

Most of us want to be good people. But this is easier said than done. Sometimes the 'good' in a situation isn't clear. Or we have conflicting messages from other people about what they want from us. We have all sorts of expectations layered onto us from other people in our lives. So many do's and don'ts, shoulds and shouldn'ts. Eat healthily, exercise, save money but be generous, work hard at a good job, but make time for your family, be nice, (be thin, be beautiful), don't upset anyone, don't let other people down, don't drink...but make sure you fit in socially, so actually, do drink, reply to emails the same day you get them, stop spending so much time in front of a computer screen...

The lists are endless, and many of them don't have much to do with who we are on the inside, and what we deeply want and desire. And most of us have never learned to listen to what is nudging from within us, rather than what has been laid on us by others.

When Jesus compares the people of his generation to 'children sitting in the marketplaces', he's pointing out the problem of making rules to tell others what to do – everyone's rules are different. We're damned if we do, and we're damned if we don't. John the Baptist fasted in the wilderness, and the people were threatened by his discipline and said he had a demon. Jesus went to parties and ate with undesirables and the people were threatened by his freedom and called him a glutton and a drunkard. In fact, both Jesus and John were living the life that God's Spirit called them to. And that's where we get to the nub of it – there are different ways of living a good and righteous life. And you can't always tell from the outside whether someone else is keeping in step with the Spirit's call for their flourishing.

What we do know, is that if we try to live a life simply by keeping rules that other people have made for us, we are doomed to fail. That's what Paul is talking about in the Romans passage when he says: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." When we are trying to live up to a list of do's and don'ts, we find that there's something within us that sabotages our best efforts to live well, and that same energy pulls us towards thoughts, actions and compulsions that harm us and others. "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul cries out. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul's own experience tells him that it's not possible for any of us to live up to what we think is good and right – or even to know what *is* good and right – without the transforming presence of the Christ, living within us. And that's what Jesus also means when he talks about coming to him and receiving his easy yoke, and his light burden.

The yoke that Jesus wants for us is to let him dwell in us and guide us. For us to take the time to be still with God, to let the noise of our thoughts and our anxieties and our sorrows die down, and to quietly seek the presence of the Spirit – the living, flowing spring of fresh water inside us that is always there. Only by learning to discern what God is whispering inside us when we step aside from all the other pressures and demands of life, can we know what is ours to pick up, and ours to put down. And that will be different for each of us.

Remember, it was John the Baptist's call to fast, to live in the desert, to baptise, to preach repentance. It was Jesus' call to eat and drink, to get alongside the sinners of his day and share friendship with them. They weren't living by anyone else's blueprint for them. They did what arose within them as call and desire, as the demands of love expressed in their own way.

This isn't a cheap and easy message to 'live your dreams' and 'do what you want'. This is a message about attuning your heart, listening, learning which of your heart's desires are birthed in you by the Spirit and which aren't, and then experimenting and discovering with God the practical ways to live out those God-given gifts and longings in your life. In **your** life...not in some imaginary life where things all magically fall into place as soon as you know what it is you really want.

There is discipline involved in this. The discipline to stop and listen. The discipline to pray in ways that help you discover the difference between the voice of God, and the voice of habit, or fear, or cultural pressure. The discipline of seeking and receiving guidance and direction from wise friends and counsellors. And then the discipline to act in ways that are aligned with your own true north, and work within the limits and realities of your circumstances.

This is the yoke that Jesus invites us to wear. Its gentleness, and its ease, comes from the fact that God is willing and able to offer course corrections along the way, without endless guilt trips and recriminations. It's the difference between travelling with someone else's directions, and driving with a GPS or a satnav. If you're trying to remember someone saying: 'turn left, then at the roundabout go right, and then left at the top of the hill...', and you end up taking a wrong turning, before you know it you're completely lost. With a GPS, if there's a blocked road, or you go the wrong way, the GPS just recalculates your route. It takes you another way. It's instant, and it doesn't shout at you for getting it wrong. It just quietly offers a new possibility for getting where you need to be.

God is the GPS, not the memorised directions. In God's heart, there are endless possibilities for discovering the abundant life. God can recalculate our lives. Of course, our decisions have consequences and some options are lost to us along the way as we make choices that open one path and close others. But because God knows us intimately, if we are taking the time to be with God, renewed in God's love, then God can offer us new and different ways to thrive.

Maybe you have suppressed something you are really fitted for in your life because of what other people wanted from you. Or maybe you've felt guilty for years because you've been trying to live up to some standards that you thought God wanted, but were really someone else's values. Or you did something ages ago that felt like it wrecked your life and you can't see how things could be good again. Or maybe you compare yourself with others and tell yourself you should be doing more, or giving more. Or maybe you've avoided places and people that would have given you joy, because someone taught you that real Christians don't go there, or mix with that kind of person.

It's not just the burden of being exhausted from doing too much that we need to be released from – although many of us know that kind of tiredness. It's also the mental burden of anxiety about not doing enough, or doing the wrong things, or of fearing that whatever we're doing isn't acceptable, or that we've missed out on the opportunity to be who we really are or do what we really love.

To each of us, Jesus says 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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.' It's time to learn to rest in God, and to discover there the still small voice that calls you to your truest self, and releases you to be that self in the world.