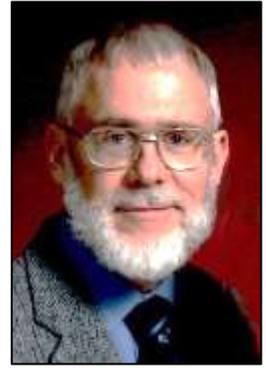


# INTRODUCING THE YOKE AND THE CROSS

by David Bowen, YPM Executive Director

*“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of 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.”*

MATTHEW 11:28-30 NIV



The logo of Yokefellowship includes the cross and the yoke. What is the difference between the yoke and the cross? Are these two metaphors for the same reality or do they represent two aspects of one relationship? Jesus says in MATT 16:24, *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”* In MATT 11:29 Jesus says, *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me....”* Are those the same thing?

## THE CROSS REPRESENTS DEATH

When Jesus called His first disciples, the cross was “the emblem of suffering and shame”. The Romans who crucified Jesus and some of His earliest disciples were not looking for a more humane method of execution. They were trying to maximize pain and shame. That is what the cross symbolized: pain, shame, and death. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor-theologian, wrote, “When Jesus Christ calls a man, He bids him *‘Come and die’*”. Jesus says, *“Deny yourself”*. The world says, “Affirm yourself, assert yourself, actualize yourself. Be your own person. Do your own thing. It’s all about you.”

The Apostle Paul said, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me....”* (GAL 2:20). It is only those who have truly died to self who are able to live for Christ. Life in Christ is not about my security, my comfort, my pleasure, my ambitions. It is all about knowing and doing the will of God. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done”* - not “my kingdom come, my will be done”. The cross represents death to the self-centered life that we may become Christ-centered seeking to know, love, and serve Him.

## THE YOKE REPRESENTS SERVICE

And that brings us to the “yoke”. The story is told that long ago in the land of Israel in the little village of Nazareth there was a carpenter’s shop and that over the door there hung a sign that read: “Joseph and Sons—Our Yokes Fit Well”. Jesus knew all about yokes. He grew up helping Joseph make them in the carpenter’s shop. He knew the importance of a good fit and could say, *“My yoke is easy and My burden is light”*. What was a yoke? It was a tool or instrument made to bring animals (usually oxen) under the control of their master so the master could use the animals to serve him by pulling a plow, wagon, or some other load. So the yoke symbolizes service - accepting Jesus as our Master and submitting to His control so that He can use us to accomplish His will and His purposes.

The key verses for Yokefellowship are MATT 11:28-30. When Jesus says, *“Take My yoke upon you”*, what does that mean? It means to learn from Him how to live life His way. That is what “discipleship” is all about. It means learning to know Jesus, to love Jesus, and live for Jesus. Jesus says, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* (JOHN 15:10-14). So to “take His yoke” upon us and “learn from Him” means to learn His commandments and obey them. That is the evidence that we genuinely love Him.

When Jesus says, *“Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.... and you will find rest for your souls”*, what is the labor and the load He is talking about? It is the heavy load of guilt, grief, pain and shame that we carry as a result of our sin. The good news of the gospel is that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 TIM 1:15). Jesus Himself said that His purpose in coming to this world was to “seek and to save that which was lost” (LUKE 19:10). When Jesus saves us, He gives us “rest” from both the guilt and power of sin.

The motto of Yokefellowship Prison Ministry is “Helping at-risk youth, inmates, and ex-offenders yoke themselves to Christ for salvation and changed lives”. The old hymn “Rock of Ages” says: “Be of sin the double cure, Cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.” The Apostle Paul tells us that the gospel is *“the power of God unto salvation”* (ROMANS 1:16). God not only forgives us for our sins (1 JOHN 1:9), but He also sets us free from the power or control of sin over our lives (ROM 6:1-23) so that we can be *“more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (ROMANS 8:37) or in Jesus’ own words, *“....if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”* (JOHN 8:36).

It is the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit in us that enables men and women to live “changed lives”. Yokefellowship means getting together in small groups (in prison or out of prison) to “learn of Him” how to live life His way to His glory—living “changed lives”. Yokefellowship is *“bearing one another’s burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ”* (GAL 6:2) which is that we should love one another as He has loved us (JOHN 13:34). Yokefellowship is all about building relationships - our relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ and our relationships to other people so that His kingdom may come and His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. That is our desire and that is our vision in Yokefellowship Prison Ministry.