

PART 3

The Function of Kingdom Discipleship



CHAPTER 9

The Individual

Unlike the elegant *Titanic* described in chapter 1, filled with wealthy voyagers, the *Pelicano* was once the most unwanted ship in the world. For over two years it floated on the open seas. It could be called the *Flying Dutchman* of the twentieth century. No port would accept it.

The massive ship was turned away from at least eleven countries, including Honduras, Costa Rica, Guinea-Bissau, the Bahamas, and the island country of Cape Verde. It wandered the Caribbean, went to West Africa, sailed the Mediterranean, and roamed the Indian Ocean. It was only allowed to dock long enough to refuel and then go back to sea again.

During those years, the orphan ship had even undergone name changes before it became the *Pelicano*. It actually left America as the *Kniian Sea*, was renamed the *Felicia* two years later, and became the ill-fated *Pelicano* four months after that.

The reason for the wide-scale rejection of the *Pelicano* is because in 1986 the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia, didn't have much brotherly love at all. The sanitation workers said

they didn't feel that love from the city that managed them. So they went on strike for almost an entire month.

A lot of trash can accumulate in a month in a city the size of Philadelphia. At first they tried to ship their trash to Ohio and Georgia. But the states refused to accept it. What Philadelphia ended up doing was incinerating their trash into 28 million pounds of scrap and ash, and dumping it into the belly of a ship later called the *Pelicano*.

The *Pelicano* became an infamous floating garbage dump with megatons of rotting trash containing toxic elements from arsenic to lead. No nation around the entire world wanted the *Pelicano* anywhere near them. It had a cargo of trash that it couldn't get rid of.

THE TOXIC TRASH OF OUR LIVES

Life has a way of unloading its junk on us, too, sometimes. Due to our sins, circumstances, and also because of things others have done to us, either intentionally or unintentionally, we get burdened under the weight of trash.

In fact, over time this trash becomes downright toxic. It produces the fumes of anger, guilt, pessimism, fear, and bitterness. Contamination grows out of the stagnation and rots us away. Even other people can smell our stench when we come around.

So we end up floating from one person to another person, or from one situation to another situation, only to discover that we get to hang around long enough to get some fuel, but no longer than that. No one wants our trash.

Even we don't want our trash. So we go to counselors to try and get rid of it. But we notice that when we leave, we still have it with us. So then we go to church to get rid of it, and we feel

good for a moment, but a few sniffs after the service and we discover that we still have our trash. There doesn't seem to be anyplace that can free us from the burden of our trash.

If you can identify with the *Pelicano* today, then you know what it is like to feel aimless and weary under a heavy burden. Weary is different than sleepy. You can fix sleepy with a bed, or with a nap in the easy chair.

But weary dictates to you how you will feel and what you will do. Weary means you can no longer relax. Weary means you are no longer able to be at home with who you are. You have lost your joy. You need relief even from yourself because the thirty-million-pound toxic ash heap that has piled up within you prevents you from having peace.

If "weary" describes you, then I have good news for you. Living as a kingdom disciple has a way of unloading some weight from your shoulders. Jesus says that He offers victory for kingdom disciples from what weighs you down. Jesus doesn't want to be just living in you but to rule in your life so that you are an overcomer (Rom. 5:17; John 16:33; 1 John 5:4-5; Rev. 12:11). Experiencing His ruling authority is intimately tied to your relationship with Him. This victory comes through one of the greatest words in the Scripture: "Rest."

Jesus says that He has come to give you rest. Would you like some rest? Would you like some peace? As you grow in your maturity as a kingdom disciple (a man or woman who is progressively living all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ), you will discover that Jesus offers you what no one else ever could. He gives you a place to dock. He gives you a way to be rid of your burdens. He gives you not only a rest in heaven but also

an ongoing rest while on earth. But before He does, He gives three instructions: come, take, and learn.

REST IS FOR DEPENDENT PEOPLE ONLY

Jesus once prayed, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants" (Matt. 11:25). This statement prefaced His invitation to rest in v. 28: "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden." Why say "You have . . . revealed these things to infants"? Because God does not reveal Himself to the proud and the self-sufficient, but only to the humble.

Anyone who thinks he is smart enough to fix his own life isn't ready to admit his need and draw close to God. But infants are helpless and totally dependent on their parents. Infants can't do anything themselves. All they can do is cry out in need and wait for someone to help them.

Now, I wasn't raised with money. I was raised in row houses in an urban community in Baltimore where my parents just barely made it. Sometimes my mom would have to find a way to cook the fish my dad caught for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert. But despite this reality, I never went to bed worried. The load of life didn't dawn on me very much at all. The reason I never struggled with life as a young child was because it wasn't my problem. That was my parents' problem. I let them worry about it.

When my dad would be laid off for weeks on end due to no work as a longshoreman, I didn't stress. I relied on those who were responsible to care for us. See, dependency does have its benefits—like peace, rest, contentment.

As an adult, I understand the weight of life's burdens. I expe-

rienced it myself, especially as a young man with four small children, a wife, and the challenge of balancing full-time academia with providing for my family. Yet despite all we carry on us as we become adults, Jesus says that if you and I will simply grow in the fundamental principles of discipleship, we can rest. We can experience one of the greatest benefits of being His: peace.

The answers to life's burdens are not found in your knowledge, success, or even in "human wisdom" as Jesus mentioned in the verse we just looked at. In fact, not only can you not find the ways to victory on your own, it is actually hidden from you. Speaking to God concerning spiritual truth, Jesus said, "You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent." Those who believe they are so smart in human understanding don't get the divine viewpoint. Only true kingdom disciples access the wisdom of the Father—wisdom that can radically transform our lives and give us all we need to live both abundantly and victoriously and with kingdom authority.

JESUS OFFERS REST: "COME TO ME"

To those who recognize their need for God and commit to living as kingdom disciples, Jesus offers this invitation:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 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.

For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matt. 11:28–30)

Talk about rest and relief from burdens. "Heavy-laden" means the weight is simply too heavy to bear. It's like a weightlifter with all those disks on both sides of the bar, struggling to hold the barbell up. Similarly, the burdens of life may be weighing you

down. Those afflictions may include physical pain, mistakes, regrets, demands, and disappointments. Eventually we can reach the point where we can't lift the weight anymore. We can't go on. That's why we must live as a kingdom disciple, because that is the only way to tap in to the power that can overcome all of life's challenges. When you abide in Christ and connect to Him fully, you discover His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Yet although this gift is free, it isn't automatic. Jesus tells us that we must do three things. In His invitation, He gives us three active verbs.

The first active verb is "Come." To come to Him, you must leave your human wisdom and attempts at self-sufficiency behind. It's like when you get sick and you run down to the corner drugstore to try and fix it yourself, but nothing seems to work. That's when you realize that you need to go and see a doctor. You visit the doctor because he has information that is beyond your scope of knowledge. He has equipment that is beyond your ability to diagnose and an investigative process to analyze the data in order to identify the source of your ailment. He has training, history, understanding, and expertise that extends beyond you.

God will let you do everything that you want to do in using all of your human ingenuity to seek to live victoriously. He will let you try, and fail, so that you will discover that the only way to live as a victorious kingdom disciple is through Him. That is where you will find rest.

"Rest" is a big word in the Bible, going all the way back to the beginning of Scripture. We read that God worked for six days but on the seventh day, He rested (Gen. 2:2-3). He didn't take a nap. That's not what rest meant. What it meant is that God "chilled." He sat back and enjoyed His creation. So important

was this rest that God told Israel to honor the Sabbath as a day of rest. He prohibited them from working so that there would be a season when they could reflect on all God had done for them, and was doing.

See, rest reminds us of our dependence on God. It reminds us of the core principle of abiding in Christ. When we begin to falsely believe that our results are because of us, we lose focus on what a truly abundant life springs from. In fact, God is so able to provide for you in spite of you that it says, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved *even in his sleep*" (Ps. 127:2, emphasis added). God is still working on stuff while you are snoring.

Rest means to put the processes and outcomes ultimately in the hands of God, where they belong. Another word for rest is surrender. But since there are so many internal resistances to the word "surrender," let's continue focusing on this concept of rest—the ability to let go and let God.

Thursday is the day when the garbage pickup service comes down our street. And despite more than three decades of living in the same home, I have never had the pickup person come to my door and ask where my trash is. If I didn't take the trash to the curb, I'm going to have to live with it for another week. So I take the trash to the curb because the stench from the rotteness would consume our entire home.

When He died on the cross, Jesus signed us all up for the

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ability to receive trash pickup service. But we still need to come. He will not force His rest on you. He says, "Come to Me" because in order to come to Him, you must leave behind the worldly wisdom within your own four walls. Jesus says, "Come to Me," and when you do, bring your trash with you. But not only do you bring your burdens to the Lord, you also hand off the pressure that comes from living in a sinful environment.

You might be saying, "Tony, what is our trash anyhow?" Our trash is anything contrary to the truth of God that holds you back from completely living out your personal destiny. It includes those fortresses that have been erected in your mind. "For as he thinks within himself, so he is" (Prov. 23:7). Every wrong attitude, thought, or belief results in wrong behavior, strongholds, addictions, or bondage.

GIVE HIM YOUR BURDENS

In football, once the quarterback receives the ball from the center, he's under a lot of pressure. Players from the other team are trying to tear at him or sack him. But if the quarterback turns and hands the ball to the halfback or running back, the pressure that was once on him now goes to the other player. The quarterback can literally stand there and watch the rest of the play once he hands the ball off. No one will touch him.

Similarly, when you are trying to live your life by your own effort, strength, and wisdom, you get to experience the pressure of the world's attacks and circumstances upon you. Jesus says if you will hand off the ball of burdens to Him as a kingdom disciple abiding in Him—yoked to Him—He will carry it all. You can rest.

I was talking once with a couple that was engaged. They

wanted to marry, but there was a problem they had asked me to help resolve. The woman had accumulated a considerable amount of debt over the years, and the couple just couldn't see getting married with all of this debt. So after explaining the situation to me, I turned to the husband and said, "We can resolve this fairly easily."

He looked surprised and then asked me how. I told him, "If you simply turn to her and tell her that her debt is no longer her debt—that you'll take it—then there is your solution."

His response was quiet, pondering what I had said, so I continued. "Do you love her?" I asked.

"Yes, of course," he replied.

"Do you want to marry her?" I also asked.

"Absolutely," he replied.

"Then let her know that it's no longer her burden to bear. Let her know it's yours."

After thinking about it for the rest of the day, this man agreed to do that. They called me back to tell me and I could "hear" the tears in the voice of the lady as she shared her relief. See, she had a load, but she also had a love. And when the love was willing to take the load, she found rest. Jesus will take your load—no matter if you were the one who created the mess. He'll take it when you make Him your central point in all of life and abide in Him.

Fundamentally, this verse is an invitation to salvation. Coming to Him means bringing your sin while seeking His grace and forgiveness. This solidifies an eternal rest: salvation. "I will give you rest." But He also invites you to abide in an ongoing rest and victory: sanctification. He does this by moving to our second verb, "Take." He says, "Take My yoke upon you."

HARNESSED TOGETHER: "TAKE MY YOKE"

Jesus' instructions may raise a question. How can He talk about yokes and loads, which suggest hard work, and about rest in the same breath? To most of us, rest means kicking back in the recliner. But that's not the kind of rest Jesus is offering.

A yoke is a harness that goes around the necks of two oxen so they can pull a load. Accepting Jesus' yoke is a picture of surrender to Him, but it's also a picture of help because you're not pulling the load alone. Jesus is yoked with you, and He's going to take the lead and the load.

The purpose of yoking two oxen together was threefold. First, it created companionship because they were hooked side by side. Second, it taught surrender, because in the agricultural days of the Bible, an older, stronger ox was most always hooked up with a younger ox; thus the younger ox learned how to surrender and do the job correctly. The younger ox had to submit to the experience, size, and strength of the older one. This allowed the younger ox to lean on the power and authority of the older one. Third, there was shared responsibility because each is pulling the same plow. The younger ox was able to fulfill its purpose through the wisdom and power of the older ox. Like a car hitched to a tow truck, a person yoked with Christ can go farther than they ever could on their own because you are sharing in His kingdom authority.

My son Jonathan travels with me a lot when I speak. On one occasion, he was with me and I had requested that we both upgrade to first class based on my Platinum Flyer award miles. With platinum status, I'm able to upgrade a companion to first class as well. But on this particular trip, I got upgraded while Jonathan remained in coach.

We went to the front desk to ask why Jonathan wasn't upgraded, especially since he's not only a companion but also my son. We were told they were not able to upgrade him because he had purchased his ticket apart from mine. His indicator number was different from mine, so he was unable to enjoy the benefits that come from being linked with me on that flight.

Many of us as God's children can't fully enjoy the benefits of living yoked with Christ because we have our own indicator numbers. We belong to God, sure, but we insist on plowing our own fields, going our own way, and following our own will. We wonder why no power is evident in our lives and the reason is simple. You don't get the companion benefits of Christ if you don't yoke with Him as a companion. To take His yoke upon you means you willingly choose to go where He says to go, do what He says to do, think what He says to think. You choose to surrender. Your victory as a kingdom disciple is entirely related to your level of surrender.

To fully enjoy relief from your burdens, you have to bow your head and be willing to accept His yoke. You must abide in a relationship with Him and His Word, as we have seen earlier. It is more than just accumulating information about Him.

It involves staying connected to Him. He wants you to make your companionship with Him not only the most important thing, but an ongoing and continual relationship. An ox doesn't yoke and take a few steps only to then unyoke and take a few

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more. To yoke with someone is to agree to walk with them where and how they are leading.

Jesus promises that because He is gentle and humble, His yoke is easy. The Greek word for easy is the word "well-fitted," or you could also say "custom made." His yoke has been designed with you in mind.

It won't be wearisome or confining or constricting to you. It will be liberating.

"LEARN FROM ME"

We've pulled up to the dock of Jesus Christ in response to His instruction to "Come." We've joined Him through tying up with Him under the connection of His yoke. Now, let's see how we can fully maximize our individual lives as His disciples through the next section of the verse.

Only the truth sets you free. To take out the trash and unload the boat is to exchange your thoughts with Christ's thoughts on a matter. Remember, our trash is anything that is contrary to the truth of God. A kingdom disciple understands the necessity of taking every thought captive unto Christ. When a thought, attitude, or impulse toward a behavior comes into your mind, you are to take it captive and align it with God's viewpoint. Because when you align your thoughts with His thoughts, then you are living as a kingdom disciple. Your thoughts affect your actions.

Thus, the third active verb Jesus gives us as an instruction is "Learn." He says, "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." The Greek word that we translate into "learn" is the concept of discipleship. Jesus disciplines you when you learn from Him. It is done through an ongoing renewal of your mind

to learn to think like His. This process doesn't happen instantaneously. It happens one thought at a time.

How do you unload thirty million pounds of toxic ash off a ship like the *Pellicano*? One pound at a time. Each time you take a thought captive and replace human wisdom with spiritual truth and insight, you are removing the burden and lessening the cargo of self-will. You are becoming more and more a kingdom disciple.

What are you supposed to be learning? Learn how Jesus pulls the plow. Learn how Jesus relates to His Father. Learn how Jesus views sin. Learn how Jesus values others. Learn what Christ's viewpoint is on a matter.

But don't only learn it; accept it—submit to it—and let it come forth in your actions. Learning from Jesus means to replace human wisdom with spiritual manifestation. It means to learn, accept, and apply His approach to peace, conquering worry, your value, your identity, what it means to be a kingdom man or a kingdom woman, overcoming temptation, operating in the workplace. It means showing respect, giving and receiving grace, learning to trust, properly handling your money. All of that, and more.

Jesus said learn My way of doing things. You tried your way and it just made you weary. Learn My way because My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. It's a new way. A new mind. It's a new yoke. God wants you to put away the old yoke that enslaved you, and exchange it for His yoke that will set you free.

FINDING REST FOR YOUR SOUL

To finish this formula for living as a kingdom disciple, let's look at the last two verses in this section in their entirety. Jesus says,

"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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

I don't want you to misread that. Jesus never said you won't have a burden. He just said it won't weigh the same. The burden will now be light.

One day I was walking through the airport with suitcases in both hands. Someone stopped me and asked, "Don't those have wheels?" Here I was straining and struggling, all because I had forgotten that my suitcases had wheels. I quickly put both of them down, pulled the handles up, and went on my way. Now, the weight I was carrying didn't change. They were still the same full suitcases. But since I changed the way I was moving them, my burden became light. I didn't feel it as I used to.

God is saying that if you will come to Christ as a fully committed kingdom disciple, He can put wheels on your life so the circumstances and challenges you face won't weigh you down as they used to.

Our world has many problems today and they come in all shapes and sizes. Rest, peace, and joy are increasingly harder to come by. But when you yoke up with Christ, God says you will rest well.

One day two men entered into a competition as foresters to discover who could cut down the most trees in a day. The younger man's strategy was to use his size and strength. But the older man had a different strategy: every hour he would sit down and take a rest.

The younger man noticed what he was doing and mockingly laughed at him. *He can't even make an hour*, he thought. *I've got this in the bag.*

So while the younger man kept chopping and chopping and chopping, the older man would chop for fifty minutes then rest for ten, chop for fifty and then rest for ten. This went on all day long.

At the end of the day, the judge counted the trees. To everyone's surprise, the older man had chopped down twice as many trees as the younger. Everyone was confused, especially since the older man worked considerably less than the other.

When the younger man asked how he won, the old guy pointed out that he was using that downtime to sharpen his ax. See, when you've got the right thing working for you, you can take a rest. You can relax because God's got it. He can accomplish more in a minute than we ever could in a lifetime. Wouldn't it be wise to rest in His sovereign rule, yoked to Jesus Christ?

As a kingdom disciple, remember this one phrase: God's got it. Rest in Him through pursuing an intimate relationship with Christ, and He will do more in you and through you than you could have ever done on your own as He shares His kingdom authority with you.