

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Local Yokels”

First Kings 19:19-21

1 Kings 19:19 So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing *with twelve yoke of oxen* before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.

1 Kings 19:20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

1 Kings 19:21 So *Elisha* turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

Introduction

A **yoke** was a type of harness, usually made of wooden beams shaped to fit over the necks, which connected a pair of oxen. When the oxen worked together, walking in step with each other, the burden of their plowing was greatly eased. When they got out of step with one another, the yoke would bind and chafe.

In New Testament times the phrase *take the yoke of* was used by the Jewish rabbis to mean "Become the pupil of a certain teacher."¹ Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul used the figure of the yoke to discuss and describe your service to God:

Jesus says to His followers, in Matthew 11:29-30,

Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Philippians, calls one of the believers his yokefellow in Philippians 4:3.

¹Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 1066.

You are to be *yoked* with Jesus, and you are *yokefellows* with one another as you minister. More importantly, your service and ministry should not be a burden. You should be able to walk in step with Jesus and with one another, thus easing the work.

The truth is, so much ministry and serving in the church *is* burdensome! There can be pressure to serve, and you are often the victim of manipulation techniques. The ministry itself becomes a heavy load.

It shouldn't be that way... and it wasn't that way for Elijah and Elisha!

It should not be a burden for you to share a yoke of ministry. Often with the right motives, Christians employ the wrong methods in order to encourage you to sign-up for ministry. One common method is to portray God as needy. "God needs your money, or this ministry will fail"; "God needs your help, or this ministry will fail." The ministry might fail, **but God won't!** In Psalm 50:12 God addresses these kinds of appeals for help when He says,

[Psalms 50:12](#) "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness."

God wouldn't tell you if He were hungry! Yet we portray God as hungry whenever we employ wrong methods to encourage people to do the right thing.

When you share an opportunity to serve God, it should never be a burden to God's people. Elijah understood this principle, and he models it in his calling of Elisha into the ministry.

I want you to remember the overall picture while we isolate its parts. Elijah simply walks by Elisha, throws his mantle upon him, and continues on his way! The mantle was the badge of the prophet; Elisha immediately understood that Elijah was calling him to follow and become the next prophet of Israel. It was as if Elijah were saying, "Elisha, just as your oxen share a yoke, so you and I will walk together sharing this garment - true yokefellows in the ministry." But he did it in a completely non-threatening, non-manipulative manner - without putting any burden upon Elisha.

If we isolate Elijah's behavior, we see these two components: He shares the vision God gives him, and he seeks volunteers for God.

Share the Vision of God:

1 Kings 19:19 So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.

Elijah threw his mantle on Elisha. The mantle was a garment that identified Elijah as God's prophet. By throwing the mantle on Elisha, Elijah was making things perfectly clear to Elisha.

We should have a vision for ministry, and be able to clearly articulate it. We should know what we are doing and why. Whenever we present an opportunity to serve the Lord to someone, it should be like throwing a mantle on them in its clarity and brevity.

Seek Volunteers for God:

1 Kings 19:20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

Elijah leaves the decision up to Elisha. There is no pressure; no manipulation; no coercion or condemnation. He says, "What have I done to you?" and the answer is, "Nothing!" It is God's business how Elisha responds; or, more properly, it is Elisha's business with God - *not* with Elijah.

You *can* coerce and manipulate people; you can do it for all the right motives. Don't! Let them do business with God; let them decide. There is a place for exhortation; but exhortation is not extortion.

Keep the ministry voluntary, letting folks make their own decisions, and it won't be a burden.

We don't have burdens to share; only blessings!

It should not be a burden for you to bear a yoke of ministry.

We've looked at the yoke from Elijah's perspective - from the perspective of sharing ministry opportunities with others. What about the other side - the bearing of the yoke as a volunteer? We learn from Elisha that it, too, is not a burden.

The key is this: Elisha was *already* a servant before he was asked to minister! Elijah found him serving his father in the field, plowing up the ground, before he ever offered him the opportunity to serve in his heavenly Father's field, plowing up the ground of men's hearts with the Gospel.

Serving is an attitude, **not** an activity! It is a way of life; it should be your way of life. When it is, it doesn't matter when or where you serve, it's never a burden.

Take a look at Elisha serving in his father's fields: He was willing to be the last; he was willing to love; and he was willing to leave.

Be Willing to be the Last:

1 Kings 19:19 So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.

There were plowing that day twelve separate teams of two oxen each. There were eleven teams driven by servants; and there was one team driven by Elisha, the son. Was he the foreman? Was he in charge? By virtue of his relationship as son, the answer to those questions was "Yes." Where was he? **He was with the twelfth.** His was the last team plowing. He was eating the dust of the other twelve.

By definition a servant is last; a servant is least. He or she has no rights - only responsibilities. Elisha willingly chose the last place; he willingly chose to be the least among his father's household.

Be Willing to Love:

1 Kings 19:20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

In the Gospels a man asks Jesus if he can go home and bury his father before following the Lord. Jesus tells him to let the dead bury their dead! The situation was this: The man was asking if he could delay his discipleship *until* his father died - until he no longer had any family ties. His father may not even have been ill.

Elisha was not saying this at all. He simply wanted an evening with his family, to say goodbye. This was no hesitation on his part. He loved his family, but he loved the Lord more.

We would say that he was willing to love them enough to serve the Lord. Elisha wasn't coerced to leave his family; he was willing to leave them for Jesus' sake. Jesus once said,

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

In comparison to your love for Jesus, everything else could be seen as hatred. It simply means that you love people and things less than you love the Lord. And, truly, by loving the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, you end up loving others more than you could otherwise.

A servant is willing to love. His or her love is controlled by the will, not by the whims of emotion.

Be Willing to Leave:

1 Kings 19:21 So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

Elisha burned his plowing equipment, boiled the oxen, and distributed all the meat. In essence he made it impossible to return to his former life; he was willing to leave.

A servant is willing to leave anything at anytime - any hobby, any habit - anything.

You can now see why ministry is never a burden for a servant - for someone who understands that serving is an attitude and not an activity. In their heart they're already last and least; they already love the Lord more than anything or anyone; they've already left everything behind to follow Him wherever He might lead.

Conclusion

Years ago we sang a chorus to Jesus that went like this:

I will serve You because I love You; You have given life to me.
I was nothing until You found me; You have given life to me.

When that is your attitude, you'll never share ministry as a burden to others, and you'll never bear ministry as a burden to yourself.

You are in your heavenly Father's field - the world. You are plowing the hard ground of unbelieving hearts with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no more wonderful yoke than His Gospel, and no more wonderful Yokefellow than Jesus.



Calvary Hanford
- being changed to bring change -

