

***Pre-Gathering Bible Study***

***(Choose students to read the intro out loud as well as the Bible Passages. Make sure each student has their Bible open to Matthew 11 for reference.)***

***Everyone has pressures in their life. Work, marriage, raising kids, and financial problems pressure adults. The list goes on and on.***

***Middle schoolers like yourself experience pressure in many areas of their lives, too. School, grades, parents, and interpersonal relationships with friends can all cause pressure, affecting you physically, emotionally, and mentally.***

***At this year's Gathering, we'll discuss the pressures in your lives and how to handle them.***

***Let's examine the Gathering weekend's theme verse and discuss it as a preview of what the speakers, breakout leaders, and you will discuss.***

***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."***

***Matthew 11:28***

***Let's also add verses 29 and 30 to give our discussion an even better context or understanding of what we'll be discussing.***

***"Take my Yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my Yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

***Matthew 11:29-30***

***In verse 28, when Jesus says, "Come to me," what do you think he means?***

***(Jesus wants you and I to come to Him and unload our burdens.)***

***For this Pre-Gathering Bible study, let's focus on three phrases and words from the verses you just read.***

***First, Jesus says, "Come to Me."***

***Second, Jesus says, "Learn from Me."***

***Third, A single word that Jesus repeats twice, "yoke."***

***Let's look at the word "yoke" first. Jesus mentions this word twice.***

***If you have a phone, Google the word Yoke, and tell your leader what photos you see.***

******

***(Here are two photos your students may find. Cattle yoked together, and a man carrying a yoke on his shoulder carrying what is probably water from a well.)***

***A yoke is a wooden beam used to help carry or pull heavy objects by distributing the weight evenly on both shoulders. It can be used by humans and animals alike.***

***What does Jesus mean when He says, "Take my Yoke…. For my Yoke is easy?"***

***(Jesus is asking you and I to submit to him, learn from him, and acknowledge his authority. It implies that Jesus wants to direct our lives and that the work He has for us will not be overly demanding.)***

***In verse 28, when Jesus says, "Come to me," what do you think he means?***

***(Jesus wants you and I to come to Him and unload our burdens (pressures).***

***What are some burdens or problems you deal with regularly?***

***(The students may say things like school, bullying, parents, and relationships.)***

***Do you feel you can handle your problems alone, or do you think you may need some help?***

***(Accept all answers, but don't be afraid to ask them how they will handle them if they say yes)***

***In this passage, Jesus has offered you to "Come to Me (Him)."***

***What are some ways you can Come to Jesus?***

***(Some of the obvious answers are to read the Bible, Pray, and Worship regularly. Encourage the students to expand on their thoughts and answers.)***

***Other good answers might be to share the Word of God with others, be patient with others, have empathy (compassion) for others, and ask God for direction.)***

***The final phrase we'll examine today is Jesus's statement, "Learn from me."***

***What do you think Jesus means when He says, "Learn from me."?***

***(The students could say many things, including the remainder of the verse, "For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest.)***

***Do you remember Jesus' twelve disciples? No, you don't have to name them all. 😊***

***The Apostles learned from and depended on Jesus. Like the disciples and all of His followers, Jesus seeks to direct our actions and efforts. Perhaps that's why, when Jesus met many of His Apostles for the first time, He said, "Follow Me."***

***One final note.***

***At the end of the passage, Jesus says, "You will find rest for your souls."***

***Jesus said, come to me, as well as learn from me. What He didn't do was to make a promise that He would make our lives easier. No, life is still going to be hard when we follow Jesus. We will still have infirmities (illnesses), problems, and difficulties in our lives.***

***But when we believe in Jesus and take on His Yoke, our lives and problems will be more manageable.***

***Have a great time at the Gathering. Sing, listen, learn, and play. Most of all, get to know Jesus better.***

***Joe G.***