



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 7: How Does Jesus Partner With Us?

Objective

Students will understand that when Jesus says in Matthew 11:29 to “take my yoke,” He is inviting them into a partnership with Him—learning His way, aligning their heart, mind, soul, and strength with His leadership—so they can experience both purposeful work and true rest for their souls. **(You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)**

Featured Scripture

“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.” Matthew 11:29, NIV

Lesson

From the time that we were being formed in our mother’s womb, God saw and imagined our unique PURPOSE and potential. Jesus came into this world not just to save us *from* the things that can hold us back; we are saved *for* something that has eternal value. God invites us into real WORK in His kingdom — again, not just *for* Jesus, but *with* Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:9 says, “We are co-laborers with God.” That word “co-laborers” in Greek (synergoi) is where we get the English word “synergy” from. SYNERGY is a great word. It

means “the working together of two or more things to produce a greater effect than the sum of their individual parts.” It’s like $1+1=3$. This is power!

When we obey the commands of the Shema prayer, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength...**,” we are saying that we understand that every part of who we are belongs to Him in interdependence. But here’s the honest truth: sometimes we don’t like being led. We want to decide our own DIRECTION. We want to move at our own pace. We have to be trained in order to follow.

When we rush ahead or pull away, life can feel messy and exhausting. Our steps lose order, and we become vulnerable and ineffective. Jesus knows this about us. That’s why He gives us a powerful picture from everyday life in Bible times – the picture of a yoke. Not to be confused with an egg Y-O-L-K! This is a Y-O-K-E, and it’s a piece of farm equipment.

In Matthew 11:28–30, NLT, Jesus says, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”



To understand this, we need to picture farming long before tractors existed. Farmers used OXEN to plow fields. A wooden yoke was placed across the shoulders of two oxen to join them together so they could pull in the same direction. **Often, a young, inexperienced ox would be yoked to an older, stronger, trained ox.** The older ox knew the farmer’s voice. It knew how to walk straight lines and keep steady RHYTHM. The younger ox might pull too fast, slow down, or veer off – but the yoke kept them connected.

Over time, the young ox learned the rhythm and strength of the older one. The work was shared. The BURDEN felt lighter because it wasn’t carried alone. The Message

translation of Matthew 11:29 says it so eloquently: **“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”**

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. Who saw you before you were born? **Answer:** God
2. What farm object did Jesus use as an example of partnership? **Answer:** Yoke
3. Why would a farmer yoke a younger ox to an older ox? **Answer:** The older one trained the younger because it already knew how to walk straight and keep rhythm.
4. What does it mean to you to co-labor with Jesus? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. Ask for what His will is for a situation and obey His leading.)
5. What’s an example in your life from the past week when you sensed the “unforced rhythms of grace,” even for a moment?” **Answer:** (Student reflection)

In Jesus’ day, a rabbi’s teaching was also called his “yoke.” To follow a rabbi meant to take on his way of understanding and living out God’s Word. When Jesus says, “Take my yoke,” He is inviting us to learn His way of life – His mercy, humility, courage, and obedience. His teaching is not harsh or crushing. It brings FREEDOM because it lines us up with truth.

This idea of alignment shows up in Proverbs 16:3 and is expounded upon in the Amplified translation: “Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will and] so shall your plans be established and succeed.” AGREEMENT. Alignment. Rhythm. Pace. Synergy. This is what partnering with Jesus looks like. This is what “rest for your soul” feels like!

There is even a beautiful picture of this in the Hebrew language. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is called *Aleph* (a silent letter), and in ancient Paleo-Hebrew pictogram, which is made up of PICTURES that represent letters, it was shaped like an **ox head**. (Hebrew also reads right to left instead of left to right like English.) Strength.

Leadership. The name for God, *EI*, is made up of *ALEPH* (ox head) and *Lamed* (which was shaped like a shepherd's staff). Together, the picture looks like strength guided by a SHEPHERD — authority carried with care. Isaiah 9:4 calls a yoke a “staff across the shoulder.” God is strong, but He is also a shepherd who guides. That is the kind of partner Jesus is.



The New Testament tells us that Christ is the head and we are the BODY. A body does not decide its own direction apart from the head. The head leads; the body follows. When we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, we are choosing to move in step with our Head. We are choosing partnership instead of stubborn independence.

Practically speaking, that might mean we change our posture, like:

- Pause and ask, “Jesus, what are You doing in this situation, and how should I join You?”
- When you do mess up, partnership reminds you, “I will bring this to Jesus quickly and make this right.”
- Choose faithful obedience again and again, rather than fitful starts and stops.
- Doing your part in taking responsibility for what only you can do, and trusting Jesus that He is in control of the rest.

Jesus wants to know our IDEAS and desires. We bring our own strengths and personalities and gifts with us when we come to Him. He invites us into His yoke — His teaching, His pace, His strength. When we accept that invitation, we discover that we were never meant to pull the plow alone. We were meant to walk beside Him, learning His rhythm of grace, bringing life and a HARVEST wherever He leads, and seeing that He loves it when our ideas succeed as we seek His help and guidance first.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. In Jesus' day, what was another word for a rabbi's teaching? **Answer:** Yoke
2. What shape did the letter Aleph look like in ancient Hebrew? **Answer:** Ox head

3. Why would alignment bring freedom instead of pressure? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. You can multiply the power when you work in unison with another.)

4. How do you think that “work” and “rest for your soul” can co-exist? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. It feels good to be able to be productive and not frustrated.)

5. What are some plans you have that you think God might want to see come to fruition? **Answer:** (Student reflection.)

Context Clues

THE RABBI'S YOKE

The title of “rabbi” was a respectful one given to someone trained in interpreting and teaching God’s Law, or the Torah. It was someone who taught with authority. In Bible times, a rabbi’s “yoke” referred to his interpretation of the Law—his particular way of understanding and living out the Torah. To take on a rabbi’s yoke meant becoming his disciple: submitting to his teaching, imitating his life, and ordering your daily actions according to his instruction.

By the time of Jesus, some groups—like the Pharisees—had developed detailed traditions to guard the Law. These added layers of rules about Sabbath, purity, and daily practices. Though meant to protect obedience, the growing weight of regulations could feel overwhelming. They seemed to lose the spirit or intention behind following the ways of God. Jesus even spoke of leaders who placed “heavy burdens” on others.

So when He says in Matthew 11:29–30, “Take *my* yoke upon you... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light,” He offers a contrast. His yoke still calls for discipleship and obedience, but it is light because it is rooted in relationship, mercy, and grace rather than rule accumulation.

Then & Now

Thousands of years ago, writing began as pictures. Early people carved pictograms on cave walls—simple images that stood for objects or events. But pictures could only go so far.

Over time, some symbols began to represent *sounds* instead of just things. The **Paleo-Hebrew alphabet** grew out of earlier pictographic symbols—like an ox head that eventually stood for the sound “aleph.” This sound-based approach was refined in the **Phoenician alphabet**, passed into the **Greek alphabet**, and then into the **Latin alphabet**, which English still uses today.

Attaching letters to sounds was an elegant breakthrough. Instead of thousands of symbols, you only needed a small set of letters that could be combined to form endless words. Writing could move from cave walls to scrolls to bound books.

The Bible was copied carefully by hand for centuries, letter by letter, long before mass production existed. Widespread distribution didn’t happen until **Johannes Gutenberg** invented the printing press in the 1400s, making it possible to reproduce texts quickly and share them widely.

From carved pictures to printed pages, the alphabet’s story is the story of turning sound into something that can last.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

“For we are co-laborers with God.” 1 Corinthians 3:9a

| Letter Name | Proto-Sinaitic | Early Phoenician | Greek | Phonetic Value | Letter Meaning |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| ’aleph | | | Α | [ʾ] | ox |
| beth | | | Β | [b] | house |
| gimmel | | | Γ | [g] | throwstick |
| daleth | | | Δ | [d] | door |
| he | | | Ε | [h] | |
| waw | | | Ϝ, Υ | [w] | hook/peg |
| zayin | | | Ζ | [z] | |
| heth | | | Η | [ħ] | fence |
| teth | | | Θ | [t] | |
| yodh | | | Ι | [y] | arm/hand |
| kaph | | | Κ | [k] | palm of hand |
| lamedh | | | Λ | [l] | goad/crook |
| mem | | | Μ | [m] | water |
| nun | | | Ν | [n] | snake |
| samekh | | | Ξ | [s] | |
| ’ayin | | | Ο | [ʿ] | eye |
| pe | | | Π | [p] | |
| tsade | | | Μ ² | [ṣ] | |
| qoph | | | Ϙ ³ | [q] | |
| reš | | | Ρ | [r] | head |
| šin | | | Σ | [š] | |
| taw | | | Τ | [t] | mark (?) |

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch “What Does it Mean When Jesus Says My Yoke Is Easy...” (4:00)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW7YwIpeOzw>
- Watch “Take My Yoke Upon You...” (1:44)
<https://youtu.be/TIrcIas3k54?si=neVvkZmXbJlw6oaM>
- Watch “Oxen Training” (2:46)
https://youtu.be/PBftjJ05qMg?si=GqkTR8f0npJh_JUv
- Watch “A History of Hebrew: Proto-Semitic Alphabet” (3:10)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TF0QQ1ptsl>
- Listen to the hymn, “Trust and Obey” (4:53)
https://youtu.be/Noyy-0hIjPw?si=_zH8jTkwR8uB9EYS
- Read the story behind the hymn “Trust and Obey”
<https://iblp.org/hymn-history-trust-and-obey/>
- Watch “Cognitive Load Theory” (2:54)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpA6RdE0aYo>
- Watch Heartmath’s “Social Coherence Explained” (3:23)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8Eyr_IDvBI

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** (or more) of these ways to demonstrate your understanding of the yoke:

- **“Co-labor” with Your Communication Partner to Build a Story Together**
 - The communication partner and student each add **one sentence at a time**, taking turns to build a story. Start with the communication partner setting it up. I.e. *“Once upon a time, a young ox wanted to learn how to plow.”*
 - They must **connect their sentence to the one before**, keeping the story coherent.
 - Encourage imagination, but keep it positive or relevant to the lesson (e.g., partnership, learning, rhythm, rest, or working together).

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- Communication partners, here's a challenge for you: YOU spell out each letter of your sentence on the letterboard or the keyboard too!
 - Record your short story (showing what sentence belongs to whom) and turn it in, along with the student's comment on how that felt to build a story that way with another person.
- **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**
 - Write a poem or song about being yoked with Christ, partnership, or rest for your soul.
 - **Fill-in the Blank Madlib (Spell the Word)**

The Story:

One day, a/an (adjective) ox named (name) was paired with a/an (adjective) ox named (name). Their job was to (verb) the (plural noun) across the field.

At first, (name) wanted to go (direction), but (name) knew the rhythm of the (plural noun) and gently (verb). Together, they discovered that when they moved in (adjective) steps, the work became (adjective) and (emotion).

They realized that being yoked together meant they could (verb) more (adverb) than they could alone. By the end of the day, both oxen felt (emotion), and their (body part) were full of (plural noun).

They learned the secret of co-laboring: when you (verb) together, the burden is (adjective), the rhythm is (adjective), and even the hardest (plural noun) becomes (adjective).

Need a guide to the parts of speech?

https://www.butte.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/grammar/parts_of_speech.html

- **Broom Handle “Yoke” Rhythm Walk**

- Grab a broom handle (or a dowel/long stick) and find an open space to walk safely. Partners hold the broom handle together at chest height side by side. Communication partner sets the pace and the course and the Speller follows. Focus on matching one another’s steps and pace. Set a metronome if you can. Try to walk in step for a few minutes.
- Spell a word or a sentence about how that felt.

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

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|-------------|--------------|
| 1. JESUS | 11. GOD |
| 2. YOKE | 12. PURPOSE |
| 3. DISCIPLE | 13. MERCY |
| 4. PARTNER | 14. HUMBLE |
| 5. LAW | 15. OBEY |
| 6. GRACE | 16. FREEDOM |
| 7. SOUL | 17. RHYTHM |
| 8. STRENGTH | 18. HARVEST |
| 9. REST | 19. ALEPH |
| 10. WORK | 20. SHEPHERD |