



Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Discipleship Series Sermon - Letting Go (Sacrificing)

Bible Reading: Luke 14:25-35 (and Luke 18:18-23)

Main Point: Following Jesus wholeheartedly inevitably means 'letting go' of all other priorities that conflict.

Intended Response: To enable people to consider what needs 'letting go' of in their lives, in order to follow Jesus wholeheartedly 'every day, in everything and everywhere'.

Introduction

Begin by getting your congregation to think of an example of someone not doing something because they are scared or anxious about it, and then missing out on the full joy or benefit of that experience. For example, someone putting their toe in the water, judging it to be too cold, and so missing out on the exhilaration and refreshment of plunging in and enjoying a good swim. Clearly, swimming might not do it for everyone, so you might like to have a few different examples.

Context

Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem, where he knows betrayal, arrest, prosecution, torture and death by crucifixion wait. As he travels he talks to the crowds journeying with him about what it means to be a disciple, and in particular about being willing to embrace the cost of discipleship. No doubt he is thinking about what being faithful to his Father is going to mean for him practically and personally. He knows that if his enemies are prepared to submit him to such violent and unjust treatment, then his followers need to know that being willing to die for their faith, in real physical terms as well as in a whole range of other ways, is 'par for the course'. It is better for his disciples to count that cost up front, and be fully prepared for the test that is coming, rather than discover this reality further down the journey, only to retreat from the challenge and let themselves down.

- **Verse 26** is one of those 'difficult sayings' of Jesus. Clearly, in view of the commandment to 'honour our father and mother', and to love one another, including our neighbour, as we love ourselves, Jesus is not literally asking us to hate our family and friends. Rather, he is dramatically accentuating the extent to which we must love God first and foremost, before all others. In other words, no one can be allowed to stop us following Jesus.





- **Verse 27** shows that following Jesus might involve us being willing to die in the same manner as him, but considering the unlikelihood of this, will certainly involve being willing to die to our own selfish priorities and goals ('carry his cross').
- In **verses 28-32** the two examples of building a tower and going into battle illustrate the utter foolishness of not being fully prepared for the cost of the venture embarked upon. It would be better to hold back and cautiously weigh the costs, rather than plunge in, oblivious to the danger.
- **Verse 33** is the point that Jesus is leading up to: 'those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples'. The story of the Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18-23) is a good example of this very point.
- In **verses 34-35** Jesus is thinking of salt as a fertiliser, and suggests that a disciple who cannot pay the full cost is someone whose service for the Kingdom of God is worthless, like 'unsalty salt' that is fit only to be thrown out.

Key Headings

In this passage of scripture, Jesus offers three or four dramatic images of what it means to be unwilling or unable to pay the full cost of following him.

The highest love (vv 25-27)

- We know from the full message of scripture that Jesus is not literally expecting us to hate anyone! He is dramatically exaggerating his point in order to help us to understand that being a disciple involves loving God first and foremost more highly than any other person, even those most near and dear to us!
- To be a faithful follower of Jesus means that no one, no object or possession, no opinion or expectation can properly stand in the way of us wholeheartedly embracing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.
- The story of the Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18-23) is a very good example of this.

The complete cost (vv 28-33)

- Jesus offers two different examples of someone who has not fully understood or considered what it might cost to fulfil their venture, either to build a tower or to win a battle, and as a result is ultimately defeated. (Maybe you can think of a more contemporary example - for example, on a recent island holiday, I encountered many half-built, empty, hollow and derelict houses which had been started before the money ran out and the island hit hard times.)
- What Jesus is dramatically saying is that if you can't embrace the full cost, then don't start the venture, because by doing so you might find yourself in an even worse situation than when you began!





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- All this is, of course, in the context of Jesus knowing that he is on a journey to the cross, a journey that we will also inevitably be required to follow, whether by physically giving up our lives or by giving up our selfish aims and ambitions.

The greatest service (vv 34-35)

- Finally Jesus says that a disciple who is not prepared to give up everything to follow him is like salt that has lost its saltiness and has become of no use or service to the soil. It is only worth throwing away!
- If we have not died to ourselves and live to follow Jesus, then all our service is of very little value (see 1 Corinthians 13). We are like salt that is not salty - the quality of our service is missing. Since God's life is not in us, we are not ourselves nourished through God's love and do not nourish others.

Conclusion

Jesus is absolutely clear that to follow him 'every day, in everything and everywhere' means to be clear that there is absolutely nothing holding us back, nothing that will get in the way, nothing that will distract us. These things have been 'let go of'! They no longer count as being more important to us than Jesus. In response to v 35, 'he who has ears ...', we have heard the call, and have left everything to follow Jesus! The life of a disciple is to constantly identify what we need to let go of, each and every day in order to live fully in the life that God gives us.

Application

In order to ground what it looks like in practice to live faithfully in the full reality as a disciple of Jesus, it will be important to think about your congregation and their daily lives. What are some of the likely challenges that they will face in living in two worlds at the same time - wanting to belong to the Kingdom and follow Jesus wherever he leads, yet living with confused priorities, unresolved conflict and personal expectations that meet their own selfish needs?

A possible practical illustration might be to give everyone a stone (or pebble) of some kind to hold and reflect upon. Can they identify anything that, like this stone they are holding on to, is potentially a hindrance, barrier or conflict in their lives to faithfully and wholeheartedly following Jesus? Invite them to either write something on the stone, or maybe just bring to mind what it is particularly that they need to 'let go of'. Then encourage them to bring these stones forward and lay them on an altar or maybe the 'mercy seat' as a symbol of that 'letting go'.

