



New Year, New Life: Start With Jesus

By: Peter Bales

No. 10, December 31st, 2023

Happy New Year! We've just come through Christmas. We dove deep into the story of Jesus and how God was working for centuries to reconcile us to himself. He gave us the greatest gift by giving us himself!

This begs the question- so what? How does this affect my life? What do I do with that? Our next bible studies are going to tackle this question for a bit. In short, he came that we would have a new life!

Dallas Williard was an extremely prolific author and Christian philosopher. He may be most famous for his books on discipleship and spiritual growth. He spent his life studying Jesus and the Bible. One day, another author was having lunch with him and asked him if he could only use one word to describe Jesus what it would be.

Dallas took a moment to consider his answer. Finally, he smiled and said, "relaxed."

RELAXED? JESUS? Think about it for a minute. Of course, there were times when Jesus was intense, but over and over we see him withdrawing from the crowds or taking time for someone who interrupted him. He took time for weddings and dinners in many people's homes. As big as his mission was, he was not rushed. He may have been focused, but he was relaxed. He was perfectly in step with the Father. He never got behind schedule.

What is so striking about this is that it is the opposite of the most of us. Let's be honest. We don't get to relax very often. We try to plan a day off or a vacation so we can relax, but even then, do we really get to relax?

- 1. What do you think about the suggestion that Jesus was "relaxed?"**
- 2. What does it mean for you to relax? What makes it so difficult?**

Jesus gave an interesting teaching about this. He said, "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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

Most of us aren't farmers, and most farmers don't use a yoke with animals much anymore. A yoke is a wooden harness that connects a couple animals to farming implements like a plow.



Yoke

Let's read that verse again.. Some of us have heard this verse and what we mainly hear is that things are easier with Jesus. Give Jesus whatever burdens you! His yoke is easy!

Yes! This is true, but there is more to it. It's like Jesus says, "I will give you rest.. so here, take this yoke!" Remember, the yoke is for doing work!! The verse is not saying that we throw off our burdens and do whatever we want to do! We are yoked! But Jesus says we find rest for our souls by being under *his* yoke.

The point is, that we are still under a yoke. This is important to think about and I want to make a couple points as we consider our walk with Jesus over the next year. First, notice that we *submit* to Jesus' yoke. Notice that Jesus is not forcing it, but asks us, "take my yoke upon you..." We allow him to put it on us. We say yes to his invitation. Submitting is the part we often forget about this verse. We think that Jesus just wants to give us the easy life, but this only comes as we submit to his ways! We release our wills to just roam freely and submit to his leadership!

3. What does it mean that we take his "yoke" upon us? How do we do that?

Another interesting thing about old yokes, is that oftentimes, a younger, newer animal might be joined with a more mature trained animal. The older animal helps to train the younger. In a similar way, as we submit to the yoke of Jesus, we learn *his* ways. He is helping us grow and mature. We learn how to walk in step with him!

It's also true that the yoke had to be made to fit a particular animal. If it didn't fit well, it could hurt the animal and make it less productive. So, the yoke was individually designed and changed over time as the animal grew! Think about this in our walk with Jesus. We submit to his yoke that is "easy." It is designed for us and isn't made to harm us.

4. How does being "yoked" to Jesus help us grow?

5. Why is it important that our "yoke" fits? What does this show us about God?

The yoke is an instrument designed to help get work done! Two animals would often pull a plow or a cart. But Jesus says that his yoke helps us find rest for our weary souls!

6. How does putting on the "yoke" of Jesus help us find rest for our weary souls?

7. How do we do this practically? What does it look like for us today?

The amazing thing is that when we are under the yoke of Jesus, we get to be part of his mission and work. In the midst of letting him lead and enjoying his rest, we are also getting kingdom work done!

8. What does having Jesus' yoke teach us about work in the kingdom? How might we know if we are doing it wrong?

Galatians 5:1 is another verse about a yoke! It says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

9. What is this verse asking us to do? How do we make sure we do it?

GOING DEEPER> As you consider the year ahead, what would it look like to put on the yoke of Jesus? Think about what you would put on the schedule if you wanted to plan for spiritual growth in the next year. Ask Jesus to help you!