



SESSION 5

LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR DEAD

▶ **The Point**

Following Jesus takes priority over all other commitments.

▶ **The Passage**

Luke 9:57-62

▶ **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.

▶ **The Setting**

Jesus had determined the time had come for Him to journey to Jerusalem, where He would be crucified. (See Luke 9:51.) Twice already Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection. (See vv. 21-22; 43-44.) Along the way to Jerusalem, Jesus taught on many topics, including the nature of discipleship. Some of these teachings were hard sayings. These sayings might have been difficult for His listeners to comprehend; or, more likely, the listeners refused to follow a leader who demanded so much of them.

What does the Bible say?

Luke 9:57-62

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

⁵⁸ 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.”

⁵⁹ To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹ Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”

⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”



STUDY THE BIBLE

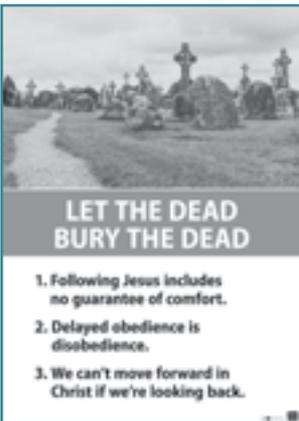
Notes

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When has following Jesus put you in an uncomfortable situation?

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Luke 9:57-58

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." **58** 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."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 9:57-58 on page 107 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: **Question #2** on page 107 of the PSG: "What do you appreciate about this man's response?"

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the background for a scribe.

RECAP: 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.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 11**, "Following Jesus," poster. Use this poster as a visual tool to reinforce the main points of today's session as you come to each Scripture section.

TRANSITION: Following Jesus includes no guarantee of comfort. In the next verses, we also see that delayed obedience is disobedience.

Luke 9:57-58 Commentary

[Verse 57] As Jesus and His disciples **were going along the road** to Jerusalem, Jesus made it clear through His encounters with three prospective followers that following Him includes no guarantee of comfort. The Greek word translated **road** literally means “way.” Christianity was first known as “the Way” (Acts 9:2).

Luke was not inspired to give us any background on the first man who approached Jesus. In his Gospel, Matthew described him as “a scribe” (Matt. 8:19), meaning a religious official. Scribes were considered to be experts at interpreting the Jewish law and in judging cases where someone was accused of breaking it. They were often associated with Pharisees.

The first individual proclaimed to Jesus, “**I will follow you wherever you go.**” The Greek term translated *will follow* means “to follow as a disciple.”

[Verse 58] Jesus responded to the man’s seemingly bold offer by pointing to two types of creatures that have natural homes. Animals such as **foxes have holes**. Also, **birds** usually have **nests**. Although these animals might wander far at times, they are used to returning home.

Jesus, however, noted that He “**has nowhere to lay his head.**” The phrase *has nowhere to lay his head* on the surface seems to be referring to the loss of those comforts associated with having a home to live in. However, it also refers to the rejection Jesus experienced and that His disciples should expect to experience as well. (See Luke 9:52-53.)

Jesus identified Himself as the **Son of Man**. This term was Jesus’ favorite way of identifying Himself in the Gospels. Jesus used the term as a self-description of Himself in His role as God’s Messiah. For instance, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus used the term as He announced His coming death and resurrection to His disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (v. 22). Even though the background for this term is Daniel 7:13-14, where it describes an end-times figure who is given everlasting dominion, Jesus understood the term included much hardship.

Luke did not report what this would-be disciple decided to do in response to Jesus’ words. Some readers assume that the man decided not to follow Jesus. Jesus’ demands went far beyond what most rabbis demanded of their students in first-century Israel. The Gospels record other instances in which some people wanted to follow Jesus, but were selective in what they were willing to do. For instance, the rich young ruler seemed at first like a prime candidate for a disciple (see Luke 18:18-21), but chose not to follow Jesus when faced with the prospect of having to give up his possessions.

Most Christians are not required to leave their homes to travel on the road, as did Jesus and His disciples in the first century. However, being a disciple of Jesus requires the same total commitment. It requires a willingness to leave our comfort zones. Furthermore, to be a disciple of Jesus often means sacrifice, at times even suffering, and for some martyrdom.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes



Luke 9:59-60

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

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 9:59-60 on page 108 of the PSG.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 10**, the "Burial Customs" handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to discuss the burial customs of ancient Israel to give context for Luke 9:59-60.

DISCUSS: **Question #3** on page 110 of the PSG: "What are some excuses we make to delay our obedience to Christ?"

RECAP: 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!

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What's your initial reaction to Jesus' words in verse 60?

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "Excuses" on page 109 of the PSG to help them evaluate their level of commitment to Jesus.



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

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that we can't move forward in Christ if we're looking back.

Luke 9:59-60 Commentary

[Verse 59] With His words, Jesus taught those who would follow Him that they could not postpone their decisions about being His disciples. Jesus approached another person with His usual invitation to prospective disciples, **“Follow me.”** This individual addressed Jesus as **“Lord.”** (See Matt. 8:21; Luke 9:59.) The word translated *Lord* sometimes is a simple term of respect or admiration, similar to our term “sir.” People such as the twelve apostles called Jesus *Lord* in the sense of His being the Messiah.

The man requested, **“let me first go and bury my father.”** The burial of a parent took precedence over every other duty in Jewish life. Refusing this duty was possible only if a person had taken a Nazarite vow (see Num. 6:6-7) or was the High Priest. (See Lev. 21:10-11.) In this case the man’s father might not have been dead yet, so he may have been asking Jesus to let him delay his commitment to discipleship until his father was gone.

Another possibility is based on the customs of Jewish burial. At the time of death, the corpse was placed in a sealed tomb. Twelve months later, after the body had decomposed, there was a second burial in which the bones of the dead person were collected and placed into a container known as an ossuary (“bone box”) and reburied. The reburial of the bones was considered the end of the duties required in mourning the dead.

[Verse 60] Jesus responded, **“Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”** The *spiritually dead* could take care of burying the *physically dead*. If this would-be follower of Jesus was spiritually alive, he had a more pressing obligation than burying his dead father. Other people, who rejected Jesus, could take care of that burial.

Now that the Messiah had appeared, and with Him the coming of **the kingdom of God**, those who would follow Jesus as His disciples needed to refocus their priorities. The kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven) was central to Jesus’ preaching and teaching. (See Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43.) Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God through His life, death, and resurrection. Sometimes Jesus described kingdom as a future reality (see Luke 11:2), but at other times He noted the present reality of the kingdom. (See 17:21.) With the Messiah’s arrival, the kingdom of God was present. However, the kingdom will not come in all its fullness until Jesus’ second coming. (See Rev. 19–22.) Jesus expected His followers to **proclaim the kingdom of God** as well.

Commitments to family, career, country, and church are all valid and important, but as followers of Jesus our ultimate priority is to be obedient to our Lord and Savior. Jesus clearly spoke of the centrality of a person’s love for God. (See Matt 22:34-40.) Love for God takes precedence over all other obligations and responsibilities in life. In this man’s case, the arrival of the Messiah indicated the coming of the kingdom of God, and the urgency to proclaim this message took precedence over all other priorities and commitments.

Luke 9:61-62 Commentary

[Verse 61] Jesus taught a would-be follower that we cannot move forward as disciples of Christ if we are looking back at the lives we are leaving behind. Another individual approached Jesus and asked for permission to handle a task before committing to Jesus completely. **“I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”** On the surface, this request sounds reasonable. In the first century, people might have felt this need for saying farewell more deeply than people today who have such things as email, social media, and cell phones to help them stay connected!

Like the previous disciple, this individual addressed Jesus as **“Lord.”** As noted above, this title could be just a respectful address or it could be a recognition of who Jesus is as the Messiah.

[Verse 62] Jesus responded, **“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”** Jesus used the word picture of a person plowing a field but looking back. People familiar with farming know that looking back while plowing can be disastrous. Plowing a straight line requires keeping one’s eye on a distant target.

The wording **looks back** literally means “looks at the things behind.” This individual apparently wanted to linger in his past relationships more than he was ready to move into the future with Jesus as his Lord. (See Phil 3:13.) Such a person, who has one foot in the past and one in the future, is not **fit for the kingdom of God**. With this passage, Jesus was warning His disciples (and us) not to be preoccupied with the past. Christians can have a healthy, positive appreciation for the past. Indeed, the Bible often encourages believers to recall, speak of, and meditate on what God has done for us in the past. For some of us, parents and other family members have been strong role models for living the Christian life. Hebrews 11 is a famous account of previous faithful people who can inspire us.

However, the danger is that someone becomes so preoccupied with past relations that he or she is not willing to have a kingdom agenda for life. If we make key decisions based on concerns that take precedence over Jesus and the kingdom of God, then we are not fit for the kingdom of God. The word **fit** is from the Greek word *euthetos*, which brings to mind the idea of “ready for use.” While a person is saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ, surrender to Christ demands more just the acceptance of God’s grace. It requires being useful for the kingdom. When the apostle Paul presented several word pictures for the Christian life, he noted, “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” (2 Tim. 2:4).

Jesus’ encounters with these three would-be disciples reveal that He requires a complete, lifelong commitment to Him and His teachings. He requires that His disciples prioritize the demands and responsibilities of life, with the commitment to Him being our top priority. (See Matt. 6:33.) Once we make the all-or-nothing commitment to Jesus as Lord and Savior, we can put our other priorities and commitments in their proper places under that primary commitment.

