

## DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 1

**STRETCHED THIN**  
**BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND**  
**MATTHEW 11:28-30**  
**09/18/2016**



### MAIN POINT

We must begin with the end in mind.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Have you ever begun a project without a clear end goal in mind? What happened?**

**What is your goal for your marriage? for your children? What happens if you lose sight of those goals?**

If we begin a project of any kind without a clear end goal in mind, we may not finish that project well—or we might not finish it at all. If we invest in the stock market but don't have a plan on when to cash out, we may never enjoy the benefit of the investment. If we enter a dating relationship with the goal of marriage but lose sight of that goal, we may wind up frustrated, especially if we don't communicate our goal!

Whether it is investing, getting married, raising children, or starting a business, we need to have a clear plan for the things we hope to accomplish. If we don't, then the many distractions that come along in life will cause us to miss out on the purpose for which we began.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 11:28-30.**

**Why do you think that Jesus wants us to know His yoke is easy and His burden light? What other yoke and burden might we carry?**

**What "yoke" might a Christian pick up that isn't the yoke of Christ?**

We are easily distracted, and that is why it is especially important to keep our eyes on the goal. When we become Christians, we want to seek Christ and follow Him as Lord. However, sometimes in our spiritual journey we get distracted with things that the Lord doesn't need or want us to do. Some over-volunteer for ministry, and so they get burnt out and cannot enjoy ministry or continue in it.

We do this with our jobs as well. We begin our jobs to provide for our families; but sometimes, our jobs take over our lives. Instead of working to provide for our families, we wind up not being there for our families. Even when we are home, we can be consumed with thoughts about work.

Jesus' yoke is easy. We need to remember that everything that we do is to honor Him. Sometimes, that means volunteering far less. Sometimes, it means working hard to make time for family instead of just working hard to feed them.

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**ASK TWO VOLUNTEERS TO READ NEHEMIAH 2:13-17 AND NEHEMIAH 5:3-5.**

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**Why do you think Nehemiah took this night time inspection of the ruins of the wall?**

**How could that inspection have helped him in Nehemiah 5:3-5?**

Nehemiah needed to see what he was up against in the building project. Before he could secure Israel's wellbeing, those walls had to be fixed. He wanted to see the damage for himself, and if he had taken others perhaps they would have distracted him from his task.

Nehemiah had to keep this goal first, or he could not solve any of the people's other problems. As we see in 5:3-5, their problems were numerous. But Nehemiah could not secure their fields, vineyards, or their children if their enemies could just waltz in through the broken down walls and take whatever they wanted.

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**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ NEHEMIAH 4:7-8.**

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**How do you think Nehemiah felt when he heard about this? How do you think the people felt?**

**How can opposition actually help us accomplish our goals?**

Nehemiah was a brave man, but even he must have been very concerned when he heard that all the neighboring peoples were conspiring to come and fight against Jerusalem. Many of the people must have lacked Nehemiah's courage and confidence, so they were probably very afraid.

This obstacle could have made Nehemiah and the people quit. Obstacles sometimes cause us to give up on good goals and plans that we make. However, they can also serve to focus us and our efforts. Israel would certainly prioritize rebuilding the wall if the enemy might invade any day. Such opposition can serve to harden our resolve and help us focus on our main goals when so many other concerns seem to stretch us thin.

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What does it mean for us to cast a vision for our end goal? How important is that in the beginning?**

**How can we begin a task with the end already in mind? Give examples.**

**How can we help ensure that everyone is committed to the work to get it done? How important is it to foresee some of the obstacles that will be in our way?**

## **PRAY**

In a time of group prayer, ask the Father to help us prioritize our goals in life. Pray that no matter what we do, we do it for the glory of Christ. Ask the Lord to help those who are having to deal with obstacles in their lives, that they might have the perseverance to overcome them.

## **COMMENTARY**

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## MATTHEW 11:28-30

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11:28-30. Jesus now appeals for a response to His revelation. All may come, at least all who hurt and who recognize their spiritual need. The “infants” (v. 25) will accept Him and thus demonstrate their election (v. 27). The “wise and learned” (v. 25) are precisely those who reject His call and thus show they were not chosen. The distinction between the two categories of individuals is therefore not intellectual but volitional. “Weary and burdened” reflects the daily labor of carrying a pack on one’s back. Tired workers need refreshment and renewal (cf. Jer 6:16); Jesus equates the Christian life with spiritual rest. In describing His provision of this rest, Jesus borrows imagery from the plowing of fields. Like the yoke that couples oxen together, discipleship does not exempt one from work but makes it manageable. Jews commonly spoke of taking on the yoke of the Torah to refer to the acceptance of the stipulations of the law. But, as the Sermon on the Mount has made plain, Jesus calls people not to the law but to Himself.

“Learn” echoes the exhortation of rabbinic instruction. No doubt, like many of the Jewish teachers, Jesus is gentle and humble. But unlike them, Christ offers work that is refreshing and good because it brings salvation. Christ’s yoke is thus light. None of this implies that Jesus’ “greater righteousness,” as illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount, is not extremely challenging or demanding. Jesus’ requirements are no less stringent than those of the Jewish teachers, but they can be accomplished more readily because of the strength Christ provides through the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not escape the hard life, but He could experience rest and refreshment in its midst. Christians are not promised freedom from illness or calamity, but they may experience God’s sustaining grace so that they are not crushed or driven to despair (2 Cor 4:8-9). By way of contrast, most Jews found the interpretations of the law imposed on them by their leaders increasingly burdensome.