

# Three Challenges of Discipleship

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## Introduction.

- A. In America, we love things that provide us with ease and convenience. When we're watching TV and want to change channels, the ten-foot walk to the TV is too much for us, so we have remote controls to change the channel from the comfort of our own couch. When we get thirsty, the five-minute wait in line at the grocery store is too much for us, so we go to the corner convenience store to buy a soda. We like our radio stations pre-set, our salads pre-bagged, and our clothes pre-shrunk. If it's not convenient, we're not interested.
- B. This same love of convenience appears in the religious sphere too. Although the Bible instructs Christians to assemble on the first day of the week, many people find Sunday worship inconvenient. Thus, many denominations of our day hold identical services on Saturday. Rather than asking people to arrange their schedules around the Lord's assembly, they arrange their assemblies to suit people's schedules.
- C. However, some find any sort of attendance inconvenient, and the denominational world is willing to work with that too. When we were still in Beaumont, my wife worked for a short time in the regional offices of a major denomination, and this major denomination is basically OK with people not coming to church. Their primary concern is the yearly pledge drive. As long as a supposed "Christian" sends this denomination his one check a year, he gets to remain on the rolls as a faithful member. They ask only for the convenient.
- D. Is this kind of religion of convenience acceptable to God? Does being a disciple of Jesus demand nothing more from us than giving Him only that which is easy and painless? Our Lord would be the first to disagree, as we see from His dialogue with three different would-be disciples in Luke 9:57-62. The fact is, Christianity is the opposite of convenience. The requirements of discipleship embrace every facet of our lives, and they don't go away simply because we find them hard to fulfill. The words of Jesus here are equally a message to us today. Let's consider them to learn how we must meet three challenges of discipleship.

## I. Give Up Everything.

- A. The first challenge that we see in this text is that we must give up everything. This is really the point of Jesus' comment in Luke 9:57-58. A man claims that he will follow Jesus wherever He goes, but Jesus reminds him that Jesus has literally nothing, and anyone who follows Jesus will also have literally nothing. To be a disciple of Jesus, we have to be willing to devote everything we have to God's purposes, to make it God's, not ours.
- B. Now, this doesn't mean that as Christians, we have to go now, sell everything we have, and follow Jesus as homeless people who have to beg for our supper. Other Scriptures make that perfectly clear. Instead, we have to understand our material possessions not in terms of what we want to do with them, but in terms of what God requires us to do with them, and there are a number of verses that express these requirements:
  1. First, the Scripture tells us that we are obliged to use what we have to provide for ourselves. Look at Paul's warning to the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Thankfully, God has given most of us what Deuteronomy calls the power to make wealth. We are able to earn enough money to supply the things we need to live, and God expects us to do exactly that. We are to feed ourselves and not burden others.
  2. Second, God requires us to support our families, as Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:8. If we choose not to do this, we are worse than someone who never claims to be a Christian at all. Now, when we consider this in conjunction with 2 Thessalonians 3, we see how far this obligation extends. God doesn't expect us to support our rascally brother who could support himself but chooses not to, but He does expect us to support our family members who cannot provide for themselves. Typically, this category includes those too old, those too young, and those too sick to work. That's what God wants.
  3. Third, God expects us to provide for the needs of His church. We need to provide for the support of those who preach the gospel, like Paul in Philippians 4:15-16. Similarly, we need to provide for the things that this local church does that are related to its proclamation of Christ. In addition, we need to consider the physical needs of saints and make contribution to those, like the church in Antioch did in Acts 11:27-29. All of these needs still exist today. Many brethren in Africa still suffer from famine, and we need to help.
  4. Then, finally, after we have taken care of all that God requires us to do, we can use whatever's left over to supply our wants. There's nothing wrong with enjoying material possessions; indeed, we read about this enjoyment in Ecclesiastes 9:7-8. It's what God has blessed us with and what He wants us to do. However, we need to remember that our wants come last, not first. God wants us to serve Him before we serve ourselves. In this way, we follow Jesus' injunction to give up everything, to give it to God.

## II. Get Rid of Distractions.

- A. In addition to requiring that we give up everything, Jesus also requires that we get rid of worldly distractions, and He makes this point in Luke 9:59-60. Now, if anywhere, Jesus' reaction to His would-be follower here

bewilders us. We take being present at the funerals of loved ones very seriously. For instance, Lauren and I just got back from her grandfather's funeral in Texas. However, when this man wants to go bury his father, Jesus commands him to "let the dead bury their own dead" and follow Him instead.

- B. Why would Jesus say such a thing? Certainly, it's not because there's something intrinsically wrong about wanting to be present at one's father's funeral. The problem was that his father's funeral was distracting this man from serving God. There are many similar distractions in our lives. We are surrounded by things that are not bad in and of themselves, but that can become bad if we let them take our focus from Jesus.
- C. For instance, I spend a lot of time in my life contemplating the world of Missouri Tigers football and basketball. There's nothing sinful about that, but if I would rather stay home and watch a basketball game than come to evening worship, I've taken what should have been a sideshow in my life and given it center stage. There are lots of other things that can similarly distract us. Our jobs are necessary, but they can keep us out of heaven if we focus on them and not on God. God commands us to care for our families, but if we start to care more about family than about God, we have begun to sin. There are many innocent delights that God has given us, and it's good to enjoy those things, but they must never mean more to us than God.
- D. We see the Christian's solution to this problem of distraction in Hebrews 12:1-2. We can't let the focus of our lives wander away from Jesus. We need to fix our eyes on Him so that we can remember that the human race we're running is for Him. As part of this running toward Jesus, we need to lay aside not just the entanglements of sin, but every encumbrance. This verse calls us to evaluate our lives. We need to look at everything we do and ask ourselves, "Where does this thing in my life stand? Is it helping me get to heaven? Is it helping me to please God? Or is it an encumbrance, something between God and me that I trip over when I try to come closer to Him?" Anything that fills that role, even a basically good thing that Satan is just using against us in this circumstance, is something we must get rid of. We must be distraction-free.

### **III. Love Jesus More.**

- A. The next point that Jesus makes in this mini-speech is that we must love Him more. "More than what?" we might ask. The answer is yes. Consider Jesus' words in Luke 9:61-62. Once again, we have a seemingly reasonable request to which Jesus reacts harshly. This guy just wants to go home and see his family first before he starts following Jesus. That's not so bad, is it?
- B. The problem is that Jesus senses a flaw in the man's heart. His problem isn't that he has asked to go home and say goodbye to his family; his problem was that deep down inside, he wanted to STAY at home with his family. He wanted to do what he was doing rather than be with Jesus. Look, by contrast, at the way Peter and Andrew reacted in Mark 1:16-18. Peter and Andrew had families too. They had a fishing boat that was worth a lot of money. They had expensive nets that needed to be taken care of. Despite all of their connections and their possessions, though, when Jesus called, they answered. They didn't stop to say goodbye. They didn't stop to pick things up. They followed immediately because they loved God.
- C. We need to develop this same attitude in our hearts, an attitude of joyful following without looking back. God doesn't want us to grudgingly follow Him. He doesn't want us to give Him the minimum that we think will punch our ticket to heaven. He doesn't want our robot-like actions while our hearts are really somewhere else.
- D. Friends, being a Christian is the greatest thing on earth. We have meaning and purpose in our lives, we spend our time learning about the most wonderful man ever to exist, and we have hope. Consider Paul's thoughts in Philippians 3:7-8. Sin is nothing. Sin is garbage. All of the things that the world has that look so alluring to us sometimes, the materialism, the immorality, the ungodly thoughts, words, and actions, those things really have nothing to offer us. Sure, sometimes they offer short-term gratification, but we need to remember that sin always works like a credit card. We get the good stuff up front, but then we have to pay and pay and pay, always far more than that brief pleasure was worth. Sometimes we spend our whole lives paying the price for one sin, and that doesn't even take the hereafter into account. As Christians, we need to ignore the things that tempt us to look back. Following the world's ways will lead us only to misery, sorrow, and death.
- E. We're not doing Jesus any favors by following Him; we're doing what's best for us. Because that's so, we need to act like it. We need to show Him that we love Him more than we love anything else in the world, and when we think about what He offers us, that's nothing out of line. It's nothing more than simple gratitude.

### **Conclusion.**

- A. That's what Jesus wants. If we want to follow in His footsteps as a disciple, that's what He expects. It's not easy. Jesus never promised that serving Him would be the lazy man's way out. What it is, though, is fulfilling. It's living life as God intended. Beyond that, though, it is our hope of eternal life with God in heaven. Consider our Lord's words in John 12:24-26. Service to Jesus requires that we follow Him, that we die to ourselves in the same way that He did. However, if we are willing to offer our lives to Him in that way, the rewards are beyond imagining. He promises that where He is, there His servant will be forever. If you aren't serving Jesus now as you should, that promise is open to you, and you need only come to Him to claim it.