

What Yoke Will You Choose?

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

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I grew up in the country in South Alabama. As a boy, I had to use my imagination to entertain myself. The nearest boy my age was a couple of miles down the road.

I built a fort out of branches I sawed in the woods.

I made my wagon into a car and drove it down the hill in the backyard, using the wagon tongue to steer. The V-shaped scar on my right foot reminds me that wasn't a good idea. I plowed into the side of the sandbox.

I played football with a team of one, creating entire games as I faced off against an imaginary team. I was the quarterback, the running back, the receiver, the defense, and even the announcer on every play.

You remember those days too, don't you?

Children have been using their imaginations to entertain themselves for millennia. In Jesus' day, one child would play a flute or pretend to and the others would pretend they were at a funeral or a wedding. Funerals were public matters, so children mimicked what they saw.

Children still mimic what they see.

Jesus compared the people he was living among to children who sat around and refused to play, even when given the opportunity. That strikes a rather sad tone.

Our generation is no different from Jesus' in this respect.

When we stand back and refuse to get involved when we should for the good of our family, friends, stranger, church or community, it strikes the same sad tone with the Lord.

Avoiding Jesus is the Avoiding of Commitment

There are people who don't want to get involved with Jesus, the church, or matters of faith because they don't want to be bothered with any kind of commitment or obligation.

A lot of people are spiritual. They believe in God. Some even attend church, but they don't want a deep commitment with any of these. It's easier to keep a safe distance.

Unless we become a committed partner with God in his Kingdom He is establishing, we are more like children that refuse to play, even when prompted by music and friends.

We need to have the faith and imagination of a child. We need to dance, sing, celebrate, mourn, and grieve – whatever the situation calls for.

Our Joy is Found in the Right Commitments

As Christians, we should partner with God because this brings joy to us, and it makes the world a better place for everyone.

The partnership image today is a yoke. It is the image of a team of horses being yoked or harnessed together. God wants us to be yoked together with Jesus.

The problem is that some see being yoked with Christ as being too restrictive. Like some horses that kick and stomp when a bridle is placed on them, some view Christianity that way.

People see it as religion designed to keep us from enjoying life, going places we want to go, doing things we want to do, seeing things we want to see, and saying things we want to say. Is that true?

The rabbis often spoke of taking on “the yoke of the Law.” They believed that the Law would lead them to salvation. But trying to live by the law became too burdensome. They seemed to have a rule for everything.

Is Our Faith Too Burdensome?

Too many people see Christianity in this way. They see it as too restrictive. It’s too much of a burden.

Do you think that God wants us to look at the Christian faith as a heavy burden to carry? Properly made, a yoke is not uncomfortable for animals and it allows them carry heavy loads.

A yoke symbolizes obedience and the acceptance of responsibility.

When we become Christians, we enter a covenant with Jesus. We are joined with Jesus like oxen are joined in a yoke.

But Jesus said that his yoke is *easy*, not because his call to discipleship is not demanding, but because He is in the yoke with us. That means we are assisted with the power of God.

Burdens in This Life Are Not An Option

Sooner or later, everyone discovers that carrying burdens is not an option.

Your burdens might be financial or emotional. They might be related to family or work. Your burdens may be physical or relational. Whatever they are, Jesus wants to help us carry them.

In fact, Jesus has issued us an invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matt 11:28-30 (NIV)

So, it sounds like we have a choice about the yoke we choose. Which yoke in this life have you chosen? Which burdens will you carry?

Notice, Jesus did not promise we would have no burdens. He did not promise that we would not have to carry heavy burdens. He said that his burdens are light.

So, what about those burdens that nearly consume us? What about those burdens that are more than we can bear? What about those burdens that are heavy and overwhelming? Maybe we should re-evaluate whether those are of God.

I do know that sometimes those heavy burdens are our own making. We rebel against God and His ways.

One way we create burdens for ourselves is that we do not take a Sabbath or Sabbath time. We stay in constant motion. We fill our calendar so full that we have time for everything and everyone except God.

Burdens and Busyness Become Intertwined

Pastor and author Eugene Peterson writes that busyness is a not a symptom of commitment but of betrayal. He says, "It is not devotion but defection." ("The Contemplative Pastor," p. 17)

Here's a little secret. Peterson is writing to pastors.

Peterson tells pastors that if we have become too busy we neglect the time we should be spending praying, preparing to preach, and listening, and we have neglected the most important part of ministry.

He challenges us to use the appointment calendar to schedule blocks of time for these tasks, which will then free us for what he calls the "administrative humdrum" and the hundred menial tasks or our work.

Basically, Peterson's advice is about prioritizing. So, his words can apply to all of us.

So, think about it. What are those areas that you should give first priority?

Unfortunately, many of us do become so busy we will leave our souls unattended.

If we do not tend to our own souls, how can we be present for our families? How can we be creative and imaginative in our work? How can we have the wisdom to choose what is ethical?

To Lay Down Burdens We Must UnBusy Ourselves

If fathers are to be the spiritual leaders we need to be, we must model for our children that setting aside time for God is a priority.

If we are yoked with Christ, we will be given the ability to carry some real spiritual freight in our homes. But if we are not in a yoke with Christ, we might talk a big game but the burdens will overwhelm us and others will know it.

Being yoked with Jesus is like a father who offered to help his daughter carry her burdens.

So, the father cut a large stick and placed it through the handle of the basket so that the end toward himself was very short, while the end toward her was three or four times as long.

Each took hold of the end stick and the basket was lifted. The daughter was bearing the burden with her father. But she found her work easy and light because her father assumed the heavier end of the load. That is the way it is when we are yoked with Christ.

The Lord is offering to help us carry our load. We need to be humble enough to get into the yoke with Him.

We must stop long enough to set our load down, and meditate on God and His ways, so that the load can be reallocated. The Lord will carry more if we all Him to. He will slid the load His way.

The Lord knows every burden you carry this morning. If you feel you are pulling the weight of the world today, allow God to lift more of the load. He wants you to allow Him to help you pull that weight.

Being Yoked with Jesus is a Choice

He wants you to trust Him. He wants you to get in the yoke with Him, knowing He is going to pull the majority of the weight.

The other choice is to try to carry your entire load all by yourself

If you are not yoked with Jesus, this morning, then what's keeping you from coming to Him and trusting Him with your life? Jesus is gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls by trusting your life to Him.

Prayer:

God, the burdens of this life can cause us to stop all the laughter and the music. Where we once found ourselves joyful and carefree like children, with each passing year, life seems to pile on burden after burden.

If were to list our burdens, the list would grow long quickly.

Lord, sometimes we here feel overwhelmed by our burdens and our joy is depleted. Sometimes we seem to have no control over the burdens that plagued us. We confess, other times we are the ones that create our burdens.

Today, help each of us to understand the differences between the two.
Show us how to prioritize so we can allow you more space into our lives.

We want to be yoked with you Lord, because we believe that your promise is true, that your yoke is easy and your burden is light.

In your name, we pray. Amen