

# **Little Words That Challenge**

by

T. B. Maston

*Little Words That Challenge*

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## Abbreviations Used

CBSC	<i>The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges</i> , ed. J. J. S. Perowne, 1877-1909
EGT	<i>The Expositor's Greek Testament</i> , 5 vols., ed. W. R. Nicoll, 1900-10
IB	<i>The Interpreter's Bible</i> , 12 vols., ed. G. A. Buttrick et. al., 1952-57
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
Phil	J. B. Phillips, <i>The New Testament in Modern English</i> , 1958
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 9 vols., ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 1964-74
TEV	<i>Today's English Version (Good News Bible)</i>
WMS	C. B. Williams, <i>The New Testament: A Translation in the Languages of the People</i> , 1937
WP	<i>Word Pictures in the New Testament</i> , 6 vols., by A. T. Robertson, 1932

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## Foreword

Unless you've had a specialized course in literature you likely would not be able to identify a unique common theme shared by these writers: Robert Ludlum, Ernest Hemingway, James Michener, T. E. Lawrence, Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dr. Seuss (!), Harper Lee.

The common theme is each of these writers wrote at least one manuscript that became lost. A few had one or more manuscripts rediscovered. For instance, Theodor Seuss Geisel's widow found notes and drawings after Geisel's death that were published as *What Pet Should I Get*. It constitutes Geisel's last book. By now, there is relatively widespread knowledge that *Go Set a Watchman*, published fifty years after author Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, was set chronologically before *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Also, another manuscript has been found authenticated as Lee's work.

What you are about to read, *Little Words That Challenge*, fits within the boundaries of these examples. It is one of those items that literary archeologists occasionally come upon—the last manuscript of a writer. The writer is T.B. Maston. The manuscript has not exactly been lost; but, at least, it was set aside for several years. A reorganization of the T. B. Maston Foundation gave reason to give renewed attention to the book. Since I had been the lead editor for the book *Both-And: A Maston Reader*, sponsored by the Foundation, I was asked to take on this manuscript as

another project to be added to the Maston Foundation's website (<https://tbmaston.org>).

There are fuller descriptions of the life and work of T. B. Maston in other sections of the T. B. Maston Foundation's website. The following is a short overview that may provide further interest in Maston and specifically this manuscript.

T. B. Maston taught Christian ethics—applied theology, Christian thought for everyday life (for individual and even global applications)—for over forty years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. He can be remembered for his work toward better race relations during the decades of the 1920s through the 1960s, both in academia and through organizations like the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary was and is one of the SBC's six seminaries. He articulated concerns early in his career about black-white race relations. Continually he attempted to give the perspective that especially the New Testament is color-blind. For these attempts he received some nods of affirmation but also hate mail and threats. He also gave significant attention in his teaching, writing, and speaking to family relationships, economic dynamics, matters of church and state, and especially ecclesial ethics.

Maston died in 1988. His younger son, Eugene, going through family records, papers, and files, found the manuscript and brought it to me—since my wife, Leta, and I had been early reviewers of the material. He wondered whether there was any possibility of the manuscript being published. That attempt was made, but one publisher, who had published other Maston manuscripts, noted the material was too devotional in tone and Maston was too regional in recognition for the publisher to be interested in it. When news of the rejection was given to Eugene, his reply, “Well, after twenty-five years, Dad won't be remembered anyway.”

After several years (now thirty-five) hiding in another desk drawer, the manuscript has been brought into the light of day again. Acting as lead editor, I recruited others to review the manuscript to ascertain what could be done for the book to be not only accessible for readers, but that the product could be formatted in such a way that contemporary readers would find it useful.

In turn, these who have contributed to perspectives toward reading the manuscript for public viewing are J. Daniel Day, Marv Knox, David Wilkinson, Brian Edwards, Paula Magnum Sheridan, Ann Farley-Parker, Ross West, and David Morgan. Each of these has years of experience in writing, teaching, pastoral experience, and denominational work. They have maintained a most creative connection to church and culture through all their years, though. Their attention to the manuscript has resulted in suggestions for further use of the book.

Certainly, the book can be beneficial for individual study. Maston never used the term *lectio divina*, but he understood the concept and suggested it as taking time to read Scripture. He advised that when one found a word, a phrase, a thought that gripped one, then stop and let the idea work on one.

Continuing study of the data demonstrates church attendance has begun to decline. An accompanying decline, although not as yet quite as steep, is that of those who maintain some kind of relationship with the Bible.

Maston had, for the most part, a mid-1950s style of writing that still carried some of the turn of the century (19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>) tone with which he was reared. He grew up in East Tennessee, by the way. When with Maston in conversation, those backgrounds did become audible from time to time. This cultural conditioning may prevent some contemporary readers from grasping his intents. His writing, teaching, and

speaking never quite reflected gender-inclusive language. So, “man,” “mankind,” for example, appear regularly. He was of the sort, though, that if alive now he would have curbed that tendency and reflected more inclusive language.

In short, Maston was, like all of us, to an extent a culturally-conditioned person of his time. The hope here is that the cultural conditioning Maston reflects is not a put-off. Rather, a reader, a group of readers, may realize their own cultural conditioning and how that shapes how they read, interpret, and apply Scripture.

One of the suggestions of the other editorial readers is that this text remain essentially untouched so that Maston’s voice can be heard as it was. But they maintained that contextualization of the text be offered with occasional footnotes, discussion questions, and/or exercises so as to provide some clarification of Maston’s thought.

Maston had degrees from Southwestern Seminary, Texas Christian University, advanced study at the University of Chicago, and a PhD from Yale Divinity School, where his major professor was H. Richard Niebuhr. For those in the world of theological academics, that latter figure is a most notable one.

The above paragraph notes what Maston called his academic writing, which he did very well. He was known across the field of Christian ethics. Much of his later work was more popular in style, though. His common statement was, “I write so that my mother, who had only a fourth-grade education, could read it.” This manuscript fits with that observation. Quite possibly the simple, not simplistic, style is one reason the publisher’s rejection of this manuscript came early on. This rejection in retrospect is somewhat ironic in that the particular publisher has gone into quite stark decline.



Perhaps, as well, the denominational publishers considered they had a corner on the Bible study area. After all, for decades the Southern Baptists had promoted themselves as “a people of the Book.” Maston understood, however, that this amounted to a self-aggrandizement that held at best a superficial acquaintance with Scripture. The decades since his death have demonstrated he was right in that Southern Baptists continue to lose face regarding moral stature. They reflect antebellum rhetoric and empire theology, and they continue sorting themselves through power games that leave large numbers of people holding little relationship to the congregations. But the Southern Baptists are not the only group who reflect these value sets.

With the manuscript of *Little Words That Challenge*, Maston presented a somewhat unique approach to reading and applying Scripture. He gave particular attention to the words of Jesus, specifically verbs. Without exception, the verbs portray and project action and engagement of values. Maston maintained that there are values and principles in these words that transcend historical particularities (a Richard Niebuhr term).

Whether this is your first exploration into biblical ethics or you are a seasoned hermeneutician, you surely will discover some insights in the text that follows.

Bill Tillman

Coordinator of the Center for  
Congregational Ethics

## Preface

I received a letter that pleased and surprised me. It invited me to participate in the orientation sponsored by our Foreign Mission Board for newly-appointed missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

The invitation pleased me because Mrs. Maston, or “Mommie,” and I had for many years had a major interest in missions.<sup>2</sup> Earlier we had struggled with whether or not the Lord wanted us to go to some mission field. We had also spent some time on mission fields.

Also, the director of the orientation, a position he continued to hold for many years, was a former student who majored with me in his graduate work.<sup>3</sup> I also knew his wife quite well and favorably.

There was one thing, however, in that initial invitation that surprised me. I was asked, among other

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<sup>1</sup> T. B. Maston was a lifelong Baptist, specifically related to the Southern Baptist Convention. His reference point at the time of writing and the presentations upon which the book is based was known as the Foreign Mission Board. The agency had first sent missionaries in 1845 to China. The organization’s name was changed to the International Mission Board in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> The Mastons considered whether China or Brazil should be their destination upon graduation from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the early 1920s. The second president of Southwestern, L. R. Scarborough, suggested to Maston, though, that the school had a place for him on the faculty.

<sup>3</sup> David Lockard was one of the forty-nine students who earned a Th.D. in Christian Ethics under Maston’s tutelage.

things, to have a period each day of devotional Bible studies of my own choosing. That surprised me very much; after all, I had not taught Old Testament, New Testament, or theology, which were and are generally considered to be the core of theological education. My field of specialization had been Christian Ethics, which majored on daily Christian living.<sup>4</sup> I was doubly surprised when every subsequent invitation to the orientation always included, along with other requests, a series of daily Bible studies. Several series were used from time to time. *Little Words* became the basis for one such series.

One time when the series was used, some of the missionary appointees were kind enough to suggest that *Little Words* should be put in a more permanent and accessible form. Most of the chapters in this book are devoted to these studies. The last two chapters on “Wait” and “An Addendum” were never included in the series. The occasion for the writing of these two chapters will be included in some introductory statements to each chapter.

You will notice that all of the “little words” are four-letter words except two; one is a three-letter word, “ask,” and one is a five-letter word, “abide.”<sup>5</sup> You will also notice that they are all verbs. As indicated in the Addendum, we could have worked out a series on nouns. We chose to restrict our studies to verbs. There had to be some restriction.

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<sup>4</sup> Another description of the specialization is applied theology. Maston displayed an affinity for blending the elements of missions, spiritual formation, and especially biblical and theological ethics in his course offerings.

<sup>5</sup> Dora Etta Bridgford typed correspondence and to-be-published materials for T. B. Maston, as he never learned to type. Her comment, with a twinkle in her eyes, was that the book might get more attention if it were titled instead, *Four-Letter Words from T. B. Maston*. She knew, as did almost anyone who ever met Maston, he did not use any profane language, four letters or otherwise.

Almost any book is a product of more than one person. Where material has been used from other authors, including commentaries, an attempt has been made to give the author credit.

Three of my younger friends have been kind enough to read the entire manuscript and check for errors. In various other ways they have suggested improvements in the way things are said. These have made the final product more readable as well as more accurate. These individuals are Bruce Corley and William and Leta Tillman. Each of them took time from very busy schedules to read the manuscript. They know that I appreciate very much what they have done.

Dora Etta Bridgford, my secretary for many years, has done her usual careful job of typing from my poorly written pages.<sup>6</sup> As usual, Mrs. Maston, or “Mommie,” has been supportive in every way. One way that she has helped through the years is by carrying more than her share of the load for our family. One thing that has helped in many direct and indirect ways is the fact that she is the “secretary-treasurer” of our home, caring for all bills and other business matters. Thanks, Mommie.

TBM

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How does the idea fit for you that at the time of this writing Maston was in his late 80s? What are some lessons for us?
2. What can be the difference in consideration of verbs and nouns toward character development?

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<sup>6</sup> Maston’s handwriting could be described as a scrawl, nearly illegible. Few people could read his handwriting without considerable time devoted to working it out.

## 1. Come

The word “come” is a logical place to begin this study of *Little Words That Challenge*. It is prominent in both Testaments. There are some great Old Testament references:

Serve the LORD with gladness!  
Come into his presence with singing!  
(Psalm 100:2)

Come now, let us reason together,  
says the LORD:  
though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red like crimson,  
they shall become like wool.  
(Isaiah 1:18)

Ho, every one who thirsts,  
Come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
come, buy, and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without price.  
(Isa. 55:1)

“Come, let us return to the LORD.”  
(Hosea 6:1)

We shall restrict, however, to the New Testament, where the word “come” is found several hundred times, with

over seventy-five different words translated “come.”<sup>7</sup> The predominant Greek word is *erchomai*. The importance of a word, however, cannot be judged primarily on the basis of its frequency. There are two other Greek words, very important for our study, that are found only twenty-two times in the New Testament. These closely-related words are *deuro*, used when a single individual is addressed, and *deute*, used when two or more are invited to come.

What Kittel says (TDNT II:668-71) concerning the use of *erchomai* in the Synoptic Gospels could serve as a rather accurate summary of the use of “come” in general in the New Testament. The article in Kittel says that “come” is used, in the main, to refer (1) to the coming of Jesus to men,<sup>8</sup> (2) to the invitation of Jesus for men to come to Him, and (3) to the eschatological coming (a) of the Messiah, (b) of the kingdom of God, and (c) of the judgment of God. Our study will be limited to the invitation of Jesus for men to come to Him.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Come” is an interesting but fitting word to begin with and was probably how he began with the missionary candidates. The word also more than implied a sense of calling. The theme was highlighted among the Baptists of Maston’s time. It bears the need for continuing attention. Maston’s book *God’s Will and Your Life* provides an in-depth, popularly stated, perspective on identifying one’s calling.

<sup>8</sup> Maston’s constant use of masculine nouns will no doubt be bothersome for many contemporary readers, who have been educated toward using inclusive gender language. This instance above and all those that follow throughout the manuscript reflect Maston’s cultural conditioning. Noticing this factor could assist readers to discover their own cultural conditioning.

<sup>9</sup> Maston’s book, *To Walk As He Walked*, is an excellent resource for understanding further Maston’s sense of Christology.

## Come for Discipleship

You remember<sup>10</sup> the invitations of Jesus to His first disciples. He was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee and saw two fishermen brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting a net into the sea. He said to them, “Follow me [*“Come with me”* (NEB)],<sup>11</sup> and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). The initial invitation of Jesus not only to these first disciples but to every subsequent disciple has been and is “*Come, follow me.*”<sup>12</sup> Simon and Andrew, when they heard the invitation, “immediately left their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:18). Their prompt response may have stemmed, to some degree, from the fact that they had previously met Him in Judea (John 1:38-42). There must have been, however, something very appealing about the presence of Jesus. It could have been His voice, His eyes, or His personality in general.

Many philosophers and teachers in biblical times expected their students or disciples to accompany them as they traveled from place to place. That way the students were not only instructed in a more or less formal way but also informally. For example, can you imagine the teaching that Jesus did as He and His disciples walked along the way, ate together, and stopped for a night, sleeping at times out under the stars? They heard the marvelous words that fell from His lips, but the greatest truths were revealed to them as they observed the kind of life He lived. They saw Him heal the sick, feed the hungry, take little children into His arms, and in general minister to the needs of people, particularly the poor, the lonely, the neglected. And, after all, a teacher teaches not only by what he says but even more by the life

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<sup>10</sup> Maston’s “You remember” phrase conveys his perspective that anyone reading these chapters had a rudimentary knowledge of at least the Gospels.

<sup>11</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

he lives. What a privilege these original disciples had! We cannot have the experience of His physical presence, but we can have the blessed privilege of having fellowship with Him as we walk along the way. But for us, as for the original disciples, it costs us something to accept the invitation of Jesus. His was and continues to be a radical invitation. Simon Peter, Andrew, and the other original disciples had to leave their business and their families to follow Jesus. Peter once said to Jesus, “We have left everything and followed you” (Matt. 19:27).

The word of Jesus to Peter and Andrew was, “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). They were fishermen; He would use their skills as fishermen to catch men. Whatever may be our talents, skills, or vocations, He will use what we have to reach men for Him. Furthermore, He will enable us to be what we are not. These fishermen were not fishers of men. He said, “I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Notice, “make you *become*.”<sup>13</sup> It was to be a process. He is still in the process of making men and women, boys and girls what they are not. It may be a long process, but His promises are sure. Our rate of progress will be determined largely by our response to Him, by how closely and fully we follow Him.

You remember when Simon was introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew. Jesus said, “So you are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter)” [“Peter, the Rock,” NEB] (John 1:42). We believe that Jesus still responds the same way when men and women are introduced to Him. He promises them that in association with Him they will become something they are not. Where are we in response to His invitation, “Come, follow me and I will make you . . .”? How different are we from what we were when we first met Him? How much have we matured

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<sup>13</sup> Italics added for emphasis.



in our understanding of Him and of His continuing invitation to follow Him?

There is at least one other thing we should notice about the invitation of Jesus to Simon Peter and Andrew. His words were, “Follow me” [or “*come . . .* after me” (NASB, marginal note)].<sup>14</sup> He leads the way. He goes ahead. He never asks a disciple of His to go where He has not gone or will not go. He is the shepherd; we are the sheep. And the shepherd “goes before” the sheep “and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:4).

The invitation of Jesus to discipleship is to all men: “If any one thirst, let him *come* to me and drink” (John 7:37).<sup>15</sup> It is a universal invitation but one that is individualized. Each person must decide whether or not he will accept the invitation. In spite of the attractiveness of Jesus and the tremendous appeal He must have had, some, while He walked among men, were unwilling to pay the price to follow Him.

### **Invitation Declined**

One of these unwilling ones was the rich young ruler. Incidentally, we need all three Synoptic Gospels to identify him as “the rich young ruler.” Mark simply says “a man” (Mark 10:17), Matthew speaks of him as a “young man” (Matt. 19:22), while Luke refers to him as a “ruler” (Luke 18:18). The young man asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit or have eternal life. Someone has suggested that our “discontent . . . provides us with our greatest opportunity” (IB, 7:803). Jesus quoted to him the Commandments, beginning with “You shall not kill” but omitted the last one, “You shall not covet. . . .” You remember the rich young ruler’s reply, “Teacher, all these I have observed from my

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<sup>14</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

youth.” I wonder if he noticed that Jesus omitted “you shall not covet”? If Jesus had included it, could he have said, “all these have I observed . . .”?

There is a statement in Mark regarding this incident that is not found in the other Synoptics. It is, “And Jesus looking upon him loved him” (Mark 10:21). Possibly this was passed on to Mark by Peter, from whom it is generally supposed that Mark got much of the material for his Gospel. Peter could have gotten this impression from something Jesus said or simply by the look out of the eyes of Jesus as He reached out in love for this young man. Jesus doubtlessly saw great potential in him. He “saw people with a double eye. He saw what they were, and he saw what they might be” (IB, 7:803).

In a tone of voice that must have searched the young man’s soul and at the same time had a strong appeal, Jesus said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” Then, possibly after a pause for emphasis, Jesus added, “and come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). Notice the action packed into the verbs that Jesus used: go, sell, give, come, follow. This is not a universal prescription. It was particular prescription for a particular individual. His riches stood between him and following Jesus. It may be something else for you or me. Whatever it is, Jesus would challenge each of us to pay the price that is necessary to follow Him. The specific prescription by Jesus may vary from individual to individual, but the challenge is ultimately the same. It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 73). But, as Bonhoeffer said and as is revealed in the Scriptures and in human experience, following Jesus is both our death and our life. And, incidentally, the more complete the death, the fuller and richer will be the life we discover in union with Him.

One commentary suggests that this young man may have been “a potential apostle, a possible Paul even” (EGT, I:250). Jesus might have invited him to join the inner circle of travelling disciples. If he had, then his riches would have been an encumbrance. The young man turned away. He was unwilling to pay the price that was necessary for him to follow Jesus. By doing so he made what Halford Luccock has called “the world’s biggest mistake.” Luccock suggests that by declining the challenge and the invitation of Jesus, the rich young ruler missed (1) a great friendship, (2) a great development, and (3) a great adventure (IB, 7:805).

There are a number of important lessons for us in this incident. One of the most important is the fact that “Jesus did not tone down his message for the sake of winning a desirable disciple . . . . He never got disciples under false pretenses, he never offered bargains, he never concealed the Cross, or disguised the cost” (IB, 7:804) On this occasion He may have lost His man, but He did not lose His gospel. Will you agree that too frequently in our churches we make it too easy for folks to come into our churches? This may be one explanation for the immaturity and weakness of many contemporary Christians. Many of us need to hear Jesus say, *Go, sell, or give up whatever would make it difficult or impossible for you to be a real disciple of mine; and come follow me.* We can be sure that whatever we hold onto that we should give up will restrict our following Jesus. At best, we will follow Him “afar off.”

### **Come for Comfort**

There is another invitation of Jesus for which we should be deeply grateful. Many of us know by personal experience how meaningful this invitation can be when the going gets rough, when life caves in on us. The invitation of Jesus was and is, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). A. T. Robertson says that

more is involved than “rest.” He translates it, “I will refresh you” (WP). This particular invitation by Jesus to come to Him is found only in Matthew. We should be grateful for the Synoptic Gospels. They frequently supplement one another in marvelous ways. Surely many of us will spontaneously say, “Thank you, Father, for leading Matthew to preserve this invitation of Jesus which has meant so much to me and to many, many other children of thine through the centuries.” The other Gospels have their own distinctive treasures. This is one of Matthew’s.

This, as is true of the other invitations of Jesus, was and is universal. “*Come to me all who labor (“are weary,” NASB) and are heavy laden.*”<sup>16</sup> And will you not agree that to some degree that includes all of us? The loads and burdens we carry may vary considerably in nature and heaviness but are we not all in some way “tired from carrying heavy loads” (TEV)? What were the burdens to which Jesus referred? Possibly most directly the reference was to the burdens of law placed on the people and particularly to the burdens the scribes placed on the people by their meticulous application of the law to the minute details of the daily lives of the people.

More than likely, however, Jesus was referring to burdens of all kinds, even the physical burdens or loads that many of the people had to carry.<sup>17</sup> These burdens for some, even yet in many places of the world, are tremendously

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<sup>16</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Many modern readers, particularly those in the Western Church, have little understanding of the physical burdens common in Maston’s time. Our suitcases and coolers have wheels to facilitate ease of movement, farming equipment is mechanized, and diseases and disabilities commonly require medication but more seldom dictate death. Parenting a minimally functional, disabled child, however, acquainted Maston more fully with physical burdens.

heavy. Men and women can be seen, in the Middle East and elsewhere, carrying incredibly heavy loads. Jesus doubtlessly also had in mind inner burdens. Such burdens can sometimes become unbearably heavy, heavier than any possible physical burdens or loads. The promise of Jesus is, “And I will give you rest” [“relief,” NEB]. The “I” is emphatic. The rest or relief will be His gift to those who come to Him with their burdens or heavy loads. We may not be able to take our burdens to the Lord and *leave* them there, but we can be sure that He will get under the burdens with us.

How does Jesus give rest, relief, or refreshment? One way He gives it is by a transfer of yokes. The term “yoke” was frequently used in that day to describe the relation of a pupil or a disciple to his teacher. Also, the rabbis spoke of the yoke of the Law. Jesus promised that His yoke was “easy” or “good” (NEB). To the degree that we take up or come under His yoke as the Master Teacher we will “learn from him.” One of the things we can and will learn is how His yoke can be easy. One way the yoke of Jesus is easy is the fact that it is a yoke of freedom. We take it up. It is not forced on us. Also, it is a yoke of love: His yoke “is easy because it is ‘lined with love’” (IB, 7:391).

Now how is the burden light? He has a burden that He places on us. The rich young ruler’s burden, which he was unwilling to carry, was to give up his riches. But Jesus says that the burden or load He gives us is light. What makes it light? One fact, suggested previously, is the fact that He gets under the burden or load with us. Really, our sense of His presence and the lift that comes from that presence depend on our willingness to take up His burden. As we voluntarily take up whatever burden He gives us, we discover that what He said on more than one occasion is true: “Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25; cf. Matt.

10:39). This is one of the great paradoxes of the gospel, and there are a number of others. Bonhoeffer reminds us that the burden of Jesus is light only to those who accept it willingly. Otherwise, it is unutterably hard or heavy (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 31).

Notice one other thing about this wonderful invitation of Jesus to come to Him for comfort. He said, “I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28), but He also said, “You will find rest for your souls” (11:29). The given is found. The promise of rest or relief is not unconditional. His conditions must be met. And since our meeting of the conditions is never complete or perfect, the finding or discovering of the rest that He will provide is a process. Also, it requires cooperation and effort on our part. It is somewhat comparable to the giving of the Promised Land to the children of Israel. It was a gift from God, but they had to go in and possess it. So it is with the promised land of comfort or relief from the burdens of life. We must not only accept the proffered relief; we must meet the conditions for it.

### **The Promise of Jesus**

There is a great promise of Jesus recorded in John’s Gospel. It applies to the initial invitation to come follow Him, to every subsequent invitation to keep on following Him, and to the invitation to come to Him for comfort. The promise is: “Him who comes to me I will not cast out” (John 6:37). We know by what precedes the promise that it applies most specifically to the coming to Him for salvation. He had said, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). One of the most meaningful paradoxes in our Christian faith is the fact that when we come to Him our hunger or thirst is satisfied and yet there begins immediately a new hunger and thirst that will never be completely satisfied in this life. We hunger for a better understanding of Him and His way in and

will for our lives. We thirst for a closer walk with Him, for a more meaningful and fruitful life for Him. In other words, there was a deep satisfaction in the initial experience when we became children of God through our union with the resurrected Christ. And yet on the very basis of that experience there develops within us a deep and an abiding dissatisfaction with our lives in and for Him. The more mature we become in our union with Him, the more conscious we become of our immaturity.

The fact that we never follow Him perfectly means, among other things, that the invitation to “come, follow” is a repeated and continuing invitation for each of us. It will be with us until the end of the journey. You and I have heard and responded to the initial invitation, “Come, follow me.” What about subsequent invitations? For example, have we heard and responded to His invitation, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24)? How close and how far have we followed Him? How much of His spirit and way of life find expression in our relations to loved ones, neighbors, and people in general? Surely all of us are deeply conscious that we fall far short. But we should be grateful for the promise of Jesus that He will not refuse or “turn us away” (John 6:37, NEB), whatever may be the occasion for our coming to Him.

The promise in John 6:37 contains a double negative, which is the strongest possible way to state the negative. It is translated “never” in several versions (NEB, TEV, Phillips). The New American Standard Bible says, “I will certainly not cast out.” Williams, who frequently pointedly brings out the meaning of the original language, says, “I will never, no, never reject anyone who comes to me” (WMS).

Let us repeat that this is true whatever may be the occasion for one to come to Him. He is always ready to respond. He goes even further, He stands at the door of our

hearts and knocks, wanting to come in. And when we open the door, He will come in and when He comes in, He will always bring rich blessings into our lives (Rev. 3:20). However, He will not force His way in; we must open the door. Have you ever seen the painting “Jesus at the Door”?<sup>18</sup> I first saw it in a reader when I was a grammar school kid. It is said that a friend of the artist, when he saw the original painting, commented favorably regarding various aspects of the painting but that he noticed one thing that was wrong. The artist asked, “What is that?” The friend replied, “There is no latch on the door,” to which the artist replied, “The latch is on the inside. The door must be opened from within.”

## Conclusion

We can be sure that the more fully we open our lives to the resurrected Christ, the more He will create within us a desire to invite others to come to Him. To those who have any uncertainty about any invitation we give them to come to Christ, we can reply with the words of Philip to the doubting Nathaniel, “Come and see” (John 1:46). We can say that with the assurance that they will find in Him the satisfaction of the deepest needs of their lives. If they will “come and see” they will join with us in saying, “I am satisfied with Jesus.”<sup>19</sup>

The One who continues to invite men and women, boys and girls, to come to Him has promised that He is coming again. The next to the last verse in the New Testament is, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely

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<sup>18</sup> The reference may be to “The Light of the World,” by William Holman Hunt. See <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/light-of-world-by-william-holman-hunt>. Accessed 12/4/2023. Or, more likely because of its greater familiarity, the reference may be to “Christ at Heart’s Door,” by Warner Sallman. See <https://www.warnersallman.com/collection/images/christ-at-hearts-door/>. Accessed 12/4/2023.

<sup>19</sup> This quotation likely is from the gospel song, “I Am Satisfied with Jesus,” by B.B. McKinney.



I am coming soon.” Do our hearts respond, “Amen [“so be it,” TEV], Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)? In the meantime, while we wait for His coming, are we letting Him use us as His instruments to invite others to come follow Him and to tell others to bring to Him their burdens and find in Him the release that He alone can give?

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Looking back at your spiritual journey, where have you seen God’s work in your “process” of spiritual development? How are you currently “in process”?
2. How does God want to re-shape the way we look at others—particularly marginalized persons, whether by status or past sins—so we see people with “a double eye,” seeing both who they are and who they might become?
3. How has your walk with God been a (1) great friendship, (2) great development, and (3) great adventure? How could God be wanting you to grow in each of these areas?
4. Does the idea of finding rest as a process encourage or discourage you? How have you learned to trust God in the process?
5. Does Maston’s lack of gender-inclusive language weaken the book’s themes for you?
6. What does cultural conditioning mean for interpreting Scripture? What are some of your cultural conditionings you find Scripture is calling you to address?
7. Does the word “come” as developed by Maston give you clarity toward how you perceive and engage God’s calling? How?
8. What is your perception of Maston’s apparent assumption when he uses the phrase “you remember”? That is, how will this expression strike someone who doesn’t in fact “remember” these words of Scripture and incidents in Jesus’ life?

9. In Maston's agricultural background, a "yoke" still held meaning. What would be a better analogy or metaphor for you?