

The Way of the Cross Luke 9:23-25

This Lenten season you have been invited on a journey to take a soul check of your relationship with God. This soul check is intended to help you grow closer to God's Holy Spirit that resides in you. John Wesley put it well when he said all Christians should do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Lent is the time that we focus on staying in love with God. We volunteer to either give something up or take something on so we can tune into God's voice and discover where God wants us to serve. The issue with growing closer to God means we might need to make sacrifices and reprioritize what we have always found most valuable to our lives. Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me;" which means the way of the cross is serious business. The bottom line question, for me, is, "What am I willing to put above everything, including family?" What would it take for you to put God as your number one priority and walk the way of the cross for Christ?

The answers to these questions are not easy. Before we respond too quickly saying, "I believe Jesus is my Lord and Savior and that's enough for me," we need to understand what it means to profess and live out that belief. There is a difference between saying the words and living the words when it comes to being true Disciples of Christ. In fact, for me, as I listened to the generations before me say those words, I became disheartened. I didn't see how their lives were really following Christ. I saw how my church

mentors behaviors were different in the secular world than when they were in church. God was not part of their vocabulary in a positive way. Today, we will explore what it takes to walk the way of the cross with Jesus. Again, this is serious business. It takes faith to be the servant Christ expects, strength to follow Jesus' authority, and courage to walk as a true Disciple. If you can walk the journey with God's Holy Spirit and these three gifts, you will find a brand new understanding of God for your life. Now, let's take a closer look at what servant, authority, and disciple mean to Christ.

In the world of the church today, many Christians are eager to volunteer their time to help with various programs and projects in the church. While volunteers are welcomed, what the church really needs are servants. The difference between a volunteer and servant is in the purpose of the mission. A volunteer comes when it fits in their time schedule, when they are interested in the project, and when they can choose what they are willing to do. Volunteers control the details of when, where, and how "I" want to be involved. A servant is when the Holy Spirit touches a person's heart, mind, and soul in a way that pulls them towards others. He/She follows because God has called him/her for a special purpose in God's worldly mission. In other words, **God guides** the when, where, and how, I need to help others in my community, church, and the world. Christ set the example of a servant when He fulfilled His earthly mission of dying on the

cross for **your** sins. Michael Slaughter writes, “Volunteers follow Jesus up to a point—the point of interference with their lifestyle.”¹ The way of the cross challenges us to be servants instead of volunteers by following even if it is inconvenient for our schedules. Our missional focus is on serving others in God’s world in the places God calls us to go.

Another challenge of the cross is following God’s authority. When we say to Christ, “I will follow, **but**...” are we really following Christ? In the counseling classes I have taken, I have learned that any time a phrase pauses with “but”, the first part of the phrase has potential to be totally discounted. In this case, Jesus encounters a man who says, “I will follow you, **but first** let me say goodbye to my family.” For Jesus, the way to the cross is to put God first on the list of priorities as though God is your commander and chief. The man’s response should have been more like the Disciples; when Jesus called they left everything behind and followed. Michael Slaughter writes, “We claim to be followers of Jesus, yet we fail to follow. We profess a cross without a cost.”² The cost of following today is putting God before family, friends, school activities, etc. For example, it may mean saying, “I will be attending the Holy Week services this year to spend time with God, so, I will miss....” Jesus comes first.

¹ Slaughter, Mike (2014-12-16). Renegade Gospel - Large Print Edition: The Rebel Jesus (Kindle Locations 1184-1185). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

² Slaughter, Mike (2014-12-16). Renegade Gospel - Large Print Edition: The Rebel Jesus (Kindle Locations 1291-1292). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

When we put God further down the line on our list of priorities, we risk not showing God to those who need God. Rev. Slaughter wrote it well when he said, “We have failed to be good news for the poor and oppressed and have forgotten God’s requirement “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6: 8).”³ Jesus gives us the challenge to make Christ first in our lives and show others there are times when an activity with God becomes more important than any extracurricular activity.

The third challenge as we walk the journey to the cross is how to be disciples. A Disciple is a student who comes to learn and then puts that knew knowledge into practice. There is an account in Luke 9:56-60 where a man is ready to follow but needs to go bury his father. In the Jewish tradition it is the son who takes the responsibility for ensuring a proper burial for his father as the new leader of the family. Jesus’ response to him was, “Let the dead bury their own dead....” This sounds like Jesus doesn’t care. Upon closer look, in the Jewish tradition, it could take up to two years to complete the burial and mourning rituals for a man’s father. Jesus only had days to teach the Disciples. The challenge for this part of the journey was the priority of relationships in respect to how relationships can be stumbling blocks for where God calls us to go in mission. Michael Slaughter writes, “relationships will not be considered an excuse for putting

³ Slaughter, Mike (2014-12-16). Renegade Gospel - Large Print Edition: The Rebel Jesus (Kindle Locations 1294-1296). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

off until tomorrow what we know God is calling us to do today.”⁴

Relationships with others do not supercede the service of a Disciple. In fact, often when we follow Christ and invite our family, friends, etc. to join us, God blesses us with with a stronger connection to these same people. When we work together for God’s purpose a special bond is created that will last for an eternity.

Now that we have flushed out a bit more of what it means to “follow Jesus” are you ready? Can you be God’s servant and not just a volunteer? It takes faith and trust in God to be a servant ready to follow where Christ leads. It takes strength to follow Christ’s authority and say to our friends, coaches, parents, “I want to go spend time with Jesus.” It also takes courage to be a true disciple of Christ. Our time, like Jesus, is limited. As Christians, we have resumed Christ’s mission to transform the world. What can you do different to complete your mission with the little or great time you have left on earth?

The way of the cross isn’t easy. It means change, sacrifice, and letting go of what is comfortable. However, the greatest part of our journey to take up our own cross is to watch the blessings from God flow through us to the people around us. Jesus went to the cross, but Jesus didn’t stay dead and neither will we. The reward for the sacrifices we are about to

⁴ Slaughter, Mike (2014-12-16). Renegade Gospel - Large Print Edition: The Rebel Jesus (Kindle Location 1249). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

make is to spend eternity with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit united as one. This reward begins with the people who God has called us to be in relationship with, to shared God's message, and to prove to that younger generation (an all non or marginal believers) that God is real and is present in their lives. Easter is coming. How and where is God's authority calling you to be a disciple and a servant? What is the cross you will be carrying and where will it lead you? Amen.