

# Equally Yoked with Christ

The yoke that captures my heart is the one mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 11:25-30.

He says, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 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 in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (NASB).

The context of this passage focuses upon the degree to which Israel had profaned their covenant relationship with God. The prevailing religious consciousness had become consumed with building fences around acceptable and nonacceptable behavior. Allegiance to Jehovah was defined by how well persons aligned themselves with the accepted codes of behavior. Devotion and passion were not missing from religious practice. However, the devotion and passion focused on performing one's way into relationship with God. As a result, this performance-based devotion led to bondage, and with bondage came the oppressive weariness of heart, mind, and soul.

Into this scene walked Jesus, with His ragtag band of followers, to proclaim the year of the Lord's "disfavor" with His people. The call of Christ was away from this performance-oriented faith to

a faith grounded in childlike sincerity and humility. Gone was the yoke of bondage to perform one's way into favor with God. Jesus brought a new yoke, an "easy" yoke whose burden was light. Both the promise and the result of this yoke was REST.

**"We are transformed from weariness to restfulness when we take up the yoke of Christ."**

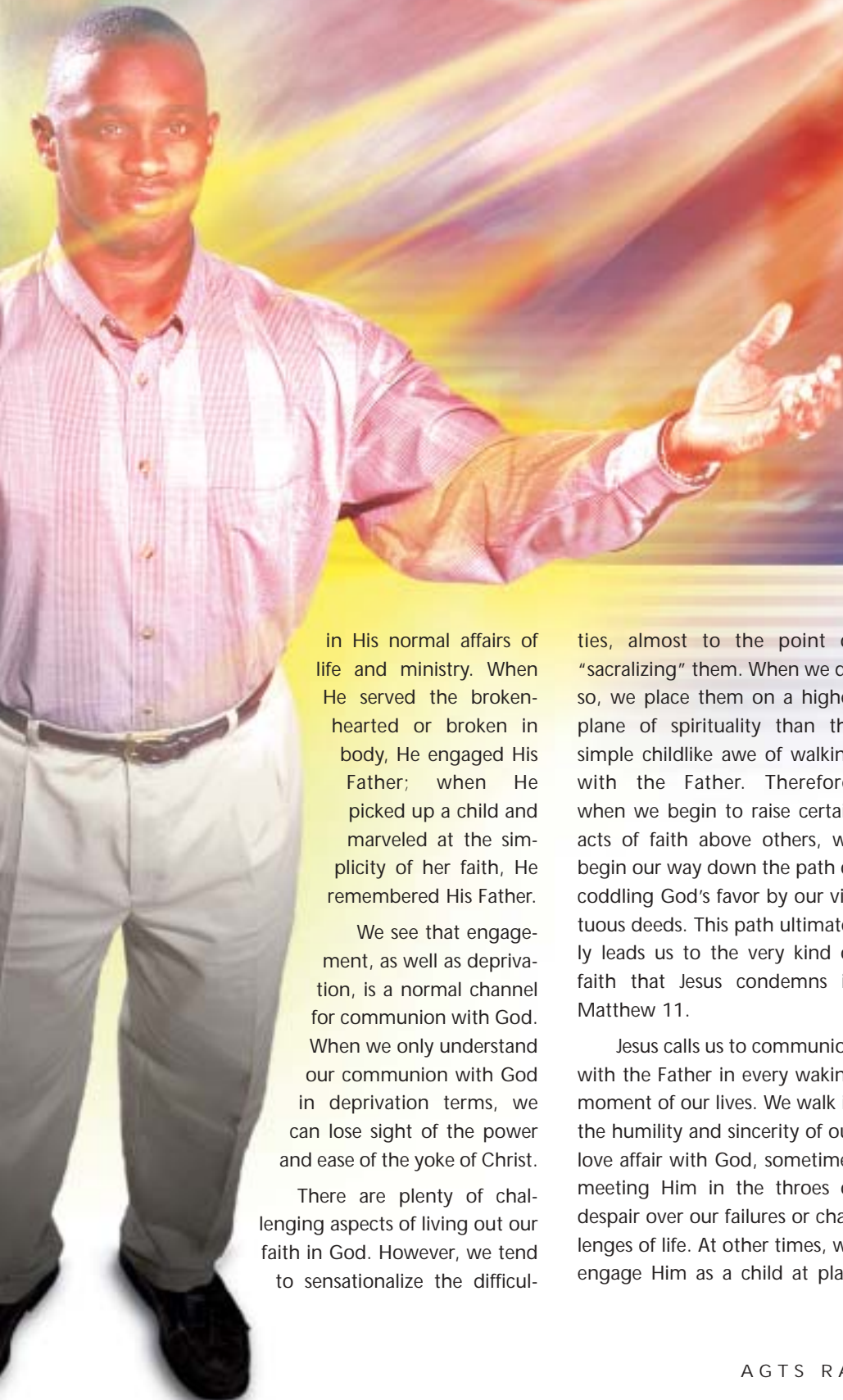
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Imagine a life transformed from the weariness of performance-based spirituality to a restful relationship with God. This is the yoke of Christ. We no longer toil to know the Father. Jesus

has made Him known to us. We no longer strive to win the Father's favor. Jesus won it for us. We have an open access to the Holy One through His Son.

In his classic book on spiritual disciplines, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard describes the yoke of Christ as the habitual pattern of communing with God in the same way that Jesus communed with Him. We tend to think of this communion in terms of a few isolated snapshots of Christ that focus upon deprivation. We see Jesus driven into the desert for 40 days of fasting and spiritual warfare. Or, we see Him secluding Himself away for an all night prayer session.

While these scenes graphically portray the passion with which Jesus pursued His relationship with the Father, they are not the only means by which He did so. We also see Him communing with His Father as He engaged



in His normal affairs of life and ministry. When He served the broken-hearted or broken in body, He engaged His Father; when He picked up a child and marveled at the simplicity of her faith, He remembered His Father.

We see that engagement, as well as deprivation, is a normal channel for communion with God. When we only understand our communion with God in deprivation terms, we can lose sight of the power and ease of the yoke of Christ.

There are plenty of challenging aspects of living out our faith in God. However, we tend to sensationalize the difficul-

ties, almost to the point of “sacralizing” them. When we do so, we place them on a higher plane of spirituality than the simple childlike awe of walking with the Father. Therefore, when we begin to raise certain acts of faith above others, we begin our way down the path of coddling God’s favor by our virtuous deeds. This path ultimately leads us to the very kind of faith that Jesus condemns in Matthew 11.

Jesus calls us to communion with the Father in every waking moment of our lives. We walk in the humility and sincerity of our love affair with God, sometimes meeting Him in the throes of despair over our failures or challenges of life. At other times, we engage Him as a child at play,

frolicking with Him as we experience the awe of His creation. We even passionately commune with Him in intimate settings similar to that of a husband and a wife. For example, I don’t commune with my wife to win her favor. I do so because of my intense desire to be with her. Why should my relationship with God be different?

There are two yokes to choose from as we seek to commune with our Heavenly Father. I prefer the easy yoke of Christ to the performance-based alternative. Ask yourself to which one you are connected—Christ’s or another’s. The answer to that question will tell you if you are equally yoked. **R**