Some of us today are even burdened by superficial religion where we feel like we have to have it all together. We can let others know what's really going on, because then they wouldn't want us around. And every day, we walk around with all that we've crammed and stuffed into our lives, and we feel like we can't keep carrying all this weight

Is this you? Here's Jesus' invitation to us: <sup>28</sup> *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* Jesus is inviting us to a better way. He's saying, "don't fall for this narrative of 'not enough. Don't believe the hype.'" Instead, this is what he's calling us to do: *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* <sup>30</sup> *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

A yoke is what a farmer puts on an ox as it plows. [Photo shown on screen.] In Jewish wisdom literature, there was reference to yoking to the commandments and wisdom of the Old Testament law.<sup>1</sup> But now, Jesus is offering for us to work alongside of him. Rather than being tied to a set of ideas or rules, we are being invited to be yoked to a person. Jesus wants us to learn how to work with him according to his pace and perspective. I think one of the distinctive ways we can faithfully follow Jesus in our current time and place is to choose simplicity in a culture of excess. To choose contentment in a world that constantly broadcasts that there is "not enough." What might that look like? I want to offer three ancient practices that the church has maintained throughout the centuries, and I would encourage you to just choose one as a focal point for this coming season. What would it look like for you to walk in step with Jesus and be yoked with his simple way?

**Working alongside Jesus simplifies -- our stuff through stewardship.** We don't often use the word "stewardship" in our everyday language. But to steward something means that you are being entrusted to care for something that isn't yours. During Jesus' ministry, he was essentially an itinerant teacher who lived off the generosity of others. His teaching and practice demonstrated a mindset that material possessions weren't bad but warned of being too attached to them. When we read the story of the early church being formed, we find that they met one another's material needs. They lived in a way that demonstrated their ability to be free from attachment to their material possessions. How could they do this? They knew their stuff wasn't theirs to begin with! The Apostle Paul reflects this belief as he writes from jail in **Philippians 4:12-13** *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* <sup>13</sup> *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.* Notice the last line -- he is fine with having little because even his hardship connects him to Jesus all the more. He knows it's Jesus he needs above everything else.

Contrast this with our own current reality. In 2019, it was estimated that there would be 16 billion wasted dollars in the U.S. spent on gifts that people will either not

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<sup>1</sup> Witherington, Ben. 2006. *Matthew*.

use or throw away. One of the biggest industries in the country is storage units -- there was a 926% increase of facilities built between 2010 and 2020! There are more storage unit facilities than Starbucks, McDonald's, Wendy's, and Dunkin' Donuts combined. [Photo shown on the screen.] We have a lot of stuff, and we keep going for more. As Christians in the wealthiest country in the world, what would happen if we stewarded what is entrusted to us? Maybe it would mean we would measure our life not by what we have but what we give. It would mean the things we own would not own us.

**Working alongside Jesus simplifies -- our schedule through Sabbath.** As Ronald Rolheiser says, we live in an era marked by "pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness." It's a 24-hour period where we meet with God and detox from our need for productivity and self-dependency. Sabbath is how God trains our body, mind, and soul to maintain an inner spirit of rest in Him. Historically, in the church, this has fallen on Sundays. But in our 24/7 world, it takes some intentionality to make this happen if you work on weekends.

We do four things that help us to be restored. We stop, rest, delight, and worship. Stopping mirrors God in the creation story, who stopped after six days of work. In other words, stopping is hardwired into the way we were created. Anything that relates to your work, you stop doing on the Sabbath. It is an embodied way that we say, "God, you are the one who sustains me!" I will say, it takes work to not work! Getting to this point takes some planning and even paring down, but you get better at it with time.

Rest means rest! Not just in the physical sense, but it can be emotional and mental rest, too. Maybe if there's a problem you've been worrying about, you set it aside for that day and say, "I'll come back to it later." If you're an introvert, feel good about getting your alone time. If you're an extrovert, it's restorative to be around people.

Delight means that we spend time savoring what God has given us. For Anika and me, that means a lot of play time with our son and connection with each other. It means great food and coffee. On Sabbath, we feast on things that bring us joy and contentment.

Worship is what makes Sabbath "a day unto the Lord." Being able to focus on God helps us to recognize his goodness at work in our everyday lives. It is in God that we find ultimate rest for our souls. Ultimately, it helps us to look forward to the renewed creation where we will experience life with God in all its fullness.

**Working alongside Jesus simplifies -- our sources through solitude.** Our minds are being relentlessly barraged with information and ideas through the noise of the world. There's an old adage, "Garbage in, garbage out." What we take in every day is forming us in profound ways. In most cases, it is *deforming* us. In solitude, we practice meeting with God alone so that we can contend with how these forces have shaped us. Here's how Henri Nouwen describes solitude: *"In solitude, I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract. Just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken -- nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something."* – Henri Nouwen

Meeting with God in solitude helps us to confront the ways we reinforce the story of "not enough." Not only that, it's where we hear from God the true story about us as his

children. We let God be enough for us and continuously surrender to him the parts of us that need to be refined and remade. Through prayer, scripture, and reflection, we hear from God so that we can take steps of obedience to Him.

What practice do you sense God inviting you to today? Let's spend some moments in silence and allow Jesus to show us his way.