

How To Be A Bad Disciple

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My subject is discipleship today, and normally I would teach you what to do right, but today I have decided to teach you what to do wrong. The title of my Bible study is "How to be a Bad Disciple." A couple of you, I think, have heard this before. I gave it in Montgomery, Alabama two years ago. I just realized that last night when I was looking to see where I had given this, so those of you who were there that day, this will be a refresher course on how to be a bad disciple.

Learning how to be a good disciple is good. I do not want to minimize that. But sometimes, looking at something from a negative point of view helps us to see errors in ourselves because we can say, "Oh yeah, I relate. I've done that before in my life." So I thought, when I originally put this together, which was 19 years ago, that I would look at it from a negative point of view. And I actually found a series of scriptures where Jesus Himself did that, but I would like to open up in Matthew 4, if you will. We are going to read the incident where Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee and He started calling His disciples. So we will see His calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Matthew 4:18-22 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Here we have the calling of the four leading disciples of Christ, and in most lists where they are named they are the four that are there named first. It is

interesting that in the way he wrote this out. It is that Jesus called them, "Hey buddy, how you doing? Follow Me." And they just immediately went. It is almost like there was no thought. Jesus called and they just up and leave their dad, leave their business, leave everything, leave all their nets and whatnot they were doing, and just follow Him.

Now we know that from John 1 that He had had some prior interactions with them. They knew who He was by this time. They knew His teachings, they knew that He was the one, the Messiah, and they were going to follow Him. But the way it is written here makes it seem like they did not give a whole lot of thought, that they did not count the cost. We can be certain that they had thought it through. They would not have made this reaction if they had not, but I am sure that they did not realize the full cost of what they were committing to.

They did not know a lot of the things that were going to happen to them. Their lives ended in martyrdom, at least three of the four of them, and the fourth one, John, he died a natural death from what we understand, but along the way, he was boiled in oil and had several other things happen to him that we are not very pleasant to go through. Plus he had to watch the church disintegrate over his lifetime, lived a long time, watched a lot of terrible things happen, watched a lot of people leave the church and it was just not necessarily the plum life that they might have thought it would have been early in in their discipleship.

I think that our response to Christ is a lot the same. We do think it over, we do count the cost as well as we can, but we have a hard time seeing. I mean, even what the weather is going to be in the next day. We cannot forecast what things are going to be like in our life as we move forward years, decades, who knows how long we have during the time of our conversion.

So we really do not know what we are getting into, we do not know what it really takes to be a Christian. We do not understand all the things that God is going to put us through in His preparation process for the Kingdom of God. We have just maybe a percentage, a small single digit percentage of comprehension of all the risks that we are going to be taking later on—all the privations, all the sacrifice, all the controversies, we may go through. All the emotional highs and lows of whatever happens in our lives, all the mental

anguish and whatever it is that God throws at us that we have to overcome. Maybe not even overcome, just endure through all the years of our conversion.

And it makes me ask the question: If we had known all those things, if God had said, "Sit down here, I want to show you a movie of your life as a converted member of My Family," and showed us everything we were going to go through, would we have said, "Uh no, where's the exit? You know, I enjoyed the popcorn, but I want to get out of here." And probably most of us would have probably said, yes. We would have agreed that we do not want to go through all that. So I think because we would see at that point in our life that the cost was going to be too high, that we would have said no to God, that He keeps us mercifully ignorant of most of that. He keeps us somewhat in the dark.

We may know it intellectually that it is going to cost us these sacrifices, that we are going to have to fight against family or whatever to maintain our Christianity, and we know that in general, but we do not know all the emotional scarring that it is going to do to us along the way, and how hard it is going to be to overcome some of those things. So it is a good thing that He does that. He brings us along nice and gently most of the time.

Of course, that is not always the case. I have one son that, after he was baptized, he was blessed. God just happened to bestow all kinds of things upon him that he was not expecting. Really nice, nice blessings. And then another son, it was just the opposite. He just got hammered right off the bat with various things, with work and school and such. So, you know, it just depends on the person and how God is working with the person. But we can all expect to have some hard times along the way. It just depends on when they come up because God does test us, God does want to know what we are made of, and what kind of decisions we will make under duress, and whether we are going to stick with Him.

So I have to ask you: Where you are right now? Where you are in your conversion? Where you are in your life? What kind of disciple are you? Are you a good disciple or are you a bad disciple? Are you somewhere in between? Have we learned to make some good and righteous decisions? Have we grown? Now, I am not going to ask you to tell us all this, we will

not be a group counseling session, but I want you to think about that. Are you a good disciple? Have you reached a good potential over the many years that you may have been called?

Now there is an interesting section in Luke 9, and by the way, in Luke 9 is where we will be most of the rest of this Bible study. So please stick a bookmark or something in the last part of that chapter. We are going to be looking at Luke 9:46-62 and it is a series of four sections, four incidents in the life of Christ where He interacts with various people, and He basically gives us a template for what it is like to be a bad disciple. The attitudes that we should have, if we are going to be a bad disciple. Like I said, sometimes looking at it from a negative point of view is helpful because normally we are used to looking at things from a good point of view and we may miss things unless we turn around and say, "Ah, I didn't look at it from this angle."

Each one of these sections at the end of Luke 9 deals with one or more ways that we can fail in our discipleship or that we can take a wrong attitude and distract ourselves or push ourselves in a way that is not good. On the surface, some of these things that we see that Jesus tells us are not good, look good. Like there are things that we should do, that a human *should* do, but He says, "No, no, no. You're not looking at this the right way." So we need to understand where He is coming from here and hopefully as we go through we will be able to see that.

But all of them are patterned the same way, each one of these four. There is an infraction that occurs and we understand then the background for the problem. And then Jesus gives us His corrective teaching on why it is not a good thing. So I want want us to understand that that is the way it is going into these four. We will do each one of these sections in turn. Rather than read the whole long section at once, I am just going to take it section by section and I think that will make it easier.

Luke 9:46-48 Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."

The first no-no for disciples is self-exaltation. That is what the disciples were doing here. "Who among us is going to be the lord of the others?" And they all wanted to be the one, it seems like. James and John, of course, we know had this thing, "Hey mom, go find out which one of us will sit on His right hand, which at His left, and if He doesn't pick us, maybe there's something we can do to make that happen. Right?" You kind of get the idea from that particular story that all of the disciples were kind of gunning for sitting at the right hand or the left hand of the Savior, because they were upset that John and James had gotten there first and asked the question.

But Jesus is saying this idea of self-exaltation, of trying to be the leader among them, to be the greatest among them, is just totally anti-disciple. Think of the word disciple. What is a disciple? A disciple is a student, a disciple is a follower, and elsewhere Jesus says that if you want to be great, then you need to be a servant. That is how you are going to end up getting the perks, as it were. By laying down your life as a servant and God knows that if you can follow, then you can also lead. So He said, "Discipleship, let us understand this from the very beginning." A disciple is a follower, not a leader necessarily. So a disciple always needs to know his place. Most of all, a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ, He is always the Master, and if you have ambitions to be at His right hand, what is to stop you from having ambitions to actually take over His seat? So it is the wrong attitude altogether.

Our place is *under* the Master and we learn to be humble by also being under other disciples. Our attitude should always be to raise up others, even if it is at our own expense.

Now, the word "receives" here, you find it three or four times in verse 48, does not, to us, convey the proper connotation. To me, it would have been better had they put the word "welcomes" or "accepts." He who whoever receives, whoever welcomes, whoever accepts this little child in My name accepts Me. It is showing that how we treat others is a very good indication of how we treat Christ. So He is saying here that we have to learn to, in a way, debase ourselves even amongst ourselves, as equals. "No, you go ahead, have this seat, you have a better view here, you can hear better from here," or whatever.

We see that in another place in Scripture. I believe it is in James. Do not go up and take the best seat, wait to be called up. If that is going to happen to you, let others have the better seats. We have to learn as disciples that we need to place equal or greater value on others and take the back seat ourselves. Lift them up before you try to lift yourself up. Let us go to Luke 6, just a few pages back. (I am going to take my own advice and put my bookmark in here.)

Luke 6:39-42 [Jesus gives us some additional instruction here on this point] And He spoke a parable to them. "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that is the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye."

So He is saying here, if you really want to be like Christ, consider yourself lower than others and also consider that you have your own faults. Now Jesus did not have His faults, He was perfect. But He had that attitude that He was not going to be pointing the finger at somebody for their own faults and find out that they have equal or worst faults of their own. It is just not the way. So this is just kind of some examples of how we can get ahead of ourselves as disciples and we do not want to do that. We have to do what we can to help ourselves, raise ourselves with God's help and the Holy Spirit's help, to be like Christ, to have His righteousness, and then let God handle our exaltation because that is the path to spiritual glory. We find it in I Peter 5:5-6, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will raise you up."

That is what we have got to do. Just be humble. It does not matter what kind of people you are with, who the congregation is made up of, slot yourself underneath, serve, do not put yourself out in front as the, "Oh I'm the

obvious leader in this group" and start telling people where to go and pointing this, that, and the other thing out. Take the lower seat and then let us see what happens.

So He said, first of all, if you want to be a bad disciple, exalt yourself, but that is not the good way. That not the right way.

Let us go on to the second one and we will read the next small section.

Luke 9:49-50 John answered [here is John again] and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is for us."

This is an interesting one. No-no number two is this feeling of exclusivity. That we are the only ones that are doing the right thing. We are the only ones that God is using. The New King James here titles this paragraph, "Jesus Forbids Sectarianism" and I think that is a little bit too religious a term. He was not necessarily talking about church groups or sects. He was talking about factions within the church or factions within those that He has called. It is having an us versus them mentality and it is not good.

Unfortunately, this is an especially current attitude in the church. There are certain churches out there who have basically held everybody else off at arm's length. They called us Laodicean. They called us maybe not even in the church, they have various ways that they keep themselves from us and keep people within their groups from others that are not in their group. And it is a very sad and actually damnable thing, I am sorry to say, but it is not good at all. "This group is God's only true church and everyone else is the enemy" mentality undermines discipleship, undermines fellowship. It is just a horrible thing. And I do not understand how they cannot see that. It is just beyond me. I do not understand that kind of attitude.

Now, notice that Christ here, when He is talking about this attitude, He does not say that because they are for us that we necessarily have to join with them. He is saying there is this group doing this sort of thing, and we are doing this sort of thing, but they are not hindering us, so we do not have to hinder them either. But that does not mean we have to join with them and do

what they are doing. That is not what He is saying. He is just saying that these two groups are different in a certain way, and we should let them be and we should do what we are supposed to be doing.

Paul says something similar in Philippians 1. I want you to notice his attitude, and it is probable that he took this attitude that he had from what he read there in Luke. Luke was his longtime companion and Luke's gospel was probably the one that was the most current and available to them. So he would have seen this, probably would have approved it to make sure it got into Luke's gospel. But notice what he says.

Philippians 1:15-18 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter [those who do it out of good will] out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then?

You know, we are faced with this situation that there are two competing, as it were, groups preaching Christ, they are going about it with totally different attitudes. What are we supposed to do because of that? How are we supposed to decide what is our attitude?

Philippians 1:18 Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

So he said, essentially, let us not set up an us against them. Let us not be antagonistic toward this group. Let us just be happy that they are preaching Christ. God will straighten them out, straighten their attitude out in time, or their attitude will cause them to fail, and they will have to reconsider or what have you. But he was just happy that they were trying to do what was good in terms of preaching the gospel. He was not going to judge them. He was not their judge. Who was their judge, but Christ, so leave them to Him. So he just said, Okay, fine. They are preaching Christ, they are doing it, striving against his own ministry. But hey, let us not take an antagonistic view toward them. Let us just let them be and we will continue to do what we are doing.

And I see that in the church now. There are different groups with different ideas of how the gospel should be preached, different groups that do not preach the gospel much in a public way. Like we do not do that much. We do not get on radio or TV, but we are preaching the gospel in a way that works for *us*, and we just need to continue to do what God has given us to do and let Him take care of them, in His own way, in His own time. He will either bring us all together or He will not. He will change their way of doing things or our way of doing things, or He will not. He is in charge, He is the Master, so we do what He wants us to do and when He shows us another way to do His work or He wants to shunt us in a different path for whatever His reasons are, He will make that clear.

So we do not need to make judgments about them. Hey, United is doing what it is doing because God has told them to do that. Fine. Philadelphia, as much as I do not like their attitude about the rest of the church, He has given them something to do. Same with any of these other groups. I just brought those names up because we all know who they are, we know what they do. I am not going to condemn them. Maybe I do not like what I see in certain ways, but that is not my call. I just have to hold my peace and wait for God to make it all work. He has got all the balls in the air and He is going to catch them and make them produce what He wants them to produce in time. So fine.

Let us just read Romans 14:4 just just to pin this point down. And this is our attitude.

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand [because remember who the Master is], for God is able to make him stand.

If I do not like what they are doing, it is not my job, it is not my place. We are all working under the Master. Let us say, we are all farm workers and I decide I am going to plow this field under the master's supervision. And I am going to plow the field like he tells me to plow the field and if he has told this other person to plow the field in a different way, maybe he is running an experiment. Maybe he is thinking that in this particular area of the farm, this is what needs to be done. And so that person can plow the field that way. It is not my job to say no, you must plow it my way. It is just not right. We both

have the same master. He is working differently with us and so let it be. Let us not say that, "Well, my way is the only right way." Do not be exclusive. Say "I'm glad they're plowing that field. I'm glad the farm work is getting done." And God will sort out the fruits.

Let us go back to Luke 9 and get a third no-no as far as discipleship goes. This is one of the longer ones here.

Luke 9:51-56 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for Him, but they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem [They could see from Jesus' demeanor as He came into the town that He was not going to stay and preach. He was just going to go to Jerusalem].

When His disciples James and John [here is the sons of Zebedee again] saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are up. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.

This third no-no, the third way to be a bad disciple is to resort to persecution. Now this is a step beyond the exclusivity of what we saw in the last one. This is actually taking vengeance in God's name. But God says, "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay." He says that at least twice. I think it is actually more than that. But He says it in Deuteronomy 32:35 and also in the New Testament in Romans 12:19. So He is repeating this thing, we ought to take notice. He says, okay, we do not need to fight one another. We do not need to kill, we do not need to war. We do not need to take this to fisticuffs or torture or anything like that. We do not need to do that.

Remember the last one? The last one said, just leave it alone, let Him him take care of it. But there are hotheads among us who want to say, "Oh, God was blasphemed! I'm going to go over there and I'm going to wreck and ruin

and kill," and whatnot. And our God says, "No, don't do that at all. Don't you know that you're actually channeling the spirit of Satan when you do that?" Satan is the destroyer. So that is not a good attitude to get into it all! We should not even have thoughts like that. But obviously James and John did, "Hey, let's just kill them!" It was not blasphemy. It was just simply they were ignoring Christ, they were not going to do anything because He was going to pass through and not stay. So, disrespect. That is all it was. It was just a bit of disrespect.

But James and John were going to go to war and use the power of God that He had given them by His Spirit to destroy. And Jesus said, "Guys, haven't you been listening? Don't you know that this is the wrong attitude? Haven't you realized that I haven't come to destroy people? I've come to save them, to turn their lives around so that we all think and believe and work towards the same thing. If you cut off a life, there's nothing beyond that in terms of being able to produce any fruit. So why would you want to do that?"

With God, there is always a chance of a turnaround here, of things to get better. Jesus says, on the other hand, back in the Sermon on the Mount, "Turn the other cheek" when you are disrespected, walk the extra mile. That is the Christlike way to go about all this because in that way you fulfill their needs and it does not blow up into something that is going to cause further trouble. So just chill. Just because some reject Christ, or us, whether it is out of ignorance or offense or even a doctrinal dispute (doctrinal dispute, that gets the blood up, does it not?), we have no cause, no right to bring harm or misfortune on another person at all. Even when we think that our reaction is righteous indignation or godly zeal, probably at that point we are not righteous at all, or godly, because we are wanting to destroy and kill.

Now, times being what they are, a lot of this happens through words these days. We do not actually get out a knife and put it in the fifth rib to somebody who disagrees with us. But we do get on Facebook or some other social media and we slander them and we destroy them in some way or another. I should not say we. Some do, but I hope none of us do that. But in the spirit of the sixth commandment—You shall not kill—that is what we have done on Facebook when we would do something like that. So we need

to be careful. This is an attitude that does not necessarily have to be a physical persecution. It could be something that is done through words and we have got to be very careful that we do not slip into that.

Let us go back to Matthew the 10th chapter and we will see some of Jesus' original instructions to the disciples on this very point and why they did not get it. Well, I know why they did not get it. They were human and they forgot or they did not take it right, they were not in the right spirit.

Matthew 10:11 "Now whatever city or town you enter [they were going into a city of the Samaritans], inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out."

In Jesus' case in Luke 9, He was not going to stay there at all, He was just passing through. But this would be when they were going on one of their evangelization trips and they need to know what to do.

Matthew 10:12-15 "And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy [meaning they are accepting of what you have to say and they are treating you well], let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy [destroy that house with everybody in it. Is that what He says? That is what John and James thought. Call fire down from heaven and do like Elijah did. No.]

But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you [meaning okay, you were fine with them. Let it come back to you because you need to take it elsewhere, which is what He says]. Whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet [I mean, that is as bad as it gets for a disciple of God. He just needs to turn around, shake off the dust, and leave]. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

Huh, well. We can be assured that if we are maltreated somewhere and we do what He says here, turn around and leave, get out of there, that God is going to mark that down. He promises vengeance upon that city that did not receive His disciples. But it is not the disciple's place to bring vengeance on

that city or that house. So the advice here is a lot like the one about exclusivity: Step back, let God handle it. There is no reason for us to get involved in some kind of fight, some kind of kind of squabble. It is just going to end badly. So what you do, you just turn around and leave, you get out. You say, "I'm going to let Christ handle this because that's His department. I do not make a big enough salary to handle that sort of thing. I'm not powerful enough. I'll do what He says and beat down the bushes somewhere else. Beat a quick pace to some other city that will be more open."

So if we are not received in some place, just leave, and leave it in God's hands. It is no good to get in a fight. It will, most of all, result in very, very bad relations. It will bring blasphemy upon God's name, make a terrible witness. So the best thing to do is leave.

Now, let us get to the fourth point here in Luke 9. The final one in verses 57 through 62. Before I read this one, I want to just warn you that this one is split up into three different distractions. That is the fourth no-no. Do not get distracted as a disciple. So there are three different ways that He points out that we can easily be distracted.

Luke 9:57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him [in another place it says it was a scribe], "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go."

This was someone saying that, I am with you. I like what you say. You sound good, your message is good. I want to join with you.

Luke 9:58 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."

He knew exactly what to say to this person. Let us go on read the next one.

Luke 9:59-62 Then He said to another, "Follow Me." [this time, it is an invitation] But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." [That is the second

little vignette we have here. And then the third] And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You [this time it is joining again], but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." And Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

These are very well known things that Jesus has said here, and they are all basically under one major point. That a bad disciple gets easily distracted.

So the three things that He points out here is over-concern on the point of the person wanting to join with Jesus. Over-concern for the first one was the self. The second one is over-concern for the world. And the third is over-concern for one's own family, those who are at his house. And this third one about the family is probably the most common and most difficult problem of all because they are the ones we love and we do not like to disappoint them, normally, or do something that they consider strange or get involved in a cult or we have heard all the different things that we have been accused of.

Let us take these 1, 2, 3.

The first man who said he wanted to follow Him wherever he would go. Very open-ended here. I will do anything You want me to do, go anywhere, suffer whatever. And we have to remember that he was talking to Jesus. You cannot say things like that without Jesus knowing what you are actually like. Because it says in Matthew 9:4 that He knew what they were thinking. He knew what was in them. He knew what their attitudes were. And the same happens here.

The first man, Jesus could figure out here, had not considered how hard the Christian life was and that is why He answers them as He does. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests. but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Are you willing to go out on the road with Me and sleep in the hedges at the side of the road, not knowing where the next meal may come from, having to walk long hours through the wilderness to get to a destination?" You know, are you willing to suffer and sacrifice for all of these things?

Now, it was a scribe. It was a person who was fairly high up in society. This was a person that probably was used to his three squares a day and fine clothes and had always had a place to sleep. Probably had a nice house and nice linens and a nice fluffy pillow and a nice little comforter. He was set up and Jesus just looks at him and said, "Really, are you willing to face the privations of life as My disciple?"

He knew that this scribe was wrapped up in his physical circumstances. And a lot of people are. They want to make sure that they have steady work, they want to make sure their housing is always good and improving, buy themselves up the ladder of these nice houses. They always want to make sure they have money coming in and all their comforts are really nice comforts. And they are always thinking about that therapeutic bed that I have seen. It may be \$4500-\$5000 but I have got to have it because it is for me. It is for my back.

And those things are fine in their place, but when God calls us to to follow Him, those things have to take a back seat. But He could see in this man, the scribe, that he was always going to put those things in the front seat. He was always going to be wanting the nicer things of life and so what that would do was force into the background the real work of a disciple. He was always going to be distracted by his physical comforts and physical things.

But Jesus says that we are to become pilgrims along the way. We are walking through this world and those physical comforts are not supposed to be front and center. If they do become front and center, more than likely they are going to push us away from God and out of the church. What happened in Matthew 19 when the rich young ruler came up to Him and said, "Hey, I've done everything You've asked me to do." And then He says, "Well, give up your money," and the guy went away bawling because that is something he could not do. He wanted the security of his money and going out on the road with Jesus as a poor man was just not going to cut it.

So this is a distraction that a lot of us face because we are human, we like having nice clothes, we like having a nice bed, we like driving a nice car, we like all those comforts that we can have in this country. We like the freedom. And Jesus said, "Well, if you become a disciple, you have to do what I said,

and I say, you have to go where I tell you to go. You'll get paid what I pay you," as it were. Are you willing to actually live that life or are you going to be distracted by all the around and about that will make your physical body feel good and your own mental and emotional state feel like everything is okay. That is the first one.

The second man is the one that said he would need to go bury his father and that was top of mind to him. He wanted to, let us say, celebrate the customs, do what any good son would do, and that is fine. I said some of these are things that on the outside look good, but Jesus says, "Hey, you need to look at this from a different perspective. If you're going to go all in for Me, then burying your father is not a top priority. It's something that you could do in the right circumstance and there would be no problem with it. But right now the top priority is the Creator of the world saying, 'Follow Me.'"

And immediately this guy gives an excuse why he could not do it. He has a responsibility, and yes, the Bible says we should fulfill our responsibilities. But when the Creator of the world is standing there and saying I am offering you eternal life, follow Me, then there is nothing in this world that is more important.

Now when Jesus responds to him about burying his father, He broadens the scope of this. He says, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." What He broadened this out to was serving the entire world, thinking that you have a responsibility towards your fellow man all the time, and you put that responsibility before your responsibility to the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. He is saying, "Let's get this straight." It is almost like He is saying, "Yeah, the first and great commandment says serve your fellow man."

No, that is not what it says. The first and great commandment says you love the Lord with all your might. That is first. Serving your fellow man comes second, and this person was switching them around, which is not the right way. We always give God the first and then what we have left over goes to others. So, in our modern way of looking at things, this would be like a lot of Christians out in the world, putting all of their time and effort towards charity or a mission or some sort of good deeds activity that they do.

I have a neighbor who is a good Baptist, he was a deacon in his church, and all he wanted to do at one point was go to soup kitchens. He would go there on Sunday morning and miss church because the soup kitchen was more important and doing all that work in his mind. Good man in terms of a worldly person. But he mis-prioritized. He put those people, the homeless people who needed help obviously, and they needed the food that was in the soup kitchens, but he ended up serving the soup kitchens and those homeless people before he served God, never even going to church on Sunday. And you know what? He ended up giving up his deaconship and left that Baptist church and he does not go anywhere anymore. He does not even go to the soup kitchens anymore. It is just weird. But he got it all backward.

I know there are a lot of people who say the church of God does not love their fellow man. They spend too much time reading and studying and praying and all that, and going to church, but they never go out and do, never do these charity things. And I can see where if we did nothing, that that judgment might be true. But I think we have learned over the years that we really have got to put God first and then the charity and the other things come next with what is left over. Some of the churches do outreach programs and that is fine. They have some of the resources to do that and if people want to get involved, that is fine. But we are still talking about making sure we have our priorities straight because to go whole hog into those sorts of things and leave out the more important thing is not good.

So Jesus says here, "Let the dead bury their own dead." The dead is code language that Jesus uses for those who do not have God's Holy Spirit. God gives us His Spirit and that imparts eternal life, and those who have eternal life in them through His Spirit are living. They are alive, they are really alive to everything that God wants them to know. But the dead know nothing. They are the ones who may have some inkling of Christianity or may be fully in their church doing whatever, but they do not have His Holy Spirit. And there are plenty of charity organizations, plenty of mission groups, plenty of good deeds organizations out there that they can get involved in. Fine. Let those who are out there do those good deeds, you go and preach the Kingdom of God. There is a higher calling for you.

Our priority when we do service, when we do these good deeds, is to the living, not the dead. That is another thing—God will take care of them in

their own time. So we do not need to be out there doing soup kitchens or whatnot. There are groups that do that. Our service needs to be mostly channeled towards the living. Now this may seem to be exclusive, that we are only serving our own. But again, this is a change in mindset because we are focused on God and the church most of all. Notice this in Galatians 6.

Galatians 6:9-10 Let us not grow weary while doing good [so we are obviously supposed to be doing good], for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart [it is part of the job that God has given us to do, to learn to do good, to love our neighbor as ourselves, but notice how he finishes here]. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are the household of faith.

So we have a kind of priority set here for us from the apostle Paul. If we are going to do good—and we should try to do good to everyone. But if there is ever a question about whether we should do one thing over another, if the question comes up whether we should do some sort of church activity where we will be benefiting those among us, or doing an outside activity that we may have gotten involved in, it always comes down on the church side—the household of faith. It is just the way things have been set up here: first serve amongst yourself and if there is anything left over then you can serve others out there.

But God is taking care of them. We do not need to worry. Right now we are concentrating here amongst ourselves and that is hard to do in our small groups because there is not a whole lot of people to serve. But we found over the years that actually there is plenty to do if we just put our minds to it and think through what may be necessary, what may be helpful to the other people within our groups. It takes a little imagination, takes us a little bit of thinking, but we can find ways to serve one another and that is where it starts. So that is the second point.

The third man wants to do a similar thing as the second man. He wants to say goodbye to his family and settle his affairs. Jesus can tell though, remember I said He knows what is in men's hearts. He can tell that this man will always be flying back to his family whenever there is a need. His heart is with his family, first of all, and not with Christ. Family is a great thing. I do not want

to undermine the idea of family here. But again, it is a prioritization of our time and our efforts and our interests and that sort of thing. God always has to be on top.

And He tells us in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." He tells us in no uncertain terms here that we have to love our family less than Him. He is not really telling us to hate them. That should never be a part of a Christian's makeup. It basically means love less, as you probably heard in the past. It is a matter of priorities.

If there is ever a question between loving God and loving one's family, even your own life, then you *always* choose God. It is a very, very high standard. But, you know, family has been known to distract people in the church and even pull them out of the church because their devotion was to their own rather than to Christ Himself. So that is just something that we need to keep in mind, that we can show ourselves to be a bad disciple if we are constantly forsaking God to go run to help family, like this man Jesus knew would do.

Now Jesus summarizes all three here with His words about putting our hands to the plow. This is a metaphor for doing any kind of skilled work. When you are going to do skilled work, you have to be disciplined. You have to keep your eyes on what you are doing, you cannot let yourself be distracted. A person behind a plow cannot plow a straight line and control his oxen if he is distracted. If he is looking over there and trying to go this way, it is not going to work. You go where your eyes are. Have you ever done that in your car? They actually do this when they teach kids how to how to control slides in water, you know where water has been placed on the road, They always tell them look where you *want to go* and your hands will follow to help you straighten that car out. But if you look where you *are actually going* when you start into your slide, you are going to end up making things a whole lot worse.

So when you make a turn, look to where you want to turn and you will do it automatically if you want to straighten up. Your body almost innately knows what to do. Keep your eyes on where you want to be. And I saw my kids do this. They were going around in BMWs that they had used for this test and they had slicked up the road in front of them and they made them swerve in

it and then correct coming out of it and I thought, man if I had a BMW I would never let them do that. But they went through the slick and they learned how to correct. One of the main instructions was look to where you want to be when you come out of that controlled slide. And they figured it out. Nobody wrecked a car, nobody turned a car, nobody had a problem because they listened to the instructions and it worked.

And so Jesus is telling us the same thing. If you want to plow a straight row, look down to a goal way down at the end of the row and plow straight toward it. Do not let yourself get distracted by what may be happening in other fields or mom calling from the steps to say dinner is coming or whatever. Just do the job, finish the job, and then take care of it so you can plow another row straight coming back. So our dedication to putting on God's image and preparing for the Kingdom, the goal must be fixed. We have got to fix ourselves on that goal and what Jesus has told us to do, and go for it and not get distracted. Let us turn to Matthew 6:22 because in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said something similar but He uses a different metaphor.

Matthew 6:22-23 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Now, what He says here (some translations make this more clear), but He says, "Your eye has to be single." Your eye has to be fixed, it has to be on a certain priority, and if it is, then things will go fine because you are concentrating on it and you will be focused, you will be clear sighted, and you will get the job done. You will be healthy in whatever the endeavor is. But if your eye is bad, if it is diffracted, your sight is diffracted, if it is here, there, and everywhere, then you are going to have a mess on your hands.

So this metaphor here, this illustration is telling us that we need to be focused. We need to make sure that we keep the Kingdom of God in our sights at all time. Not let ourselves be distracted in any way.

Let us end in John 15. We are going to read verse 16 and then we will jump back to verse 8.

John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you."

John 15:8 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

God and Christ specifically chose us to be disciples and our job is to bear fruit. It is that simple. We will not be able to bear any fruit unless we divorce ourselves from a lot of the bad habits of human nature. They frequently spring up and spoil our discipleship. We are so easily distracted, we are so easily angry at others or want to fight or all these other things that we have seen today, especially self-exaltation. That is another one. We are always trying to put ourselves in the front.

So we need to be careful, and as we conclude here, we need to keep our minds focused on the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. Now that you know how *not* to be a disciple, let us go out there and be the best disciples we can be.