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# LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR DEAD



When have you found yourself jumping on a bandwagon?

**QUESTION #1**

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **105**

*Following Jesus takes priority over all other commitments.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Following a sports team can be a fun endeavor, but fans come in two breeds: (1) Fair-weather fans follow a team only when it's winning. They like to cheer, and following the best team available gives validity to their cheering. (2) Faithful fans hang in there through thick and thin. They develop a strong foundation to stand on as they support their team in both the ups and the downs.

In my elementary and junior high days, I was a die-hard Cubs fan. The only time I'd be inside during the summer was when the Cubs were on TV. However, in high school my allegiance changed to the Astros. It's interesting how the seasons of life can affect what we hold as important, even which sports team we follow.

Unfortunately, the same can be true about the priority we place on following Jesus. It's easy to follow Jesus when everything is going great, but what happens when it becomes uncomfortable or other things call for our attention? In Luke 9, Jesus challenged us to consider the cost of following Him.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## **Luke 9:57-58**

**<sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”**

**<sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”**

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus called people to follow Him. The Greek word *akoloutheo* (ak-ol-oo-THEH-o) was used seventy-seven times in the Gospels to refer to following Jesus. This word means “one going in the same way.” The call from the Lord to follow Him was always in the present imperative, which means it was an ongoing command. Following Jesus, then, is not a momentary decision or just for a set period. When Jesus calls for someone to follow Him, He literally means “keep on following Me.” Jesus’ call for us to follow Him is simple: *From now on—for your entire life—follow Me.*

Luke gave us three instances of “would-be” disciples that show us just how radical the call is to follow Jesus. The first of these three would-be disciples made a strong statement, “I will follow you wherever you go.” This man had likely seen many miracles and heard Jesus teach, and he decided this was a man he could get behind. He may have determined Jesus was the political messiah the Jews hoped for, and he wanted to jump on Jesus’ bandwagon. But Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, knew what was in the man’s heart (John 2:25); Jesus knew this was not a whole-hearted declaration to follow Him, so Jesus addressed this scribe’s statement by introducing the full cost of following.

Wild animals like foxes and birds had a more comfortable life ahead of them than Jesus did. Jesus knew the full sacrifice involved in what lay ahead of Him. Because following meant “one going in the same way,” Jesus knew all it would take for someone to follow Him. Jesus knew that this scribe was not ready to let go of personal comforts.

What do you appreciate about this man’s response?

**QUESTION #2**

Earlier, in Luke 9, Jesus spoke of the cost of following Him: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). When Jesus invites us to follow Him, He is calling us to deny ourselves of our own desires and comforts and to step into this new life of following Him.

Jesus was willing to live without the creature comforts of the creatures He created! Why? Because He loves us that much. It seems this scribe was not willing to accept a lack of personal comfort. Jesus never told the man he could not follow. Jesus simply outlined the cost and allowed the scribe to decide for himself.

We must be willing to accept the gift of God that, in one sense, cost us nothing (Eph. 2:8-9), but at the same time, cost us everything as we deny ourselves to follow Him.

## **Luke 9:59-60**

**<sup>59</sup> To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."<sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."**

The first would-be disciple had come to Jesus on his own seeking to be a follower. With the second would-be disciple, Jesus Himself took the initiative of calling him to follow. What an honor it is to have Jesus Himself say to you, "Follow me." Whether this man felt honored or not, we are uncertain, but he did give a response.

"Lord, let me first go and bury my father." This sounds like a reasonable request. In fact, for Jews, burying the dead was a religious duty. On the surface, it appears this man was asking to do an honorable task. That's why Jesus' answer seems particularly harsh: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."



# EXCUSES

Rank the following excuses people use when trying to get out of a commitment (by the frequency that you see them occurring).

- \_\_\_ 1. I don't have the time.
- \_\_\_ 2. I'm too tired.
- \_\_\_ 3. I don't feel equipped.
- \_\_\_ 4. It's not a priority for me right now.
- \_\_\_ 5. That's not my job.

In a single statement, confess times you've used some of these excuses regarding following something you knew Jesus wanted you to do. Now commit once again to making Jesus your priority in life.

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*"It must be God first,  
God second, and God third."*

— OSWALD CHAMBERS

*Whoa. Wait! What did He just say?*

As honorable as the man's request sounds to our contemporary ears, we miss one critical detail: the man's father wasn't dead yet! If his father had already died, he would have been buried immediately. The man also would've been in a month-long period of mourning—and not conversing with Jesus.

The saying, "I must bury my father," is still used in parts of the Middle East. A man would say it today to explain that he would remain home until his father dies to help with the family business and responsibilities, and receive his inheritance after his father's death. Perhaps the would-be disciple's excuse carried a concern that leaving and following Jesus in that moment could mean the loss of his inheritance.

This man's response brought his priorities to light. His attitude of delayed obedience was actually disobedience. Jesus was not asking for commitment to Him alone and nothing else, but all other commitments must flow out of and be subservient to our commitment to Him.

Jesus knows what it costs to follow Him. Jesus knows exactly what it would take for His followers to proclaim the kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, His response was not one of disrespect for the man's family, but a call to the greater commitment. We display our commitment to Christ in the way we handle other priorities. Following Jesus is not an important thing; it's the *most* important thing!

What are some excuses we make to delay our obedience to Christ?

### QUESTION #3

## **Luke 9:61-62**

**<sup>61</sup> Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."<sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."**

The third would-be follower spoke up and made the proclamation, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." At first glance, this third man has one step up on the one who wanted to bury his father, because, really, how long could saying goodbye take? However, this man's commitment to follow Christ was derailed by one word: *but*.

This man started off in the right direction, but he quickly got turned around because Jesus was not his first priority. He wasn't concerned first and foremost with following the Lord and seeking the kingdom. He may have been concerned about what his family would think or do when they found out he was leaving them for Jesus. It was more than just a matter of saying goodbye.

You can't plow a field while you are looking back. Your lines wouldn't be straight. Your rows would probably be on top of each other. The apostle Paul put this principle to practice in his own life. He wrote: "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

You likely know people who are continually pulled back into their old lives. Or others who talk about "the good old days." It seems impossible for them to live in the present. In reality, they struggle to understand how good the present is. If we spend our time looking over our shoulder at the past, focusing on what might have been or even continuing to live in the sin of the past, we will not be fit for effectiveness in the kingdom of God. Looking back reflects a divided heart, and we cannot follow Christ with a divided heart.

God most likely will not take away all our earthly possessions, nor will He ask us to leave our families and friends. But to follow Jesus we must be *willing* to give up all those things.

In what ways does looking back affect our walk with Christ?

#### **QUESTION #4**

How can our group help one another keep our hands to the plow as we follow Christ?

#### **QUESTION #5**

# LIVE IT OUT

Jesus allows no shortcuts to following Him. The cost is high, but the reward is great: a full, joy-filled life now and forever. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Let go of the past.** Do not let the past become more important than where God is leading you today. Focus on Christ daily as you follow Him and embrace what lies ahead.
- ▶ **Evaluate your priorities.** Realize following Jesus includes no guarantee of comfort. Look for ways that your desire for personal comfort has hindered you from truly following Jesus. Remove those hindrances and put Jesus first.
- ▶ **Follow Jesus with immediate obedience.** If there is an area in your life where you have delayed your obedience, understand that this is disobedience. Repent and act immediately on what you know Christ is calling you to do.



This joy-filled life is ours in Christ, if we choose to truly follow Him.

My thoughts