

Side-By-Side: Yokes, Comfort and Choices

The author John White, told a fascinating story about his days as a missionary in a remote village in the South American jungle. One evening, as John stood outside his tent, he saw a tribal farmer training a young ox to walk under a yoke.

The farmer put the yoke on the neck of an older experienced ox, then laid it on the shoulders of the youngster, and they all set off towards the jungle. As soon as the older ox took a step forward, the younger ox resisted, planted his feet, and writhed around. The old ox quietly stopped and waited for the youngster to calm down. Finally, once the young guy stopped squirming, the old ox took another step, the young ox squirmed, and the yoke scraped *both* of their shoulders. Again and again, with the farmer in tow, the two beasts made their mutually painful journey. They were still awkwardly moving forward when John finally went to bed.

When John woke in the morning and looked towards the jungle, he saw the two oxen moving together with ease as they approached the village. The student ox had learned to match his teacher's steps and share his pace. The yoke was now comfortable for both.

Biblical Yokes

The Old Testament often uses the word “yoke” to describe Israel’s slavery to an oppressive foreign power like Egypt, Syria, or Babylon. The “yoke” bound them to the will of their oppressors. They had no choice. In the New Testament, we get to choose with whom we share a yoke. Our choices have significant consequences. Jesus tells us to take His yoke upon us ([Matthew 11:29](#)). If we do, we learn from Him and experience rest and ease. Yoked to a different teacher, like the law, brings oppression pain. Yoked in marriage to a believer produces a very different experience than being “unequally yoked” to an unbeliever.

How Yokes Help

I remind myself – fairly often – not to walk faster than Jesus is walking. It’s easy for me to rush ahead of Him. Remembering that we are yoked together helps me slow and match *His* pace, That way our yoke doesn’t scrape either of our shoulders. Remembering our yoke also helps me walk in *His* direction. (It’s not good to go west if Jesus is going east. Picturing myself yoked to Jesus also helps me remember that my steps may bring Him pleasure or bring Him pain. Remembering that yokes impact both participants guards and guides my choices.

Yokes are such a great analogy. Let’s Keep them in mind.