

# The Christian Cure for Fatigue

**I**n light of these very heavy themes we're considering, it seems to me that we need to think first about a place to stand. We need stability, a foundation, in order to conquer fatigue. And then we need resilience. I thought of what would help us in times of fatigue, when compassion becomes weary. I have two texts. The first is a very famous parable that Jesus told at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

Our Lord begins that sermon with nine blessings. Just like Psalm 1, which is the great Psalm of the Law: "Blessed is the one who walks in the way of righteousness." Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount, giving his listeners a signal that he is offering a commentary on the Law. He ends it the same way that Psalm 1 ends, with a parable. The Psalm tells about how the one who walks in the way of the Torah, the way of the law, is like "a tree planted by the streams of water and bears fruit, but the wicked are not so. They are like the chaff that is blown away by the wind." That's the parable that ends Psalm 1.

Our Lord ends the Sermon on the Mount with the same parable, though he modifies it. He begins with a blessing as in Psalm 1; here our Lord gives nine blessings, the beatitudes. He ends the sermon with this parable:

*Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man or woman who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them or do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain*

*fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell. And great was the fall. Many of our Lord's parables end just as abruptly, but Matthew, writer of the Gospel, decides to make a comment: *When Jesus had finished saying these things the crowds were astounded at his teaching. For he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes.**

This parable is a two-story parable. If you have ever thought of our Lord's parables, many of them tell two stories side by side. The way that you understand the parable is to watch the two stories unfold. You notice the elements that are the same in each story and the elements that are different, and that's how you interpret it. It's a Jewish way of teaching called parallelism, seen in Proverbs, Psalms, stories, and parables in the Old Testament. Now our Lord does the same thing.

## *Everybody Builds a House*

First of all, notice what's the same in the story. Each person builds a house. We meet a wise person who builds a house and a foolish person who builds a house. Notice in the parable it's not an option whether or not you build a house. Everybody builds a house. In other words, our Lord is teaching that this parable is about philosophy of life and what you're living by as you build a house. Each person is developing a philosophy of life. Every single person is building a house, and the house you build will show your priorities and what

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you are interested in. It shows you a little bit about what one has in mind for that house.

If you saw new neighbors build a three-car garage and maybe a one-bedroom house, they are giving you a

signal. It shows you a little bit about what one has in mind for that house. If you saw new neighbors build a three-car garage and maybe a one-bedroom house, they are giving you a

decide whether to get married or not. “I can’t make up my mind on that woman, that man.” Well, that person is not celebrating anniversaries, because our non-decision builds a house that we have to live in. Notice that not building a house isn’t an option in this parable. Every single one of us is building a house.

The second thing in this parable that is the same is that every house built faced the storm. That’s not an option either. Notice the Lord is a good storyteller. Each storm is stated identically: “The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on that house.” He is not implying that all storms are identical, but he is saying that all houses face storms. We’re not so sure we like this



part of the parable. I can prove that to you. We spend a whole lot of our time trying to make sure we have a house where there are no storms, don’t we? We don’t get any comfort from this parable. This parable is not about weather, it is about a house that can endure storms. It’s not a parable about finding a place to build your house where there are no storms. I know people who are trying to find that perfect school district to put their children in, a place where their child will not have any temptations. I want to tell you, they are looking in the wrong place if they are trying to look for help for that in the New Testament. You don’t find it there. This

signal. It’s probably going to be a small family with a lot of cars. If you see them put in a lap swimming pool with no deep end for diving, it’s going to be a serious aerobic person moving into that house. You’re getting clues. You show your priorities; you show what matters to you by the house you build. Jesus has other parables where he’s very interested in whether you have a five-bedroom house, one-bedroom house, the lap swimming pool, and all the rest. But in this parable, he just makes the point that everybody builds a house, and the house will show a lot about yourself.

Even non-decisions build a house, like the man or woman who can’t



is a **parable** about building a house where there are storms, and there are storms for every house. That's clear in **the Sermon on the Mount**.

## *The Grand Variable*

What is the **grand variable**? The grand variable in this parable is the foundation and our relationship with that foundation. I want to make some theological reflections for our time. One theological reflection is this: This parable is a **profoundly Messianic parable**. There is no question about it, and Matthew says that's exactly the way the people understood it. The people who heard this sermon said, "No one ever taught like this." Jesus boldly teaches with authority. He said that if you hear his words and do them, you're a wise person. We hear Jesus Christ make a Messianic claim in this remarkable sermon. It's unmistakable—everybody taught it.

He's claiming that he and his words be trusted as the fulfillment of the Law. He brings the Law around full circle. The way I understand the Sermon on the Mount is that the Lord treats the Law as if it were a true arc. He does not deny the Law. He brings the arc around to its fulfillment and puts it in a circle that fulfills it. He is that circle. The Law is now fulfilled. He boldly claims that his words, and he himself, can be trusted, and you can build your own house on it. In fact, in this parable our Lord is posing a huge challenge and question. The question is this: If I do not choose to build my life upon Jesus Christ, then what do I propose to build my life on?

Every one of us is a house builder. Every one of us faces a storm with the house that we build. The big question is, where are you going to build the house? If you do not propose to build your house (i.e., your life) on Jesus Christ, his Word, and his work, then what do you propose to build your life on? Our Lord is giving us criterion by which to test

every foundation. Whatever foundation you and I build our lives on, we know one thing: It must be able to withstand the storm. That's a huge challenge. It means I can test any foundation by that criterion. It's got to withstand the storm.

## *Testing the Foundation*

I have a prayer group with young university students. One of these students, named A.J., has a dream to be an airplane pilot and eventually fly 747 jets. I got to thinking about A.J. and his dream. When you get to United Airlines and you're able to fly the 747, you're really at the top.

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*If you do not propose to build your house on Jesus Christ, his Word, and his work, then what do you propose to build your life on?*

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If you get to that point, you could say, "I'd like to be like United, where I own the airline too." Then let's suppose you say, "I'm going to give my whole life to United Airlines, because after all, I own the company now. I'm going to let them know how much I love that company. I'm going to build my life on my career." This is a temptation my young friend A.J. faces. Should I build my life on my career? A lot of men and women do it. They seem to do all right, at least for a while.

Well, let's test it. Just a little test from our Lord's principle that whatever you build on has to be able to withstand storms.

Let's try out a few storms. I'm not going to even try a big storm like a hurricane. Let's try out a little storm using United Airlines as the foundation to build your life on. Pretend I have a

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badge, braid, cap, and a 747 along with all that power and people depending on me. It's my airline. I live for it. All right, let's have a little test. You're coming in for the regular flight and the company nurse says, "We have our regular check today; just routine. Your blood pressure is 180 over 110. I don't think you're going to fly today, just to be safe." Suddenly, you're not flying anymore. You can work out front and do PR work, but you can't fly. Talk about a little storm! That's a little tiny storm, but it just wiped out United Airlines for you.

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*A family is like a house. It's a wonderful house. It will thrive when it's on the foundation that can bear its weight.*

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### *Choosing Your Foundation*

Many of you have careers. Let me tell you about your career. Your career is a wonderful house—but it's a poor foundation. It's a house and you can't build a house on a house. A house needs a foundation; your career is a terrible foundation, because as you know, companies are not loyal anymore. In the old days, when you joined Ma Bell you stayed with Ma Bell all your life. Now Ma Bell will hire people from MCI. They're not loyal to you anymore. That's the way it is. A career is a great house, but a failure as a foundation.

Then you say, "All right, I'm not going to do that. I'll build my life on my family. That will be my house." Let me tell you the same thing about a family. I love my family. A family will thrive and do wonderful things unless you worship the family. If you worship your parents, you have done a terrible thing because they can't bear that weight. If you worship your children, they can't

bear that weight. Your children cannot guarantee your happiness. You're asking too much from them if you demand that they make you happy.

A family is like a house. It's a wonderful house. It will thrive when it's on the foundation that can bear its weight. What can bear the weight of the storms that hit a family? Let's take the storm of death. A family cannot handle death, but Jesus Christ can. He's a foundation that a family can build on.

"All right. I agree with you, pastor. I'm going to build my life on the Church and the mission of the Church. Finally, we have arrived! Like World Vision's great work around the world, I'll build my life on that." But one reason people get burned out is that you can't build your life on your work, even your mission. You can't build your life on the Church.

The word "church" means "house of the Lord." The Church is a wonderful house, but a fragile foundation. With all of our faults, we are a great house when we're on the foundation. Notice what our Lord has done for us. He has given himself to us as the foundation. He has said that he is the foundation on which we can build the Church.

### *A Matter of Faith*

Another thing I want to point out is that the parable is also about faith. It's a parable that explains how we build our life on the foundation of Christ. I recently gave a sermon on the good effect of the Christian faith in our lives. I gave a quotation from Pascal in the beginning of this chapter called the "Necessity of the Wager." This French physicist of the 16th century was a devout Christian and was very concerned about winning people to the Christian faith. He said, "Men and women hate religion and despise it because they fear it might be true. To remedy this, we must begin by showing



that the Christian faith is not contrary to reason.”

He explained how we show that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not contrary to reason. “First, we need to show that it is venerable to inspire respect for it. Then we must show that at its center is love. To make good men and women hope that it’s true, then we must show that it’s true.” Notice how our Lord in his final parable of the Sermon on the Mount is covering all three of Pascal’s concerns. The claim to truth is at the center of the parable. It is the biblical view of life and of truth that gives us our strength. Jesus Christ is the foundation on which you can build.

He also addresses the venerability question. In the context of what Pascal is saying about the Christian faith, venerability means that if you were to believe it, it would have a good effect in your life. If you are to believe that United Airlines, the Church, or your family is the center of your life and your foundation, each of these finally will have a bad effect on your life. If you believe in Jesus Christ as the foundation, faith will have a good effect in your life because when storms come the house will stand. It may be battered, but it will stand. We must show that the Gospel is venerable and that love is at its core so that good people will hope it’s true.

I don’t want to be disrespectful—our Lord has given a great and complete parable—but I think we could actually make this parable more terrifying. What if Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock. The rains fell, the floods came, the winds blew, there was horizontal and vertical earth movement, and the house stood.” You add earthquakes and you have a really powerful parable. It really makes it scary, doesn’t it?

After the Coalinga quake in California, engineers noticed a row of three houses. One house was in com-

plete shambles, but the houses on either side seemed to be fine. What they found was that if a house was bolted to its foundation, it withstood the earthquake. If it was not bolted to its foundation during the horizontal part of the movement, it would move four or five inches and cause the house to collapse. Now in California, you cannot sell a house unless it’s bolted to its foundation. They made the discovery that you need to relate the house to its foundation; not just *on* the rock, but *in* the rock.

Do you know that in the San Francisco Bay area the safest place to be in an earthquake is the Golden Gate Bridge? The Golden Gate Bridge is a masterpiece of anti-earthquake construction. It’s a very flexible structure. Every single thing on that bridge, every piece of macadam, every piece of concrete, every single steel girder is related to the next. It has two great cables that go to two piers deep into bedrock, and then an anchor in San Francisco and Marin County. It’s the essence of simplicity.

You know what its secret is? It is totally preoccupied with its foundation. That’s what will keep you from fatigue and it will also give you compassion. You must be totally preoccupied with your foundation. I love the fact that you have to build *into* him, not just *on* him. That’s the marvel of Paul’s “in Christ” language.





## The Source of Resilience

In order to be able to withstand and keep from burning out and wearing out, we need to be able to have a place to stand. We need stability that comes from the truth and we need resilience. It seems to me the secret to resilience is contained in one word that appears in

the following three texts. This one word is the source of the energy that overcomes fatigue. That word is “joy.” In John 15 and 16, our Lord said to the disciples:

*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Amen, Amen, I say to you. You will weep and you will mourn. The world will rejoice. You will have pain, but your pain will be turned to*

*joy. The hour is coming and indeed has come when you will be scattered, each one to your own home. You'll leave me alone, yet I'm not alone because the Father is with me. I have said these things to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face intense pressure and persecution. Be of good courage, I have conquered the world!*

In John's Gospel our Lord teaches the disciples about joy on the Thursday night of Holy Week. The joy he is talking about here is the sudden awareness of the power of Christ's love. There's power to win the biggest victory and even, he said, your sorrow and pain will

be turned to joy. Why? Because of the power of his love. His love is going to give you this joy. In fact, it's going to give you courage despite tribulation, and that courage is going to come from joy.

The second text is from the book of James. James was a brother of our Lord and the Bishop of Jerusalem. Here is what he says in the first chapter of his book:

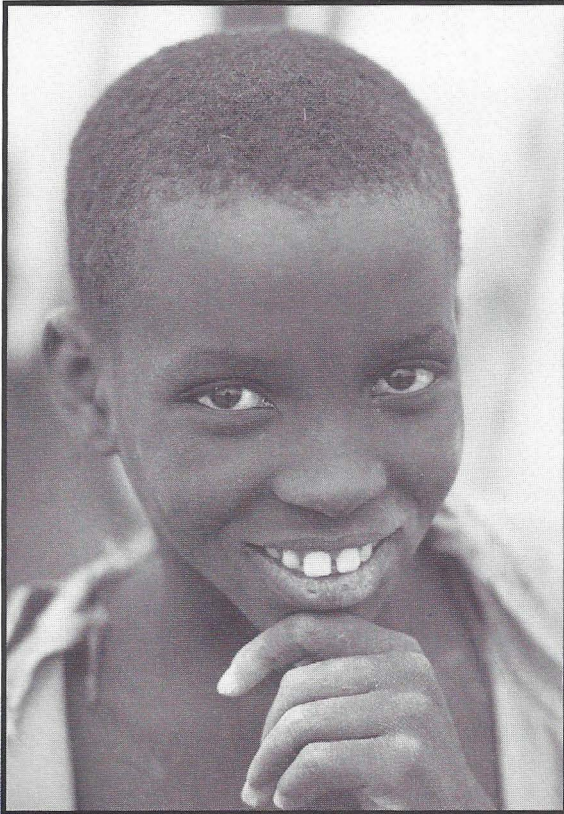
*“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials, intense pressure or peril, intense trials of any kind, consider it joy. Because you know the testing or your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

Endurance is translated from the word “upomano.” It means to hang in there. Sometimes it's translated “steadfast.” *Mano* means “to stay”; *upo*, “underneath.” To stay underneath. The word he uses there for “complete” is the word for health, that you may be a healthy person. Here again James is using the word joy.

James said Jesus Christ's grace is able to work in your lives over the long haul so that when the storms are over and you look at your house, you see that your house stood. It may be battered. It may be slightly askew, but it stands. When you discover that your house stood in spite of the earthquake and in spite of the storms, then you discover that it's venerable. It works. That is what James is saying produces joy. Joy comes in realizing that your foundation stood in the midst of everything. The result of joy here is that it produces a surviving endurance.

The final text where this word is used comes from the Apostle Paul. Here in Philippians 4, we have the Apostle Paul using the same word “joy” again:

*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is nearby. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your*





requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This time joy is the word that is used because of the fact that Jesus Christ is nearby. The result of his nearness to us is peace. He says the peace of God will reign with calmness. The word here is the word for mellow or gentle. It is one of the moderation words in the New Testament.

Are you intrigued by this? This is the final chapter of one of Paul's last books, and you might expect him to say, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. Let all people know your zeal-ousness, how hardworking you are." He surprises us. He says, "Let everyone know that you're unflappable, let every-one know that you're mellow and calm." I'll tell you—I think Paul is right. We don't need hysterical Christians running around. We need people who are calm and have a kind of moderation. Why? The Lord is nearby.

### *Surprised by Joy*

I think the person who helped me understand the meaning of the word, this biblical word that we have used now three times in this text, is C. S. Lewis. In his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis describes joy as a meaningful acceleration in the rhythm of our relationship with God. That's why he said it produces energy. Are you fatigued? Do you know what you need? Joy. You need it more than anything else. That's why, in these chapters and passages on joy, the words that describe the result of joy are "moderation" and "peace." Those are not hysterical words. Joy is rhythmic, it is a meaningful acceleration in the rhythm of our relationship with Christ. It's your relationship with Christ that gives you joy.

Returning to the foundation, we now know the foundation not only

withstands storms, the foundation is downright fun. It's actually fun to be in a relationship with God. It is good, it is venerable, and at its center are love and joy. Lewis understood the word joy. It's interesting that when he wrote his autobiographical book, he entitled it *Surprised by Joy*. It is the fourth word in our Christian imperative: faith, hope, love, and joy. Lewis understood that joy is what he never expected to find. When he found it, that's what really converted him.

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*Joy comes in realizing that your foundation stood in the midst of everything. The result of joy here is that it produces a surviving endurance.*

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What is it that causes joy? First, the discovery of God's love: It is strong and more powerful than death. His is the victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. That will give you courage.

Second, there's joy in discovering that in the midst of all the trials, God's foundation does stand. It gives you endurance, you survive, and that gives you joy. You know that you wagered well when you wagered on faith. And third, joy comes in knowing that Jesus Christ is nearby.

### *The Parable of the Kite*

Calvin once said that the "Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ binds us to himself." The greatest freedom we have in the Christian life comes in being bound to Christ. It's when Jesus Christ is Lord. When our lives are built in him, we get our greatest freedom to be our true selves—not when we break away and do our own thing.

I told the parable of a kite to my congregation. I said, "Imagine flying a kite. Imagine it has a personality. If you're the kite, tell me how you feel. This guy unrolls the string, ties it to you, he runs a little while on the beach. Now you're up in the air and you're feeling this tremendous power of the wind in your fabric, but you feel an incredible tug at your center from the string. Wouldn't it be logical, if you are a kite, to assume that you're being held

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down to the earth by that ridiculous boy or girl down there holding you back? I feel this incredible pressure, and the higher I get, the more pressure I feel. So I say to myself, 'Next time I go up I'll sneak a pair of scissors on board. I'll show that guy, and then I'll really fly.'

"Then the next day I get up there in the sky and I'm flying higher and higher; the winds are really great. I say 'OK, you've had your day, I'm going to have mine.' I take the scissors out and I snip that little cord. And now I'm going to really fly. But everybody who ever flew a kite knows that there is a law of physics, and the very flight itself is made possible because of the tension between the string and the kite. So now I have cut the string and I fall to the ground."

When I gave that sermon, a man in my church scribbled out a little poem during the sermon. It is called "I Am the Kite" by Bruce Bailey. I read this poem the next week in church.

### **I Am The Kite**

*I am the kite:  
Red and orange,  
Fire in the sky,  
Stunt Kite  
Cutting loops  
And gashes in the blue,  
My skin vibrates  
On my frame with power.*

*I cut the cord  
To fly yet higher still,  
To show the rest  
What freedom's all about.  
I turn and twist  
My fanciest curl  
And set my course  
For distance.*

*But, my mistake  
Was not  
To take the wind for granted,  
But the cord  
That tensioned me  
To one I did not see  
So far below.*

*The flyer is not me.*

*Lord, give me anchor. Give me pause.  
Let me know in freedom's limited flight. The  
kite's first cause.*

Three weeks later I received an anonymous poem.

### **The Kite Tangled In The Tree**

*The other kites are flying free,  
But I am Tangled in a tree.*

*My heart is crying with despair,  
Will I ever be up there?*

*Torn and tattered, how can I be  
Ever up there flying free?*

*The string is tangled in more  
than one limb.  
The future for me seems so dim.*

*God has been healing, but it  
takes so long,  
And the gale-wind forces seem  
so strong.*



*What will happen to a kite like me  
Tangled, so tangled in a tall, tall tree?*

*Will I, will I ever be  
Up there with the other kites flying free?*

*Able to trust the breeze and the string,  
Able to trust God in everything?*

A profound poem! A few weeks later I received another anonymous letter with yet another poem. The poet wrote that his poem started as a joke but something happened to him in the course of writing the poem:

### **I Am The Balloon**

*I am the balloon:  
Blue and green,  
Flying in the sky.  
Stunt balloon?*

*I laugh at the kite below  
Cutting loops and gashes in the blue."  
(I grow weary of hearing his poem.)  
His power is not his own.*

*I have no cord to cut.  
My power comes from within.  
Talk about convergence?  
I soar miles above Mount Shasta  
As the kite flutters helplessly  
To the trees below.  
I ascend into the stratosphere  
Growing larger and more powerful  
As I rise.*

*But whoa! What's this!  
I'm feeling tight!  
What was that sound?  
Oh my, I fear I'm just a wad  
Of latex on the ground.  
Here comes that kite-flyer.  
I hope he doesn't step on me.  
His hands are warm.  
He's stretching me on a cross!  
I am a kite!!  
Amen.*

What is joy? Joy is knowing God's love: that it is powerful; that his faithfulness lasts; and that Jesus Christ is nearby. I think this is what produces resilience. This is what produces energy. And this is the Christian cure for fatigue.

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