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Matthew 11:28-30
The Ladder of Ups & Downs

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We are at the end of a season in which all of us take advantage of the weather and the time that we have to go on vacation. Vacations with family, vacations with your husband or your wife, vacations to go and visit your grandchildren living in another city, vacations with your closest, oldest or newest friends.

Some of us plan our vacations ahead of time; it could be a year in advance, six months in advance, or you may be one of those spontaneous folks that go with a few days in advance.

Recently, my family and I went to Cancun, Mexico and we enjoyed our time there. Honestly, it was one of the best vacations that we have ever had as a family. A few days or weeks before we left, we spent time thinking about what we needed to take for that week: what clothes, what shoes, how many outfits, swim suits, rain jackets, etc. I am a planner, in case you have not noticed. Essentially, I just wanted to make sure we had all we needed. We were ready for a change of environment for a period of time.

But let me tell you something that most men with women in the house probably know, it is not easy living with females when it comes to packing! They pack a lot of stuff...

But there are also some men like me who pack a lot of stuff too. Regardless of whether or not you are an over-packer, my invitation for you today is to review the luggage that you pack when you decide to go for vacation.

My invitation for you today is to climb the ladder of life with light luggage; the ladder

of ups & downs. Because when we decide to go on vacations, ***we decide to change our environment.*** Because when we climb the ladder, we want to reach the top and encounter the empty cross.

There are different reasons why we separate a couple of days or weeks in the middle of our busy schedule to take some time off either on our own or with family.

I asked some of you why you take a vacation every once in a while and this is what you responded:

- Because we need time to relax.
- Because we need time to swim and get tan.
- Because we need time to go out and forget about work.
- Because we need time to meet new people and get to know new places.
- Because we need time to taste new food.
- Because we need time to be alone.
- Because we need time to think about ourselves, our family, and make future plans.
- Because we need time to find ourselves in new adventures.
- Because it is the time to leave all behind and start anew, to have a fresh start.
- Because it is the time to get away from the routine.
- Because we like to learn about the history of the places and education.

But with all of those reasons in mind, we always pack something in our luggage that we don't need to take on vacation. What is in your backpack that isn't letting you climb the ladder and reach to the top?

The scripture reading for this morning is in the book of **Matthew 11:28-30:**

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you

the midst of it. Please don't buy the lie that you can never be healed, or forgiven or whole again, or be able to restore any relationship around you.

Your healing has *already* been accomplished through what Christ Jesus has done for you. Your joy is already there, so make the choice to grab a hold of it.

stories of people who blew it and then cried out to God from a broken heart and were healed and restored. Tell God you need His love and forgiveness, **Psalms 34:18** says, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* **1 John 1:9** tells us: *"If we confess our faults, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our faults and purify us from all unrighteousness."* Notices that it says He will purify us of *all* unrighteousness -- even the acts we believe are unforgiveable.

If you are feeling guilty of something this morning, today is the day in which we can step up and leave the brick at the foot of the Cross. It is an action, we take it out of our luggage and we move forward towards His presence.

Fourth, some of us pack other kinds of bricks. You may find yourself with a brick of jealousy, a brick of despair, a brick of suicide, a brick of addictions, a brick of hate, and so many more that we can spend hours talking about. How do we chase out these negative feelings? How do we come to a place where our souls aren't burdened by the weight of what is meant to be given to God?

Conclusion:

Today we are finishing the series based on the book, *People Can't Drive you Crazy If you don't Give Them the Keys* by Mike Bechtle. And we discussed since the first Sunday until today how others can affect our relationships, or how we can be an inspiration for them too. Our challenge today finishing the series is how we can be an inspiration for others...but let's begin with a simple step from the Bible.

The Bible teaches us in **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"*.

Gratitude is the answer to breaking, crushing, and destroying every single brick you may be carrying and that may be affecting your relationships with others. If you take anything from today, it is gratitude; not the concept of it, but the choice of it. We may not find ourselves able to give God thanks for the difficult situations or relationships that we find ourselves in, but we *can* learn to look for things we can be thankful for in

rest.²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Let me show you some of the stuff that I call "bricks" that we pack when we go on vacations, the very things that lead us to exhaustion once we get there or back home.

First, we pack a brick of confusion. Confusion is lack of understanding; it is the state of something in our minds, our lives, our families, our jobs, etc., being unclear to us.

- Confusion doesn't help us to reach the top to the ladder, it forces us to carry something very heavy, making us feel weak and without the energy to continue pursuing God's will in our lives.
- Confusion is not from God, the Bible tell us in **1 Corinthians 14:33a** *"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace."*
- We can avoid confusion before it starts by keeping our minds on the Lord and His Word. The Lord gives us peace of mind, which keeps confusion away from us. The Bible tell us in **Philippians 4:6-7** *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Confusion takes us to dark places; confusion leads us to making wrong decisions. Confusion is one of our enemies during vacation, so I encourage you not to pack this brick in your luggage of life because confusion doesn't belong to you. Give it to God. Let Him bring peace. The Bible also tell us in 2 Timothy 1:7 *"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."*

Second, we pack bricks of "dis": **discomfort, discouragement, disconnection and disappointment**. All of these are emotions we all experience even as Christians, but when we allow any of these into our lives, we open the door for sadness to

come in, we open the doors for stress to come in, we open the doors to believing that the love and grace of God has abandoned us.

Let me pull some examples from the Bible:

Despite fervent prayers, things don't turn out the way we hope they would. Elijah hoped that after all the miracles the Israelites saw performed on Mount Carmel, Ahab and Jezebel would repent and put God first, but they did not. King Ahab and Jezebel were as stubborn and hard hearted as always, and Elijah felt discouraged, exhausted, and he told himself that his entire ministry was a waste (**1 Kings 19**).

Jeremiah felt angry and discouraged with God when he believed God was against him, and because of that perspective, he temporarily lost hope in God, **Lamentations 3**.

The disciples too felt discouraged after Jesus was crucified, before he rose from the dead. They said, *"We were hoping that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"*, **Luke 24:21**. They couldn't see the bigger picture and felt disappointed that Jesus did not fight for his kingdom.

Peter felt discouraged with himself when he realized that he wasn't as courageous as he thought he was. Jesus had warned him that he would deny him, but Peter's pride kept him from seeing himself clearly (**Matthew 26:31**). We too can feel discouraged and even depressed when we fail to live up to our own or someone else's expectations.

But the Bible also provides us some solutions that we need to put into action. Pay attention to your thought life. Philippians is a clear example. In **Philippians 4:8** Paul tells us: *"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things"* And in **2 Corinthians 10:5** to *"take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ"*.

Back to Jeremiah, in **Lamentations 3** Jeremiah told himself things about God that were not true but because his mind believed his version of reality instead of God's, he lost his hope. Notice in verse 21 Jeremiah begins to have a change of mind and heart. He says, *"This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope."* When his thoughts changed, his negative emotions also lifted even though his circumstances stayed the same.

The apostle Paul advises us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, **Romans 12:2**. He is telling us that our mind needs to be capable of thinking differently than we have in the past. Part of this process is to learn to see both the temporal (life is hard) and the eternal (God has a purpose here) at the same time; to see life with two different lenses.

Paul speaks honestly of his temporal pain when he says he is hard pressed on every side, confused, persecuted and beat down. Yet he did not become crushed, despairing, abandoned, or destroyed. Why not? Because he learned to firmly fix the eternal perspective on his spiritual eyes. He says, *"Therefore we do not lose heart... So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"* (**2 Corinthians 4:8-18**). Paul never minimized the pain of the temporal, yet discouragement didn't win because he knew that God's purposes were at work.

Third, we carry bricks of guilt & shame. Do you believe you've done something that God could never forgive? Maybe you realize He's forgiven you, but you still struggle with forgiving yourself.

Whatever it is we struggle with, many times we think if we hold onto it -- and continue to grieve over it -- we are showing God that we really are sorry for our actions. But the whole reason Jesus had to die for us is because we are incapable of pacifying God on our own efforts. If you believe God could never forgive you, or if you are struggling to forgive yourself for something in your past, these steps toward healing and wholeness are for you:

Cry out to God and confess to him all that is on your heart. The Scriptures are full of

