

Matthew 11:28 (1984 NIV)
Jesus the Burden-Lifter

Introduction

Story is told about a couple who could not have children and went to a priest. He was about to leave for a work assignment in the Pope's office in Rome. After hearing their concern and desire, the priest promised, "I will light a candle for you when I am in Rome." Lighting a candle is a way to symbolize seeking God's blessing in prayer.

Two years later, the priest returned and visited the couple. He found the wife taking care of five children—twins and triplets. Overjoyed, the priest asked to congratulate the husband.

"He is not here," the tired wife replied. And she added, "He has gone to Rome to look for you and to ask you to blow out the candle."¹

We are often reminded in Singapore that we need more babies. Do more babies really solve the future problems of our country? We hope they will. But nothing is certain.

Indeed, the only thing certain in our very fluid and fast-changing world is uncertainty. Yes, life in this age is full of uncertainties.

- Good health today, but sudden illness or even death may follow.
- Top of the heap in your workplace, but then comes a sudden notice to make way for another.
- Advanced technology in place to deal with natural disasters and diseases, but when earthquakes, cyclones, tsunamis, snowstorms, floods, and viral epidemics hit, everything seems too little too late.
- Economic outlook painted in bright colours one day but turn gloomy the next because of the power play among free market forces.

The burden of uncertainty is heavy. Little wonder many today are stressed, stretched and strained. Indeed, if most people are honest with themselves, there have been times, maybe even now, when one feels so weary and worried; burdened and burnt out.

If you feel this way today, you are not alone! These feelings of weariness and worry; burden and being weighed down are universal. People everywhere are affected in one way or another, in one degree or another.

¹ <https://news.amomama.com/234096-daily-joke-a-couple-ask-a-priest-help-ha.html>

You know why gyms, spas and Yoga centres are popular with people today? Many people are willing to pay big money to these places not only because they want to keep their shape. In today's stress-filled world, they also want to keep their sanity.

Many are burdened by the uncertainties in life today. These uncertainties that hit us are not always things that affect people on a global scale. More often than not, they are things that hit us at the personal level as we live each ordinary day.

Some of you may be carrying into this place your burden of uncertainty in life. I want to tell you that someone here wants to lift away that burden from you. He is none other than Jesus Christ. In the Bible, Jesus says to the people, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).

What are some things that may be burdening you and me today?

I. We may be burdened by the uncertainty that comes with the fear of redundancy.

One BIG reason why the world labels someone as redundant is because he has failed. Our society stresses much on success. Almost everyone hates to experience failure. All love success in life.

Yes, we often measure success by gauging if we are important enough to be respected by other important people. We often measure success by gauging if we have an important identity before others. And often this identity has to do with what we do—i.e. our work.

Our work gives us income. We get the money to meet our needs and even our wants. Our work gives us social life. We get the chance to meet people. Our work may even give us status. We get the perks to impress others. Our work gives us drive. We get the challenge to achieve results.

Indeed, work is very important to many people. It gives them their sense of identity. Hence, when they lose their work, they lose their sense of identity. They become haunted by a sense of failure. They feel redundant in life.

Many people have lost their work in recent times. Gone were the days when the more senior you are, the more secure you are in your position. Today's reality is this—the more senior you are, the more likely you will become redundant because younger and better ones have entered the competition for your position. A number of people who lost their work are depressed. Not necessarily because of the loss of income. In fact, they may have enough money to retire or semi-retire or to stop work for a while. They are depressed because with the loss of work, they have lost their sense of identity. They feel like a failure becoming redundant in life.

How you see yourself is often reflected in what you think how others see you.

A man felt so lousy about himself. One day, he told a friend, “You know, I really think that I am a good for nothing.”

His friend asked, “What do you mean by that?”

He answered, “Well, I think I am like garbage fit for the dust bin.”

His friend tried to encourage him by saying, “No, you are not like that. So don’t talk rubbish.”

Immediately the man exclaimed, “There! I talk rubbish because I am garbage. You have just confirmed it.”

This cruel and pragmatic world says, “You have messed it up very badly this one time. Now you get out. We want nothing to do with you since you are good for nothing.”

Indeed we may experience success, but it is never certain that it will continue. You may do well numerous times. But if you mess up just one time, you’re out! That’s the kind of low tolerance for failure in the world today. You see that everywhere, even on TV in reality shows like “American Idol”, “Survival”, and “The Apprentice”. Just one slip one time, you’re out or fired!

The 2008 Olympics in Beijing must indeed be the most impressive Olympics that the world has seen so far. But if there’s any disappointment, I wonder what it would be.

While the world might not be disappointed with how China had hosted the Olympics, I believe the greatest disappointment, if any, must be among the 1.3 billion or so Chinese people themselves.

The man who was almost certain to win the only gold in track and field for China had failed to deliver. That broke the hearts of the Chinese people. After all, Liu Xiang was like a demigod to them. He was the world record holder, world champion and Olympic champion at the 2004 Games in Athens, Greece.

On the day of his heat in the 110m hurdles, some 90,000 Chinese had gathered in the Beijing Olympic stadium to watch him. Tickets were not cheap and many had scrimped and saved just to get a ticket to see their hero bring them glory.

Just before the starter’s gun sounded, someone made a false start. All the hurdlers turned back to their starting blocks except for one—Liu Xiang. The reigning Olympic champion turned his back away from the

stadium, away from his fanatical supporters, away from the event that had given him some kind of immortality in 2004 when he won it at the Athens Olympics.

He was overcome by a very bad heel injury, quietly kept from public knowledge for some weeks but rudely exposed on that day that shocked the whole stadium.

The fans were stunned. Their demigod hero was out even before clearing a single hurdle. His coach cried at the press conference. The media declared that “China went into mourning”.

Success had seemed so certain on home ground. Months were spent in tough preparation in order to make this success certain. Alas! For Liu Xiang, any certainty of success disappeared even before the race had actually started. No gold, no money from product endorsements, no one to scream his name in adulation.

(The New Paper, 19 Aug 2008, pp. 52-53)

In this world of little grace, we need more of the grace of Jesus Christ. And Jesus dearly and lovingly embraces failures rejected by the world. I believe so because the Bible tells of an occasion when Jesus’ most promising follower by the name of Peter denied three times that he knew Jesus. Why? The reason is because Jesus was arrested by His enemies and Peter feared for his own life. Jesus said in John 21:22 to this cowardly disciple who had failed Him, “You have messed things up past three times, now come follow me.” Jesus told Peter to “follow me” and not “get lost”.

Jesus dealt with Peter with much grace and compassion. He took Peter’s failure and recreated it into a success story. Blessed with this second chance, Peter later became a great leader of the early Christian church.

If you think you are a failure and becoming redundant in this world of high performances, Jesus says to you today, “You may have messed things up one time, two times, three times. But I want to give you another chance. Now come follow me.”

- You may have failed as a husband/wife.
- You may have failed as a father/mother.
- You may have failed as a son/daughter.
- You may have failed in your work.
- You may have failed in your studies.
- You may have failed as a friend.
- You may have failed in your Christian faith.

Remember, Jesus is the Master who gives people another chance. He wants to lift away the burden of uncertainty that comes with failure that makes one feel and look redundant.

Jesus says to people, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Another thing that may be burdening you and me today is ...

II. We may be burdened by the uncertainty that comes with the fear of the unknown.

A disease hit many countries (including Singapore) in the year 2003—SARS. In the early days of its appearance, no one paid too much attention to it. Even the Singapore Ministry of Health thought that it was something that would pass away quickly. But as the days passed, people realized that it was a deadly disease. The world all over was at a loss as to how to contain it.

Singapore was no exception. The lives of many people were turned almost upside down. Schools were closed for weeks. Temperature checks became standard practice. Eateries and other crowded places turned into almost ghost towns. Many hotels and other tourism-related businesses were on the brink of “closing shop”.

SARS also caused many problems in human relationships. People ran away from one another at the slightest sign of a cough or cold. Doctors and nurses were looked at with suspicion instead of with trust. Many hospital staff and healthcare givers felt unkindly treated by others.

My wife works in the now famous (or infamous) Tan Tock Seng Hospital. This was where they warded and treated SARS patients during the epidemic. Though her department is away from the SARS wards, she was told that she would be mobilized to the wards if the situation worsened. If there was a right time to resign from the hospital, this must be that time.

As a family, we struggled with some disturbing questions—“Should we wear mask at home?” “Should we send the children to stay with our extended family members?”

Well, we didn’t wear mask at home. We didn’t send our children to stay with others. The one thing we did was that Iris decided to self-quarantine herself—she stayed away from worship service for a few Sundays just to be considerate even though no one had openly voiced any concern over her presence in church.

Why then are we so afraid of SARS? Is it because we are afraid to fall sick? Is it because we are afraid to lose business earnings? Yes, partly. But the most important reason why we are afraid is because SARS is deadly.

The word “death” means “goodbye forever” to many people. It means eternal loss. So, they mourn with great sorrow at the death of a loved one because as far as they are concerned, they will forever not be able to talk with or see that person again.

But they still hope to talk with or see the dead person again. So, some people pray to the dead. Some seek help to talk to the dead. Some try to dream of the dead. All these are attempts to reconnect with the dead. We are afraid that death is “goodbye forever”. And we try to change that.

But really, we know so little about death. If I say I will sponsor someone to the Olympic Games so that he can return to tell us all about it, I am sure there will be many volunteers. But if I say I will sponsor someone’s funeral so that he can die and return to tell all about it, I am not sure how many will volunteer. Perhaps you may say, “Must be crazy to volunteer. It’s a one-way ticket. How can I be sure I will come back?”

The fear of death is real. For many people, it is the fear of death as the end of everything. I believe the fear of death is just an indication of a much deeper fear—i.e. the fear of the deep and dark unknown.

Today, I want to let you know that there’s someone who has died and returned and never to die again. That person is Jesus Christ Himself.

The Bible tells us that He died on the Cross, was buried for three days, and then arose. He appeared to His followers on many occasions, and later went up to heaven and is alive today and forevermore!

What does this mean?

- It means Jesus Christ has conquered death.
- It means Jesus Christ has been through the deepest and darkest unknown—death itself.
- It means Jesus Christ has become light to those who trust Him as they go through their deep and dark unknown in life’s journey, even in the face of death.

Just imagine how you will feel if you want to go to a place not familiar to you. You board a taxi and you tell the driver the destination. And the driver says to you, “Where is this place? How to go there? I am a new driver.” How will you feel?

You may be burdened by the uncertainty that comes with the fear of some unknown in your life today. You need a light, a compass, and a guide to show the way ahead. Jesus wants to be your light, your compass, and your guide in your life. He has been through the deepest and darkest unknown of death,

and has come out of it victorious. He will make a way for you through the deep and dark unknown so that you can see light at the end one day.

Jesus wants to share your burden in life. In fact, He carried burdens you and I may not even have experienced. His life was in danger when He was only a baby—the evil Jewish King Herod sought to kill Him. He was treated as an outcast by His own Jewish people. One time, His own family thought He was mad. He was sentenced to die in a most cruel way even though he was totally innocent—He was nailed on the Cross where He bled and died.

When Jesus Christ says that He knows our pain and suffering, He is not talking about it in an ivory tower. He has not merely read a book on pain and suffering, and telling you that He knows it. Rather, He knows our pain and suffering because He was there before and can empathize completely in what we are going through.

Jesus has gone through it all Himself—even through the deepest and darkest unknown of death, and the pain and suffering associated with it. He calls you and me today to trust Him as our light, compass, and guide so that He can help us out of the deep and dark unknown we go through in life.

That's why Jesus says to people, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Conclusion

Do you know what burden is uppermost in Jesus' mind? It is not the burden of uncertainty that comes from the fear of redundancy or the fear of the unknown. Rather, it is the burden of sin and the certainty of its judgement from God.

To sin is to miss the mark that God has set for us. When we compare with another, we may have missed by one foot and the other may have missed by one mile. The fact is this—both have fallen short and sinned as far as God's perfect standard is concerned.

Often we think we are good enough for heaven based on how we compare with others.

- We think we are better than the murderer because we have not killed anyone.
- We think we are better than the swindler because we have not cheated anyone.
- We think we are better than the robber because we have not robbed anyone.
- We think we are better than others because we show more patience, gentleness, kindness, friendliness, generosity, understanding, etc.

But the Bible tells us that we are not to compare ourselves with others, but to measure ourselves by the perfect standard of God. For example, we may not have murdered anyone. But if we are angry with someone in our heart so intensely that we wish he's dead, we have already murdered when measured by God's perfect standard; we have already sinned.

If that's so, how can we ever be good enough for heaven based on our self-efforts or comparison with others?

Jesus wants to lift away the burden of sin in your life. He wants you to stop all your struggles in and striving with sin, and to give you His rest. This rest comes when you are at peace with God. This is more than the peace that comes because everything is smooth and plain sailing. It is a very deep-seated peace—peace of heart, of mind, and of spirit. It is peace that comes from the experience of being forgiven by God for your sins.

This rest is based on the truth that God has accepted and loved you in Jesus Christ. Do your best in life, but know that God still loves you even if you have failed. Plan the best you can, but trust God to lead you even if you don't know everything that's ahead.

Jesus is not inviting you to come to a religion. He is not inviting you to follow a list of religious do's and don'ts. He is inviting you to come to a person—to Himself. He is calling you to come to Him—i.e. to come into a personal relationship with Him.

He says, "Come to me. Don't try and fix yourself up before you come to me. Don't try and be in denial about your problems and your burdens. These burdens are not an obstacle to me; let me handle them for you. Don't try to come to me after you have become a better person. But come to me as you are now and let me make you a better person."

In 1936, Mary Stevenson (a young poetess who had tragically lost her mother and brother) wrote a poem about her relationship with Jesus Christ that has since become a Christian classic. It is called "Footprints in the Sand". Many of you are familiar with it. For those who are not, it reads like this:

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord (i.e. Jesus Christ).

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord,

“You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?”

The Lord replied, “The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you.”

For those who come to Jesus, He promises to lift away your burden of uncertainty in life. In your most heavily burdened times, He promises to be there to even carry you. More importantly, He promises to lift away the burden of sin upon you.

Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Would you come to Him today?

I now ask you to bow your heads and close your eyes. I want to speak to two groups of people as I close.

- For those of you who are Christians, you can come back to Jesus today by renewing your trust in and obedience to Him. Seek His forgiveness and make a commitment in your heart to follow Him afresh today. Take some time to do that before the Lord in the silence of your own heart.
- For those of you who are not yet Christians, you can come to Jesus in three simple A.B.C. steps.
 - **A**cknowledge that you are a sinner.
 - **B**elieve that Jesus came to die for your sins on the cross, that He was buried, arose after three days, and conquered over death.
 - **C**ommit yourself to Jesus Christ by asking Him to forgive your sin, and to come into your life as the Master of your life.

If you desire to believe in Jesus Christ and receive Him into your life today, I want to help you do so by leading you in a prayer. It is not a magical prayer, but it is a personal prayer between you and the Lord Jesus Christ. You repeat the words of this prayer after me silently in your heart. You say it to Jesus Christ and not to anyone else here. If Jesus Christ is speaking to you and touching your heart this day, and

you desire to believe and receive Him into your life, would you raise up high your right hand and then put it down while all heads are bowed and all eyes are closed?

For those who have put up your hands, please repeat these words after me slowly:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner. I thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I believe also that you were buried, and three days later you rose from the dead. I now confess my sins before you. Thank you for forgiving me. I now invite you into my life as my Master. Help me to live in obedience to you.

Amen.

Today, we commemorate Jesus Christ rising from the dead after His body was in the tomb for three days. This day should rightly be called Resurrection Sunday instead of Easter Sunday.

Let me close by listing down what Resurrection Sunday means—it means:

- Jesus Christ has risen and never to die again.
- Jesus Christ has given new life to all who have believed and received Him so that they can live in His resurrection power.
- Jesus Christ who died and risen has made this day possible for us to rejoice and celebrate.

Let us then come to Jesus Christ and let Him be our burden-lifter so that we can experience His grace in very personal and special ways.

Amen!