



Luke 9:51-56, 57-62

“Disciples Get Rid Of Excuses”

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

VIIIA,B: LUKE 9:51-56 57-62
"DISCIPLES GET RID OF EXCUSES"

4:14-9:50 = Phase 1, Galilee Ministry

A) 9:51-56 JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM: REJECTION IN SAMARIA + 2 RESPONSES (Only L).

Travel Narrative, 9:51-19:28 (44), Picks Up Mk. Again At 18:15

1) vv.51-52 Travel To Villages In Preparation For Jesus Ascension In Jerusalem. //2 Kgs. 2:1

51 And it happened when the days drew near (were fulfilled) for him to be received (taken) up, 1:1, 19:22, 44, Acts 2:1
he set his face *to go* to Jerusalem. Single Purpose, 9:53, 13:22, 17:11, 18:31, 19:11, 28, Destiny Of 9:31

52 And he sent messengers ahead of him (before his face), //Jn. 4, Jesus Has A Mission To Jews/Outsiders, Warrant For Acts 1:8; 8:1ff.
// John, 7:24, 27, Advance Party, Dt. 1:22, Ex. 23:20
who *went* and entered a village of the Samaritans, Mt. Gerazim v. Mt. Zion, Historic Hatred, Most Jews Skirted
to make ready for him; 9:5, 10:33, 17:16, Mal. 3:1, Hospitality, Only Jesus Can Validate His Team

Sections: Rejected In Nazareth (4:16-30), Now Samaria, Then Jerusalem

2) v.53 Jesus Not Received Because Of The Jewish Capital. Not Go Home To Say Goodbye

53 but the people would not receive him, 10:29-37, 17:11-19, Acts 8:4-25, Resistance/Receptivity Scale
because his face was set (*going*) toward Jerusalem. Is. 50:7, Fixed Determination, Ezek. 21:2-8
e.g. Jn. 4:9-20, Long History Of Antipathy

2') vv.54 Disciples Seek To Defend His Honor And Are Rebuked. //Ginea Massacre

54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 1 Pt. 3:9, Mk. 3:17 *Boanerges* = *Sons Of Thunder*
Lord "Lord, do you want us to bid 'fire come down from heaven' and consume them?" 9:5, Elijah 2 Kgs. 1:10-18

55 But he turned and rebuked (*epitimao*) them(.), 3 Responses: Samaritans, Disciples (Hostile), Jesus
[saying, Stung! Kingdom Not A Demonstration Of Vengeance
Rejects Their Idea Of Vengeance As Demonic

"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of, No Vengeance, How Much They Have To Learn,
[For the **Son of man** is not come to destroy lives, but to save them.]" 19:10, [3 Variants], Commentary?
6:27-31, Kingdom Is Not To Settle Grudges, Dies For Enemies

1') vv.55-56 Another Village. 2 Pt. 3:9, No Instant Judgment; Time To Respond

56 And they *went* on to another village. 2nd Chance, Success In Acts 8:1-14, Not Waste Time With Unreceptive
The 12 Not Understand, Neither The 3 Prophetic Would-be's

B) 9:57-62 THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS: THREE EXAMPLES (Q//Mt. 8:19-22).

Threefold Call, Elisha, 2 Kgs. 2:1-6

1) vv.57-58 To Follow = Loss Of Security: Dependence On Hospitality (Q). CARE FOR SELF

57 *As they were going along the road (on the way), a man said to him,* Follow Him At High Cost
Offer "I will follow you wherever you go." Really? Mission, Eager Volunteer, No-Nonsense, Not Lower The Bar

58 And Jesus said to him, Discipleship Not In Addition To Other Commitments But Central
Plutarch *Lives* 828c, G. T. 86, Itinerant, Not Established Community

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests;
but **the Son of man** has nowhere to lay his head." Proverb, Political Edge? Roman Eagle, Herod As Fox

Nights Outside! Offers Nothing, Wandering, No Guarantees
Sir. 36:24-26 (Single Man, Not Trusted), Some Philosophers Were Homeless

2) vv.59-60 To Follow = First Things First: Jesus Over Family (Q). CARE FOR DEAD

59a 1 To another *he said,* To Follow Jesus = Participate In Kingdom Word/Deed As Apprentice
Called "Follow me." ← Personal Loyalty, Follow, Then Go; Invitation To Be Always *On Call*

b 2 *BUT* he said, The *Best Excuse* Is Rejected, Proclamation Is First
Lord "Lord, let me **first go** and bury my father." Sir. 38:16, Puts Jesus Off With A Common Excuse

60 2' But he said to him, "Honor Father," Sacred Obligation, Tobit 4:3-4, 6:13-14, 14:11-13
8:19-21, Least Denied By Jesus Seminar, Military Mindset

"Leave the dead to bury their own dead;
New Life vs. Spiritually Dead Bury Physically Dead

1' *but as for you,* Shock! Explain God's Work, Obedience Over Burying
go and proclaim the kingdom of God." → New Life In The Kingdom! = Old Allegiances Reorganized

Lord Jesus' Core Message: Father's Rule Is Touchable/Near
Explain New Reality Of God's Reign In Jesus = First Place

1') vv.61-62 To Follow = No Looking Back: Jesus Over Courtesies? (L). CARE FOR FAMILY

61 *Another said,* Jesus (The Realist) And His Mission Are A Priority
Offer "I will follow you, Lord;
BUT let me **first say farewell** to those at my home." Second Volunteer, Be Wary Of Volunteers

62 *Jesus said to him,* The Great *But!* 1 Kgs. 19:19-21
Rescue People In A World Sliding To Destruction

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Ex. 16:3, Constant Priority

Proverb, Hesiod, *Works* 2.30, Pleasant Distractions/Duties, Can't Plow A Straight Looking Back!
Detachment From Property/Family, No Glib Promises, Count Cost!

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 9:51-56, 57-62

With 9:51 we move into a new section, Luke's central *Travel Narrative* (9:51-19:28) which takes Jesus to Jerusalem where he will be *received (taken) up* in the three events of cross, resurrection, and ascension. Unit A (vv.51-56) establishes Jesus is a merciful Savior who absorbs Samaritan rejection rather than inflict vengeance as the two *sons of thunder* wish. Unit B (vv.57-62) is a cohesive teaching on the cost of discipleship. Jesus pays the cost of obedience; so must his followers. They travel together to announce and enact the new-and-near regime (i.e. *the kingdom of God*) and trust God to meet their needs along the way. The call to participate in the new reality makes excuses and postponements trivial. Both units contain the word *Lord* (v.54b // vv.59b, 61b) and are full of travel references (*go to Jerusalem, went and entered, went on, going along the road, wherever you go, go and bury, go and proclaim*). Unit A has a concentric structure (1-2-2'-1') with the travel of the disciples and the word *village* (v.52b // v.56b) as inclusions. At the center (2. v.53 // 2' v.54) the rejection of Jesus draws two responses: the disciples' anger (v.54), the Lord's rebuke (v.55). They need not defend his honor, and the time of judgment is not yet.

In the counsel of God it's now time for Jesus' trek south to confront the powers of the holy city, so *He set his face to go to Jerusalem* (v.51). But his travel from Galilee is south through Samaria rather than the route of avoidance to the east through Transjordan. These heretics and half-breeds, cousins the Jews despised- and who returned the favor- receive a preparatory delegation. Since Jesus company was large (10:1-24), advance preparations were needed *to make ready for him* (and them). The theological point is that Jesus has ambassadors, but only he can validate the new reality. Christian faith is about meeting and following him! Teachers and preachers are at best billboards for the coming great attraction! But here the village rejects a visitation and its benefits by refusing hospitality. They are resistant rather than receptive because of deep historical prejudice. That Jesus is headed to Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life, is an offense. In an attempt to defend Jesus' honor, the *thunder boys* ask permission to reenact an incident from the life of Elijah where- in calling down fire- he proved himself a prophet and fifty soldiers were incinerated (1 Kgs. 1:10-18). Their racial and religious bigotry is revealed in an over-reaction that shows how little they comprehend their rabbi. Jesus did not spare their feelings in his rebuke. So what is Jesus' response? Acknowledge resistance and aim at the next village which may be receptive (v.56). We hold the resistant lightly and move on to riper fields. Acts 8 demonstrates mass receptivity later on.

Luke takes care to emphasize the *on the road* setting of Unit B (vv.57-62) in his introduction, "And as they were going along the road..." What follows are three initial discipleship encounters carefully edited together. The first (1. vv.57-58) and third (1' vv.61-62) involve volunteers, "I will follow you wherever you go" // "I will follow you, Lord." The second is a proper call, "Follow me." The first and second have a Q parallel in Matthew 8:19-22; the third is found only in Luke (L) and likely involves a source Luke edited to tie the unit together rhetorically. The second and third conversations frame the excuse as *But let me first*, use the phrase *the kingdom of God*, and involve family issues. Each of the three has Jesus speak in a proverb as a conclusion: vv.58, 60, 62. Luke has likely rewritten his Q source with addition of a travel report (v.57), a call to *go and proclaim the kingdom* (v.60b) and a third encounter that both reflects the first and links to the second through multiple echoes (vv.61-62). To those who see discipleship as a romantic quest, he responds with no guarantees, "Me and my home boys are homeless. Can you live with such uncertainty?" The request to bury a father draws a remarkable statement from Jesus which means *let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead*. The goal is to proclaim new life in *the kingdom of God*. Finally, whereas Elijah allowed Elisha to kiss his parents goodbye (1 Kgs. 19:19-21), Jesus did not. One is to go forward like a good plowman and not look back (v.62). Nostalgia is out!

DISCIPLES GET RID OF EXCUSES

“And they went on to another village.”

LUKE 10:3

Without surprise, Jesus sought out the receptive when rejected.

After graduating medical school, Dr. Tom Dooley enlisted in the Navy as a physician. A hot July afternoon found the young doc off the coast of Vietnam. That’s when his ship rescued a 1000 refugees drifting in an open boat, many diseased and sick. Since Dooley was the only physician on board, he singlehandedly took the duty of giving care to the sick. It was backbreaking, but there he discovered what even a little medicine could do for the ill. Hours later he made a second discovery, “I stopped a moment to straighten my shoulders and made a discovery- the biggest of my life. I was happy treating these people... happier than I’d ever been.” Dooley’s experience that hot July afternoon changed his life forever.¹

Meaning and joy are words hard to define since they go so deep, but when they converge mission is discovered, a sense of saying with Dr. Tom Dooley, “For this I was made.” Where your deep joy meets the world’s deep need,² there is your calling and your gifting and your craft and your task and your convergence and your passion and your heartache and your endurance. For me it’s being a pastor and teacher in the diversity of each day’s duties and surprises. Though there are days I want to run from it all, I have to admit it’s what God wired me for. I’m hooked. It’s what pulls the threads of life together and weaves them into a pattern. It’s what made men and women leave the script written for them by parents and Jewish culture and village expectations to literally become *followers* of Jesus of Nazareth. With him they found

¹ Edited, Gerard Fuller, *Stories for All Seasons* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1999), 26.

² A paraphrase of Frederick Beuchner, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” www.goodreads.com/nauthor/quotes/19982.Frederick_Buechner.

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joy and meaning and a challenge which converged in a lifelong mission that changed the world forever and of which we are the most current beneficiaries. To his person they were drawn, and in his company they were changed as he drew them into the circle of life that was the fellowship of the Holy Trinity. Jesus was sent by the Father and illumined inwardly and outwardly by the Holy Spirit, so to deal with him was to deal with full deity.³ With Jesus life was dislocated and recentered.

In the beginning they believed only a little because they knew only little. On day one he was a stranger to them all. But every day they came to believe a bit more til a layered picture began to emerge. A prophet? Yes. The Messiah? Yes, but not as expected. They were on a journey that would crumble at the cross, then re-energize at his resurrection and the gift of the Spirit for the sake of a mission to the world. Eventually they would come to see that their friend Jesus was not just *the son of God*- God's personal agent- but *God the Son*. But for now it was OK to be a learner, OK to be a fumbling apprentice, OK to ask questions. To follow Jesus was to be in the floating laboratory of God's kingdom where meaning and joy and drama and pain were never in short supply. In him, and eventually through them, God was breaking into the old world to set things right. The kingdom of God was not a far off place of escape- a place to aspire towards after death, what we think of as heaven- but a power of incredible love breaking in on the shores of the present from the fullness of the future. Jesus is what life looks like when God's rule shows up at ground level. Everything is disrupted, and we get a glimpse of a new world.

What a dizzying experience to wake each dawn and hear Jesus for the eighty-third or the hundred and eighty-third time issue his signature invitation, "Follow me." One day here, another there: teaching, healing, confronting, forgiving, calling, liberating and listening. Being with him and watching what he did was more important than anything else in life. More important than having a regular place to lay their heads at night- place and property; more important than the duties owed to their own parents- family life and inter-generational obligation; so important, in fact, that to look back longingly at life as it used to be was to disqualify themselves, as he often said while observing a field of crooked rows, "No one who puts his hand to the

³ For a fresh and irreverent read on the incarnation, see Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity can still make Surprising Emotional Sense* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2012), Chapter 5, "Jeshua," 107-146.

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plow and then looks back can plow a straight row; when you plow you look forward.” The costs were high, the training intense, the hours long; in some places they met hostility, in others indifference. They knew they were riding something new and big which is why they stayed with him. In his small movement the rule of God was coming near enough to be felt in people’s bodies as diseases were banished and demons dismissed. People were made whole in the presence of a Jesus who looked just like one more Galilean village guy, but in whose words and through whose hands the life of God flowed freely like water seeking the lowest, most humble spot. The disciples agreed, “For this I was made.”⁴

We are the results of that mission two thousand years down the tunnel of time, and if there’s a word of encouragement, it’s that we too were made for mission, made to experience that convergence of meaning and joy Dr. Tom Dooley found off the coast of Vietnam and that the disciples found in the company of Jesus. It’s not enough just to believe correct doctrines about him or to gather in his honor once a week and eat at his table; it’s not even enough to study the Book and pray and give—these are all preparations; we are to become his living extensions with this church as our training center. Perhaps I should stand at the door each week and ask as you file by, “How did it go in your mission this week? What victories and defeats have you had? How can we encourage you today?”⁵ One of the things that most disturbs me as a pastor is to wonder how many politely listen each week because it’s your duty but have not a clue as to how your life connects with Jesus and his mission.

Dooley found it in a community of need; so did the disciples, and so will you.

⁴ On recovering the art of making disciples, see D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IND: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), Steve & Lois Rabney, editors, *Side by Side: Disciple-Making For A New Century* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook/ Nav Press, 2000); Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2003); Glenn McDonald, *The Disciple Making Church* (Glenn Haven, MI: Faith Walk, 2004); Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings On Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006); David Augsburg, *Dissident Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Spring, CO: NavPress, 2006), Mark Tidsworth and Ircel Harrison, *Disciple Development Coaching* (Macon, GA: Nurturing Faith, Inc., 2013),

⁵ For questions asked in the early Methodist class meetings, see Appendix A, p.15.

Mission is not something we find alone but together as we face the complicated and often overwhelming problems within us and around us. Main Street Church is a laboratory for the formation of people in the mission of Jesus Christ. It's why we exist. How are we doing? It's in keeping the big picture and overarching mission before us that we make sense of all the parts:

“In the middle ages a dispatcher was sent out to a building site in France to determine how the laborers felt about their work. He approached the first stonecutter and asked, ‘What are you doing?’

‘Are you blind?’ came the response. ‘I’m cutting these impossible boulders with primitive tools and putting them together the way the boss tells me. I’m sweating under a blazing sun. It’s backbreaking and boring me to death.’

The dispatcher backed off and located a second worker, “What are you doing?”

He never looked up, ‘I’m shaping these boulders into usable forms, which are then assembled according to the architect’s plans. It’s hard work, sometimes repetitive, but I earn five francs a weeks to supports my wife and kids. It’s a job; could be worse I suppose.’

A little encouraged, the dispatcher found a third stonecutter, “And sir, what are you doing?”

‘Can’t you see?’ he said with his mallet and chisel held high to the sky, ‘I’m building a cathedral!’”⁶

It’s when we lose sight of the grand design that church gets boring and deadly and repetitive and joyless and dutiful and meaningless and many decide to go elsewhere and do other things on the weekends. We are being formed and built as living stones, a grand cathedral not made of granite but of living saints chiseled and placed as God designed as a temple of his presence in the world.⁷ In the text before us we find something of the painful and joyful procedure of how it’s done.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

⁶ Edited from Brian Cavanaugh, *The Sower’s Seeds* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1990), 38-39.

⁷ An image from 1 Peter 2:4-5.

Exposing Prejudice (9:51-56)

Our story begins with a turning point, “When the days drew near for him to be received up, Jesus *set his face to go to Jerusalem.*” Timing is significant, and here the divine clock signals a decisive moment. After a time of itinerant ministry in Galilee, Jesus turns resolutely towards Jerusalem for the final confrontation between his new-world agenda and the centers of Jewish religious and Roman governmental power. It’s now time for the final countdown, time for him to be *received up* in three stages: the cross, the resurrection, the ascension.

And the first thing Jesus does is deliberately put his closest companions into a situation where their deepest and most enduring prejudices are exposed to the light. To follow Christ means he has the right to deal with all that’s in me that’s not of him, and if on some issue I’m not willing, at that point I opt out of discipleship because I’ve said *This far and no further.* Being his follower is a purging and purifying process which burns out the crud layer by layer. The fancy theological name for this process is *sanctification*, which is the lifelong process of making us more like Jesus Christ: more holy and happy, more perceptive and receptive, more able to bear the light because we’ve learned to live in it ourselves. For me it’s the embarrassing process of having my inbred and residual bigotries and assumptions exposed.

I remember a Thursday afternoon in Georgetown years ago when I spent an hour and half praying with three black and one white pastor over the city. It was an exhilarating time of opening our hearts to one another before God. But during that process there were moments when I felt the fire of God’s inward rebuke upon me as I realized I was with men who may not have my same educational credentials but who loved God with a passion that embarrassed me. My inherited sense of superiority took a gracious licking. But I was not discouraged, because my guess is the same thing was happening to them at a different level. So if you never feel the inward fire exposing and purging, I want to know, Who are you following?

The most direct route from Galilee into Judea and Jerusalem was south through the province of Samaria, but most Jewish pilgrims chose to cross the Jordan to the east and take the longer route rather than go through *no man’s land.* To Jews the Samaritans were half-breeds practicing a perverted form of Judaism that recognized only the first five books of Moses with their own rival temple atop Mt Gerazim. They were a strange set of foreign cousins with whom you shared blood but don’t want to

spend time. If you take the historic hatred between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, mix in a racial component like that between black and white, and then add in the regional tensions between North and South, you begin to feel the intensity of the divide. It was racial, religious and cultural hatred rolled into one huge incendiary ball with a short fuse. In his Gospel John put it simply, “For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”⁸ No dealings, but Jesus did.

Yet this is precisely where Jesus sends his lead contingent, verse 52: “And he sent messengers ahead of him who went *and entered a village of the Samaritans*, to make ready for him, but the people would not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.” I don’t think that response surprised Jesus at all; I do think it surprised James and John to learn what hatred and murder lay within their hearts even after years with the Master. Jesus’ had been dishonored, and they took up his defense, as if he needed it, “Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them? Let’s get rid of all of them through a divine holocaust because we believe God hates them too. Elijah did it not far from here. Can we?” Whenever we desire to use the resources of God and the faith to back our prejudices, we’re not acting in the Spirit of Jesus but in another spirit, a dark one. When the Methodists north and south split in 1844 over slavery, it was a dark cloud that enveloped the church and eventually the entire nation. And if you want to see a memorial to that tragedy, look on the outside of this and other churches for the old ME South cornerstone. Across history the church stumbles as did the disciples.

“But he turned and rebuked them.” Think of that rebuke that same way you do a surgeon’s scalpel aimed at a cancer. Jesus’ rebuke was clean and clear and true and precise and full of love. So when the worst about you is exposed, when the CAT scan of the Spirit excavates some dark spot in your soul and brings it to light, you will feel humiliated. You may even say- as I did just recently, “I didn’t know that was still in me,” to which the Lord may answer:

“Yes, and much more as well, but that’s enough for now. Knowing me means knowing you at a deep level, and I love you too much to leave you alone. I will hurt you and bring pain, but I will never harm you. Following me is not about appearing religious or looking good or having it all together. It is about changing at every level of your being, even

⁸ John 4:9.

your unconscious and dreams, so I can use you to extend myself further into the world. I am forming you for mission.”

Verse 56 ends the episode, “And they went on to another (Samaritan) village.” What do you want to bet *fire from heaven* was not mentioned again? Read in Acts 8 sometime about a great revival that later came to Samaria. People can change and move from resistant to receptive, which means there’s hope for me and you.⁴ The mission of Jesus into which we are invited is not first *through* me but *to* me, and it is costly, as the next paragraph. It is the thing we avoid that we must talk about, the issue that we’d rather sweep under the rug that we must deal with. We are not so different than the disciples. For them it was Jew and Samaritan; for us it’s black and white and rich and poor and citizen and undocumented.⁵

The High Price Of Followership (9:57-62)

Gary, a farmer, is concerned that the insecticides he uses kill birds, beneficial insects, and pollute the air. But switching to a safer, but more expensive, pest control would endanger profits and thus his family’s financial security. Gary wants the benefit, but is unwilling to pay the freight. He has just enough ethics to make him miserable.

Kristen cries when she sees evidence of cruelty to or exploitation of animals. She refuses to eat meat and sends donations to animal rights groups. Yet when her husband buys her a fur-trimmed coat, she wears it rather than risk his feelings. Kristin’s convictions are negotiable down to her comfort level.

Richie joins his Boy Scout troop’s project to devise a recycling plan to use in each boy’s home. After a few weeks, through, he went back to dumping family trash into one big plastic bag for the garbage collector. He didn’t realize sorting and saving would cut so much into the time he needs for soccer practice. Rich has a vision, even a plan, but no sticking power. His habits are more basic than his hopes.⁶

⁴ See Appendix B (p. 15) on the modified Engel scale and its analysis of receptivity.

⁵ For a provocative treatment, see Joseph Barndt, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1991).

⁶ Edited from Fuller, *Stories*, 118-119.

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Convenience is his functional deity. All three fall short; the price of change is high.

For an institution like Main Street Church which is still deciding whether to continue a comfortable pattern of decline or to put in the considerable energy to be reinvented as a vital missionary community, it's tempting to low-ball the demands of Christian discipleship to fit the demands of the culture for entertainment and easy self-help improvements, but that was not the pattern of Jesus. In the three cases before us in verse 57 through 62 two concern volunteers, "I will follow you," and the third is a draftee, one to whom Jesus said, "Follow me."⁷ All were treated roughly.

To the first who comes with naive enthusiasm, "I will follow you *wherever you go*," Jesus says, "I don't know where I'll sleep tonight. Can you handle that? Birds and foxes have more security and comfort than my mob." Did he follow? We don't know. How many have come to Christ in the emotion of some revival or crisis experience only to find out they'd signed up for more than they bargained for. G.K. Chesterton wrote brilliantly, "The Christian faith has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried."⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor martyred only weeks before the Allies liberated his prison camp, got it right, "When Christ calls man, He bids him come and die."⁹ For too long we as Methodists have practiced American folk-religion and not Jesus-style discipleship.¹⁰ Jesus is not a religious component added to enhance my lifestyle and complete the package of a life defined on other terms. He's not here to entertain us.

The third volunteer asked for a temporary waiver, "Let me first say farewell to those at home." Oriental good-byes could last for days and be full of subtle family pressures not to leave. Jesus knew that. You can't go ahead with God looking in the rear view mirror. You can't plow a straight row looking backwards. If you wait to get everyone's approval and want them all to be happy about your decision, you'll

⁷ For an analysis of patterns of discipleship in the ancient world and the early church, see Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 16-20.

⁸ Albert M. Wells, Jr. *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰ On the contrast between ancient discipleship and modern church membership, see Appendix C, page 16.

never follow Jesus Christ very far. The decision is between you and the Lord, not you and Jesus and your wife and your father and your two brothers and three sisters and seven closest friends and thirty-three business associates. First the following, then the dealing with others on the basis of that new commitment at the center of life. First secure the center, then a new circumference forms. Did he follow without going home? We don't know. It's left open-ended so you can add your name.

But it's the middle case, the one Jesus himself called, who receives the hardest word. To bury ones parents was a sacred Jewish obligation, the last act of honoring them and fulfilling the fifth commandment. Either the man's father is near death or has just died, or else the man is postponing a Yes til his father's dead and buried, however long that may be. A third option takes into account the two stages of Jewish burial, first the body is wrapped in linen and placed on a rock shelf in a tomb for a year of decomposition, after which the bones are gathered and placed in a stone box, an *ossuary*. Maybe the man's father was in stage one and awaiting stage two.¹¹

In once of his bluntest and most uncompromising moments, Jesus said, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." In other words, leave the spiritually dead to bury the physically dead. There's a lot in that line. First, that you can be a zombie in this life, spiritually deceased while still breathing, in effect a *dead man walking*. On your tombstone it reads, died January 5, 2014, buried July 14, 2037. Apart from responding to the call of Jesus Christ, people are dead. Before this man heard the call he lived an illusion, "I am alive." But after the call and his excuse he knew what Jesus thought of his life.

Death and life are not just categories that apply when your heart stops pumping or at the final judgment; they cut between persons right now. Those who do not know and do not follow Jesus Christ are dead in their sins, dead in their souls, dead in ignorance and illusion no matter how vital and lively their outward life appears. To join Jesus and his cause is to receive life, a quality of life that will never die because it flows from the very fountain of life itself which is God. I have seen young woman turn down a scholarship to college because her parents were dropouts, and in some twisted way she thought her pursuit of excellence would be a put-down to her parents rather than a credit. I have seen people say No to Christ because they feared what their heathen spouse or family would think of it. Their family tradition was

¹¹ Joel Green, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 408-409.

skepticism and unbelief; to break with it was more than they could handle. But it's foolish to cling to death when life is offered. Life with a *Capital L* is found only in Jesus Christ. You may look and invest elsewhere, but it will not work. Family and land and place and belonging and name and security are no substitute for a heart-felt following of Jesus Christ. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for *you*, get with my program; join me for life." Did he follow? We don't know; we know he was forced to count the cost, just as were the two who volunteered.

Occasionally I give altar calls, but not often. I want folk to count the cost, and that's best done not in an emotional appeal but over a kitchen table conversation or in a study group over time. God's grace is amazing and abundant, even magnetic in its pull on the heart, but it will fundamentally change both the center and direction of your entire life. Following Jesus is a permanent revolution.

Part of the renewal of this church as a missionary congregation will be in clearly distinguishing small town southern folk religion, which demands little except politeness and sentiment, from authentic discipleship which is costly. I'm not here to provide a spiritual fix each week; I'm here to seek to live this stuff before you as best I can and to invite you as God's people to find your mission again.

CONCLUSION

Lesson No. 1: Jesus will not tolerate but exposes racial and religious bigotry as an offense against God, especially in his disciples. Receiving his rebuke is no fun; we get to look bad in public. It's part of his mission *in us* and *for us* because we must be made willing to love all people. Lesson No. 2: Jesus will not tolerate cheap discipleship. He tells us up front what it costs. It's also part of his mission *in us* and *among us*. Lesson No. 3, and here we move past the painful side of his love to its utter pleasure; Lesson No. 3 is that Jesus wants to give us each a part of his ministry; we are to be his living extensions. I have it on good authority that Jesus has a dream for this church. Malcolm Muggeridge, the famous British journalist, eventual Christian and biographer of Mother Theresa, wrote: "I can say that I never knew what joy was like until I gave up pursuing happiness, or cared to live until I chose to die. For these two discoveries I am beholden to Jesus."¹² Me too! How about you?

¹² PreachingToday.com search under *discipleship*.

Appendix A: Early Methodist Accountability

(<http://ruach.wordpress.com/2007/07/29/wesleys-accountability-questions/>)

I have been studying John Wesley's method of discipleship lately. It was built upon a high degree of accountability to one another within the group. The society meeting was a large group used for teaching the doctrinal beliefs but the class meetings and band meetings were smaller groups that were focused on the heart and accountability. Before joining these smaller groups, each member stated their willingness for the following questions to be asked of them at any time. Even though the England at the time was experiencing huge moral and societal upheavals, the questions still are quite startling. Note especially questions 5 to 10!

1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?
2. Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you from time to time whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you?
10. Do you desire that in doing this we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart, without exception, without disguise, and without reserve

From *The Works Of John Wesley, Volume 9: The Methodist Societies History, Nature, and Design*, Edited by Rupert E. Davies, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989, 77-78.

The following questions were asked of **every member at every meeting**.

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

From Steven W. Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household*, Nashville, Discipleship Resources, 2000, 90-97.

Appendix B
The Engel Scale Of Spiritual Decision Making

The Spiritual Decision-Making Process *(What's Gone Wrong With The Harvest, James Engle)*

GOD'S ROLE	CHRISTIAN'S ROLE		NON-CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE
General Revelation		- 8	Awareness of Supreme Being but No Effective Knowledge of Gospel
Conviction ↓	Proclamation ↓	- 7	Initial Awareness of Gospel
		- 6	Awareness of Fundamentals of Gospel
		- 5	Grasp of Implications of Gospel
		- 4	Positive Attitude Toward Gospel
		- 3	Personal Problem Recognition
		- 2	DECISION TO ACT
	Persuasion	- 1	Repentance and Faith in God
REGENERATION			NEW CREATURE
Sanctification ↓	Follow-Up	+ 1	Post-Decision Evaluation
		+ 2	Incorporation into Church Body
	Cultivation ↓	+ 3	Conceptual and Behavioral Growth
		+ 4	Communion with God
		+ 5	Stewardship
		•	Reproduction
		•	Internally (spiritual gifts, etc.)
		•	Externally (witness, social action, etc.)

**Appendix C:
Contrasting Biblical Discipleship And Modern Church (Club) Membership (Thraillkill, et. al.)**

Ancient Christian Discipleship	American Church (Club) Membership
Risky, High Cost	Safe, Low Cost
Contributor & Stakeholder	Consumer & Observer
<i>In The World As A Clear Alternative Community</i>	<i>Of The World With A Few Moral Variations</i>
Total Self Involvement	Segmented Self (Sunday Faith) “Come a little bit, do a little bit, give a little bit, and say a whole lot.”
Obey In Behavior	Assent In Beliefs/ Doctrine
Active, Involved	Passive, Observers
Always Serious, High Adventure	Mostly Casual, Low Demand, Minimal Adventure
High Supernatural Exposure: Miracles Expected	Rare Exposure To Supernatural: Skepticism Is The Norm
Always On The Move	Rarely On The Move
At The Vital Center Of Life	Around The Edge Of Life As A Possible Option
High Challenge	High Comfort
Group Orientation: <i>We First</i>	Individual Orientation: <i>Me First</i>
Allegiance: Tight Bond, Severance Required	Affiliation: Loose Bond, Easily Abandoned
Home As Hospitality, Place Of Teaching	Home As Refuge, Hiding Place, Entertainment
Offer Life And Substance	Pay Club Dues
High Expectation For Transformation	Low Expectation For Transformation
Intense Training, Change Expected	Observing/ Critique Expected
Largely Outdoors	Largely Indoors
Organic Bond: Shared Life	Institutional Bond: Shared Space In Buildings
Follow Jesus, Learn His Ways, Share His Ministry	Admire Jesus, Worship Him, Pay Others To Do Work
Jesus As Leader, Model And Mentor	Jesus As Savior From Sins Worst Consequences
Confrontive And Blunt: Being True!	Convivial And Affable: Being Nice!
High Accountability	Low Accountability
Intense Fellowship: 24/7 + Conflict	Occasional Fellowship: Coffee/Cookies + Avoidance
Disciples Often Look Bad, Goofy, Incompetent	Members Focus On Image-Management, Looking Good
Location: Front Lines	Location: Behind the Lines
Ministry By Amateurs (for the love of it)	Ministry By Professionals (career clergy)
All Are Spiritually Gifted Ministers	Pay The Professionals (Clergy + Staff) To Do It For Us
Jesus And His Kingdom Mission Draw Resources	Institutional Maintenance Draws Large Resources
Holy Spirit As Creative, Disruptive Presence	Low Tolerance For The Unexpected