BUFFALO UNITED METHODIST

Sun, Apr 12 – Relax: You Don't Have to Figure it All Out *Proverbs 3:5*

Dallas Willard, was a well-known American philosopher and respected speaker and author on spiritual formation. He was once asked, "How would you describe Jesus in one word?"

He answered: **relaxed**.

What an intriguing word.

He could not have meant Jesus never grieved, never wept, never felt the weight of his mission especially on the cross.. But Jesus was never in a hurry. He was fully present to the person in front of him. He was never flustered by interruptions. He was never anxious about how his Father's will would unfold.

Jesus lived with a settled trust.

Jesus didn't drag his feet nor did he rush ahead. Neither did Jesus seem flustered or irritable for all the interruptions and people challenging, pressing, and asking something from him. He did seem relaxed.

This story of Dallas Willard describing Jesus as relaxed is found in this book.

In the Introduction of Megan Fate Marshman's book Relaxed: Walking With the One Who Is not Worried About a Thing. I encourage you to check it out for yourself.

When I saw this book pop up online, it was the subtitle that hooked me. What would that feel like, to walk with the One Who is not worried about a thing? I bought it for myself, to slowly savor it…

…like one might when eating a milk chocolate Lindor's ball.

But that little daydream was disrupted when my life took a sudden painful turn, a pinched nerve in my neck.

Being "relaxed" is not really how I would describe myself. This long journey of healing has been extremely painful.

But during this time the Spirit brought back to my memory this verse I memorized in college…this verse this book and our 3 week sermon series is based on from…

Proverbs 3: 5 -6.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your path straight.

I was being stretched to trust God more. My life situation was challenging me.

And in general, I would like to become more relaxed in my outlook in life. I would like to grow in my ability/my lived experience…to walk with the One who is not worried about a thing. And this little gem is giving me helpful insights to do just that.

So, let me ask you.

How is it with your soul? Does the word relaxed describe you? Are you experiencing wonderful spiritual spa days with the Lord? Are you having rejuvenating times with God or in your life? We celebrate fully with you!

But for some of us, relaxed might not be a good description. Or maybe you have a sibling, co-worker, neighbor or friend or grandchild who is struggling to relax. Right now, maybe we would choose other words like distracted or hurried or anxious. Not relaxed.

And maybe you are not relaxed because they are not relaxed?

How did we get here, to this place of not relaxed?

I could blame the weather or my neck. But I am going to blame our culture and even our Christian culture.

The blame is fitting because we have been unconsciously trained to figure out and live our lives, including the Christian life, on our own. Meaning living and serving God mostly just within our own strength and competency, which can result in weariness, minimal spiritual impact, low joy, pride, irritability, and burnout.

Why do we succumb to the cultural norms of independence and anxiety instead of living and leaning into the relaxed life of Jesus? Our author Marshman asks, **"How will we ever walk with God when we're so preoccupied with figuring it all out, living better and sinning less and loving more, all the while praying without ceasing?"**

It seems impossible, and it is, in our own strength.

And then Marshman lands this crystal clear insight, **"One of the greatest counterfeits to living like Jesus is living in Christian autonomy, trying to be like him without him."**

Repeat it.

Trying to be like Jesus…without Jesus.

Trying to be like Christ without receiving his help through the Holy Spirit is Christian autonomy. Maybe that is a new phrase. But it is an old idea.

I would also call it being exceedingly "self-reliant".

Being "self-reliant , self-sufficient, and independent" is a problem, of course, because from start to finish, the Christian life, as explained in Scripture, is one of dependence.

Just recently I had a little life lesson on the dark side of self-sufficiency. Someone had given me a ride to physical therapy and back. And she asked if there was anything else she could help with. I asked if she would help change my bed linens.

She agreed and happily set to work.

But I couldn't let it go. I was pacing in the kitchen. I couldn't eat my lunch, rest, or sit still. I HAD to go help her. I knew I shouldn't strain my arm, but I strained my arm. We even kind of joked about it.

But that was a problem. I couldn't receive her help. That wasn't strength. That was pride dressed up as self-sufficiency.

It's when we fall into self-reliance, that our lives become burdensome, worrisome and anxious. Our faith becomes shallow and fake. Our author describes it like this, and as I read…does any of it hit close to home for you?

"We become experts at the routines, the lingo and the habit of acting Christian, while rarely engaging in a real conversational relationship with God, the one we claim to be following is relaxed, but our lives aren't. We're burdened and bothered and ashamed and grieved and angry."

We start to perform, we start to hustle to become better Christians but it doesn't bring joy, instead it falls flat, we end up**, "…playing a part in God's story, we were never intended to play: the one in control."**

And again that's a problem. And again, we have pride.

There's a reason why Jesus said, **"Apart from me, you can do nothing."** from John 15:5. Meaning, of course, there's things that you can do, there's a lot of things we can do separate from the Lord. But apart from dependence on the Lord, we know our actions can lack spiritual weight and impact and will amount to nothing.

When we hear, "Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart…" we might get a little discouraged. When we hear you don't have to have it all figured out, we might get a bit uneasy. Maybe you have tried to trust in the Lord and things kind of feel apart or you fell down.

Maybe you have gotten tired and maybe given up.

It's okay, it happens.

Here is some good news.

Today you can take another step. Today you can take a small step. Each day offers us a new opportunity to take another step, to reach out for God's unending grace for you. God's grace is simple and practical and helps us move forward.

God's grace helps us get up and place one foot in front of the other.

More good news,

God loves you and is for you. God is like any good parent, watching and helping a toddler learning to walk, God is not angry or surprised when you miss a step. He doesn't shame you for your misses. He lovingly encourages you to get up and take another step.

No sprints or marathons are needed today, friend, just take another simple step, knowing God goes before you, and he leads you in His sovereign path.

I like how Marshmann reminds us that our hearts will find God greets us warmly with his non anxious presence, inviting us to take just another step with him, toward him. And we walk away from the autonomous faith, one step or fall at a time.

But don't just take my word for it. Listen to his. **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your path straight."**

In journeying with God, and as we grow in trusting Him with our whole heart, we may find ourselves praying differently. We go to God in every situation.

And I quote:

If you finish a chapter and nothing seems to change, tell him. If you want to pray more, tell him. If you don't pray more a week after wanting to pray more, tell him. We can't stop letting our good or failed efforts hinder us from our relationship with God as we tell him what we feel and think.

And she goes on…

Are you disappointed in yourself because you're long forgotten, the truth gleaned from a clever sermon or an insightful blog from a month ago, tell him. Are you angry with yourself because you can't seem to figure out how to stop being so anxious? Tell him. Do you feel guilty, tell him. That's walking with God.

The journey God takes us on in trusting his sovereignty begins with the personal awareness of all the ways we don't trust him, and then being honest about them. You might be thinking, “Wait, you mean we can talk to him about the ways we don't trust him?”

Yes, it's not like the conversation is going to surprise him.

Whatever the issue might be for you, whatever you are feeling or struggling with, anxiety, worry, stress, anger, jealousy, laziness, lack of spiritual energy. Tell Him.

Whatever light is lighting up on the dashboard of your soul. It's signaling to you the very thing that you can and need to dialog with God about. Take it as an invitation. See it as a doorway for greater intimacy.

The first step in your journey of becoming more relaxed, more like Christ, is to go to Him with everything. Going to God with the truth, even if the truth is that you don't trust him in an area of your life, IS trusting Him. Even bringing your distrust is an act of trust.

So maybe the question this morning is not, *Do I trust God perfectly*?

Maybe the question is simply, *What is one place in my life where I need to take one more step toward him?*

One fear.

One burden.

One anxious thought.

Bring that to him.

Tell him the truth.

And take one more step into living into this Proverb:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, submit to him in all your ways, and he will make your path straight. Amen.

Time of Reflection:

1. What small step is the Lord encouraging you to take this morning?