



**ChristCommunity**  
an Evangelical Free Church



# THE YOKE

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*The Yoke* by Tom Nelson  
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## INTRODUCTION

We believe we become the people God designed us to be in the yoke of Christ.

What is the most memorable invitation you have ever received? For my wife Liz and me, it arrived in the mail with an embossed envelope that read, “The White House, 1500 Pennsylvania Ave. Washington D.C.” Staring in utter disbelief, we could hardly wait to open the envelope. Our heart skipped a beat when we realized we were being invited by the President to attend a celebration at our nation’s capitol. Responding with an enthusiastic “yes!” was not a hard decision. In fact, we didn’t have to think twice. We cleared our schedule immediately and made the necessary travel arrangements. Frankly, the biggest question flowing through our minds was what we were going to wear for such an important occasion.

We all get invitations to birthday parties, Christmas parties, wedding celebrations, and a myriad of social events. Invitations come in many shapes and sizes and make our lives happier, but not all invitations are equal. The significance of an invitation is determined, not by the kind of the paper on which it is printed, but by the kind of person who is extending the invitation. While it is quite an extraordinary thing to be invited by a President who is the leader of our country, it is much more extraordinary to be extended a personal invitation by the Creator of the world. Yet this is precisely what Jesus does for you and me in what we at Christ Community refer to as The Great Invitation.

### JESUS' GREAT INVITATION

In His Great Invitation, Jesus invites us to live the life we were originally designed to live before our lives were broken as a result of sin. A life of wholeness, abundance, purpose, and joy!

*Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).*



## WHAT DOES JESUS INVITE YOU TO?

Jesus invites you to personal intimacy with Him. In the Gospel of Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, “*Come to me.*” These welcoming words of Jesus make it clear that the Christian faith is first a personal relationship with Jesus made possible by grace through faith in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross and His bodily resurrection. In his gracious invitation, Jesus doesn’t invite you to embrace a long list of religious do’s and don’ts or some external veneer of self-guided religiosity, but rather an intimate and transforming personal relationship with Himself.

Not only does Jesus invite you to a life of intimacy, He also invites you to a life of apprenticeship, where you learn how to live your life like Jesus would if He were you. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus says, “*Take my yoke and learn from me.*” Here Jesus uses a figure of speech of comparison. Jesus’ metaphor is comparing the path of following Him with an agrarian device used in the first century to train animals. The yoke was a common tool used as oxen plowed fields. It was like a McDonald’s golden arches turned upside down with a large wooden beam over the top. In Jesus’ day, each yoke was custom-made by a skilled carpenter for a specific team of oxen. As a carpenter in the town of Nazareth, Jesus’ skillful and callused hands crafted yokes for this very purpose.

Here in His Great Invitation, Jesus refers to a training yoke. How did a training yoke work? The farmer would put two oxen in the yoke side by side. He would put the mature, experienced ox on the larger side of the yoke and the younger, inexperienced ox on the other side. In the yoke, the young ox became an apprentice to the experienced ox. The young ox, used to unbridled selfish pursuits, would want to go off the path when he saw green grass or a refreshing stream of water. Rather than letting the young ox do his own thing, the mature ox would gently guide him back on course. When the young ox entered the yoke, he left an old way of life and submitted to a new master that would train him. The young ox would get to know intimately the other ox and learn everything the older one knew. In the course of time, the young ox would become just like the mature ox. The yoke was the means by which training and transformation occurred.

The yoke is a metaphorical picture Jesus paints for those of us who desire to be His true disciples. While the yoke was often a symbol of enslavement and freedom, paradoxically Jesus uses it as a symbol of ultimate freedom and the path to spiritual growth and increasing Christlikeness. The true disciple enters the yoke of Jesus, following His lead, and learns from Jesus just as an apprentice learns from a master craftsman, or a resident doctor learns from an established physician. Entering Jesus’ yoke is both a decisive act of submission as well as a daily lifestyle of submission. Without being yoked to Jesus, your spiritual growth is greatly hindered.

## WHAT DOES JESUS PROMISE TO YOU?

Twice in His Great Invitation, Jesus promises those who enter his yoke will find “rest.” Often when we hear the idea of rest, we think of taking it easy or chilling out after a long day at school or work. Jesus does not have a life of ease in mind here, but rather an integral life of wholeness and purpose. As a rabbi, Jesus is using the word ‘rest’ to allude to God’s original creation design articulated in the Old Testament book of Genesis. The first time the word ‘rest’ appears in the Bible is in Genesis 2:1, “*And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.*” Why did God rest on the seventh day? I doubt if it was because God was tired of working. Rather, I believe God rested so that He could simply delight in the perfection and awesome beauty of



His creation. When Jesus promises a life of rest, He is saying that in His yoke, we, as His apprentices, will discover the delightful life we were originally designed to live way back in the Garden of Eden.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- » *Have you responded to Jesus' Great Invitation? You and I have received the most amazing invitation. It is an invitation not to an event or a party, or even to meet a President, it is an invitation to experience a brand new life. Jesus invites you to experience the life you were designed to live, the life you long to live, the life He has now made possible for you to live through His atoning blood on the cross. The cross of Christ leads us to the yoke of Christ.*
- » *What will your response be to Jesus' Great Invitation? Will you say "yes" and become his yoked apprentice? I can't think of a more important decision you will ever make.*

## NEXT STEPS

- » Reflectively read through Matthew 11:28-30.
- » Prayerfully say "yes" to Jesus' Great Invitation.
- » Read my book *Five Smooth Stones: Discovering The Path To Wholeness of Soul*. This book expounds upon the Great Invitation and the spiritual practices that aid us in our journey of transformation.
- » Participate in our Razor's Leadership Pathway (beginning every September) in order to grow in your understanding of the Great Invitation.