

## Series: Called to Follow

### “The Conflicts of Discipleship”

#### Luke 9:57-62

Today we continue in our study “Called to Follow” where we are learning all about Jesus’ call to be disciples. There are many people in our culture and world today who describe themselves as “Christians.” They may do so for a host of reasons, but in the gospels we find that Jesus did not merely call us to be people who claim to be “Christians.” Instead, He calls us to be devoted followers of Him. In fact, in each of the passages that we have studied, we have seen Jesus’ clear invitation, “Follow Me.” We have seen where He found Peter, James, and John and called them, “Follow Me,” and they left everything to follow Jesus. Last week we studied where Jesus noticed Levi sitting in the tax booth and said, “Follow Me,” and immediately Levi left everything behind to follow Jesus. That simple call to follow Jesus is a call to personal relationship with Him. When Levi left everything to follow Jesus, he responded with great celebration. He hosted a large banquet for Jesus and invited all of his fellow tax collectors and sinners to come and meet Him. I love the imagery of that celebration as he celebrated what Jesus had done in his own life, and also rejoiced that Jesus was willing for all to come to Him. Jesus’ actions were shocking to the Pharisees of the day. They asked, “Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?” We find in another passage they referred to Jesus as a “friend of sinners.” Jesus responded simply in **Luke 5:32**, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” His statement was rejected by the hardhearted crowd, but to the sinners it was a message of hope and deliverance for all who would trust in Him. I don’t know who you are, where you’re from, or what you’ve done, but the message of the Gospel is that Jesus invites you to come to Him. In **John 6:35, 37b**, “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst...And the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.’” Jesus also said in **John 7:37-38**, “Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.” ’” Jesus gives an open call of invitation for all to come to Him. This is wonderful news, but it is not without conflict. With the offer of sins forgiven, righteousness imputed, eternal life assured, and countless blessings in Christ, we would think it impossible to forfeit our opportunity to follow Jesus. But we discover in our text today that many things can hinder us from truly following Jesus.

#### SHOW TEXT

It may sound strange to describe discipleship in terms of a conflict. When we think of conflict we think of strife, contention, trouble, or even a battle. Many have the notion that if we just follow Jesus, all of life becomes easy like a bed of roses. However, God’s Word actually paints a very different picture of our life in Christ. If we look to Scripture, we find that there is indeed conflict in discipleship. Of course, there is a spiritual conflict that is happening as Satan wars against God’s people, seeking to prevent God’s plan and rob Him of glory. There will always be an external conflict against the promises of God. Those who harden their hearts against the Word of God will always combat it, which we see very prevalent in our culture today. The truth, though, is that the greatest conflict with Jesus’ invitation to follow is the conflict that takes place internally in our own hearts, minds, and souls. Jesus invites all to know Him, grow in relationship with Him, and

experience eternal life. He invites all to come and follow Him, but our text today shows us that the call to follow Jesus brings us face-to-face with the conflict of our own will. It brings us to the place of realization that we must go the Lord's way or our way, but we can't do both. It is in these moments that we wrestle with these questions – Will we do what we want, or what God wants? Will we trust ourselves, or will we trust Him? Are we striving to be the master of our own life, or are we submitted to Jesus as the Master of our life?

As we study our text today we find three specific people who had an opportunity to follow Jesus, but the Scripture implies that none of them experienced the blessing of doing so. They did not miss their opportunity because of any insufficiency in Christ, but due to their own personal unwillingness. There were conflicts within them, things they were unwilling to part with, that prevented them from being “all-in” with Jesus. It is interesting to note that none of the things that brought conflict were actually bad things. They were, in fact, good things, but even good things can become bad things when we allow them to stand in the way of doing God's will. When good things become idols that hinder us from surrendering to the Lord, they must be dealt with. As we discover each one, perhaps we will also see the reason we, too, are struggling. With each area of conflict I want you to consider, “Is this me? Is this also hindering me from following Jesus?”

## **I. The Conflict of Comfort (vs. 57-58)**

The text tells us that the scene transpired as Jesus and the disciples were going along the road. By this time Jesus was certainly growing in popularity. Everywhere He went, people followed Him because they wanted to hear Him teach and see the miracles that He might perform. In Matthew's account of this moment, he placed it in the middle of Chapter 8. Matthew organizes the gospel account by topic, not chronologically, and in this chapter, he tells us of Jesus cleansing a leper, healing the servant of a centurion who practiced great faith, and healing Peter's mother-in-law who was sick in bed with a fever. He simply touched her hand and immediately she was healed and got up and began to serve them. The chapter ends with Jesus meeting two men who were controlled by demons. Jesus rebuked and removed the demons, then sent them into a herd of pigs. This is the backdrop to what is being described in Luke 9 when the man comes to Jesus. Notice two things:

### **A. Man's Supposed Desire**

When we put together the account of Matthew 8 and Luke 9, we get a fuller picture of what is taking place. Jesus had made His way along the road, and now He instructs to depart to the other side of the sea. His ministry to the crowd at this moment is ending. As the disciples get the boats ready, someone in the crowd comes close. Matthew explains that the man was a scribe who said plainly, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” It appears in this moment that the words of the man were sincere. He didn't know what the crowd would or wouldn't do, and he didn't know when Jesus might be back this way again, but he did know that he did not want to miss his opportunity to be a part of this new and exciting movement. After all, who would knowingly want to miss out on Jesus? The scribe had seen the miracles and was amazed at Jesus' power. He had also heard Jesus' teachings, and his heart had been stirred by the words that he heard. We see here a man who has been moved by what he has seen and heard, and this leads him to an immediate response, “I want to follow You, Jesus.” His words and claim are clear, but his claim is clearly not enough. I do not mean to minimize the man's effort, but I do hope to show that his effort was not enough to lead to life change and

transformation. He appears to be so caught up in what he has heard, seen, and felt that he prematurely blurts out a statement of devotion that is not entirely true. As a scribe, he certainly was familiar with the things of God. He knew the Old Testament Law and the prophecies of a coming Messiah. When he heard the teachings of Jesus and saw the miracles, his heart was stirred to do something, but God, we remember, sees and knows all things. There was something in this man's heart and life that was preventing him from truly following Jesus, and God knew exactly what it was. His statement of commitment was really just an emotional response to the excitement of the moment, and Jesus addressed it in one subtle statement.

## **B. The Lord's Shocking Declaration**

In our American Church culture, we would probably expect Jesus to compliment the man and immediately add him to the group. After all, Jesus did give an invitation for everyone to come to Him, and this man was doing so. And, of all people, this was a scribe. Most of Jesus' disciples were fishermen and common, ordinary men, but a scribe in His group would certainly lend a measure of expertise, respect, and credibility to Jesus and His disciples. Human reasoning says, "Yes, finally, we have someone with us who will cause us to be respected." However, Jesus didn't stop to celebrate or commend the man because He knew that the scribe needed to consider all the implications of what he had just stated. "I will follow You wherever You go." Really? Is that true? The scribe had spoken before he fully knew what discipleship involved, and Jesus wanted him to weigh the cost. Jesus said it best in **Luke 14:28**, "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?" Knowing that the scribe needed to weigh the cost, like a master physician, Jesus knew exactly what to address. The Lord always knows what parts of our hearts and minds need to be tested. Jesus saw the scribe's heart and knew his thoughts, so He responded, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." I'm sure that this statement of Jesus was shocking. In one statement Jesus was stripping away any selfish motivation that might exist in the scribe's heart. If he truly believed in Jesus and followed Him as Lord, he would follow no matter the cost. No cost could be too great for gaining Christ, but if he was only following for a selfish motive or reason, Jesus' statement would be a hard pill to swallow. Jesus is telling the scribe, "You can come and follow Me, but you must understand that I don't have a place to lay My head. I didn't come to cherish the comforts of this world. If you follow Me, you must be willing to let go of your life of comfort and ease."

Can you imagine being the scribe hearing this statement? Scribes were very respected. They were not only entrusted to transcribe the Law, but because of their depth of education and training, they were also entrusted with writing up separate contracts and covenants. Due to their expertise, they were often closely associated with kings and government leaders. All of this made them very valuable, needed, and respected, gaining them great comfort and security. I am not suggesting that they were the richest people in the world, but they certainly had a very comfortable life. They didn't have to work in the fields by the sweat of their brow, pick up arms and go to war, or even make the weighty decisions of kings, yet they were well provided for and looked to. His job, his home, and his future were secure, thus making him very comfortable. Jesus knew the scribe's love of comfort and called him to let it go.

We need to recognize that Jesus was not condemning the possession of a home, a bed, or even a pillow. Jesus wasn't condemning comforts or even riches in themselves. He was condemning the heart posture that values comfort and riches over the Lord. Many people supported Jesus' ministry through their financial resources, and throughout the New Testament, many people of great wealth did the same. Even today there are individuals that God has blessed greatly monetarily, and through those blessings they give generously to the Lord's work. **\*\*ILL:** David Green, Cathy family, Harold Mathena. **1 Timothy 6:10** says, "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Notice it is not money that is the root of all evil, but the "love" of money. In other words, it is not really about the possessions that we own, but whether or not our possessions own us. Jesus is not condemning the fact that the scribe has possessions in his life, but He is pointing out that his possessions have made him so comfortable that he is now complacent and unwilling to surrender them to the Lord. Jesus gives this specific statement because He is showing that the scribe had become so comfortable with where he was in life that his comforts were actually more important than obeying and following Christ, and this would never work. Jesus is calling this would-be disciple to count the cost. How much will it cost? He answers in **Luke 14:33**, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does give up all his own possessions."

Jesus quickly moves on to the next person because the conflict in the first man is clear: **He was more focused on what he would lose than on what he would gain.** As such, he determined that his comforts were too great a cost for following Jesus. Before we move on to the next person with Him, let's examine our own hearts. Have we become so focused on our comforts that in our comfort and complacency we are unwilling to follow Jesus? What is Jesus calling you to surrender to Him today? What would you do if the Lord led you to give your vehicle to someone in need today? What would you do if the Lord led you to sell your house and move overseas to serve as a missionary in an orphanage, or to leave that awesome career to answer His call to ministry? What would you do if the Lord laid it on your heart to give a sacrificial and extraordinary offering to His work? What would you do if the Lord asked you to stand during the service so that someone else could have your seat, or to give up that extra 30 minutes of sleep so that you could be here early on a Sunday morning to be ready to serve Him? What would you do if the Lord burdened you to step out of your comfort zone and lead a Community Group? What would you do if the Lord laid it on your heart to give at least 90 minutes every week in service to Him? There's more to address in the passage, but we need to first start with the comforts in our own hearts that have become idols that need to be torn down. There should be nothing in our lives that we are unwilling to surrender to the Lord. Missionary **Jim Elliott** said it best, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Unfortunately for the scribe, he missed his opportunity.

## **II. The Conflict of Convenience (vs. 59-60)**

There are others still around seeing the interaction unfold when Jesus looks at another individual and calls him, "Follow Me." This man is given the exact same invitation as the other disciples of Jesus. What an incredible offer the Lord has given him, but once again another conflict arises.

### **A. Man's Personal Plans**

At first glance, this second man responds with what appears to be a very reasonable response, “Lord, I’ll follow You, but first please allow me to go and bury my father.” This sounds like a compassionate son. As we read his statement it is easy to assume that the man’s father has died and he now has to go and arrange the details of the funeral. However, as we look closer at his statement and the culture around him, it becomes very clear that his father has not died. In fact, if the man’s father was sick and near death he would not even be with the crowd in this moment. He would instead be at his father’s bedside, tending to his needs and ministering to his family. If his father had, in fact, already died he would certainly be observing the formal process of mourning which would take days and possibly weeks. My point is that neither of these scenarios is taking place at this moment. His father had not passed, nor was he likely even sick at the time. The man would not be on the beach at such a crucial time for his family. So what did the man mean when he referred to the burial of his father and of it taking place **first**?

To understand his statement, it is best to look at the context of that culture. The *Complete Jewish Study Bible* explains, “This does not mean that this would-be *talmid* (disciple) is traveling with Yeshua (Jesus) while his father’s corpse is waiting at home, stinking in the sun. The father is not dead yet. The son wishes to go home and live peacefully until his father dies in the future.” In support of this view, British theologian Alfred Plummer in the 1800s spoke of an oriental custom that was very similar. He said, “At the present day, an oriental son, with his father sitting by his side, has been known to say respecting his future projects: ‘but I must first bury my father.’ ” He goes on to explain how the phrase, “first bury my father” was a common figure of speech that referred to a son’s responsibility of helping his father in the family business until his father died, was properly buried and grieved, and then the inheritance claimed. Some believe that his issue was also motivated by wealth because his responsibilities would not be fulfilled until he had collected his own share of the inheritance. I’m not sure of the latter, but with this background, it sheds a whole new light on what was taking place. What the man was actually saying is this, “Jesus, I hear Your invitation, and I know it’s important, but let me **first** go do what I have already planned to do, and then I will follow You at a more convenient time.” The issue is about procrastination. Though we do not know every detail of the man’s life, he is likely the oldest male in his family and has certain cultural and familial responsibilities that he must fulfill. His life course has likely been mapped out for him for a long time, and he was unwilling to venture off his preset plans. So, he tried to bargain with Jesus that he would follow Him when it was a better time. Do you see the conflict? **He was more focused on his wants rather than the Lord’s will.**

## **B. God’s Clear Priority**

Remember, we have said repeatedly that we can’t go our way and go God’s way at the same time. Jesus offered a personal invitation to follow Him, but the man responded by saying that he first wanted to fulfill his own plans. Jesus then responds with a startling statement, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” We must understand that Jesus was not being rude in this statement. He was not suggesting that the man dishonor his father because the father had not even died yet. There is zero indication from Jesus’ life and ministry, or anywhere else in the Scriptures, that would indicate that Jesus would have hindered him from fulfilling the last duties of a son for his father. Instead, Jesus is requiring and commanding that the man have the right priorities in his life. He is in essence saying, “Don’t get distracted by the pursuits of this world, but set your

mind on things of eternal value. Don't fear your father's future need and provision when right now you need to focus on the kingdom of God. There's a greater work to be done." His statement about the dead burying the dead was a reference to the spiritually dead. He was saying to this would-be follower, "Let those who are spiritually dead be focused on the concerns of this world, but you, as a disciple, have a higher calling. Go and preach the kingdom of God." In other words, the man was thinking about the *potential* of his father's future physical death, when the *present reality* was that spiritually dead people all around him needed to hear and know the Good News of the Gospel. The greater need at this moment was for the man to follow Jesus and be sent into the world to proclaim the Good News of salvation to those who were spiritually dead, but this was very different than the plans he had for himself.

What about you this morning? What plans have you made that the Lord is calling you to let go of? What hopes and dreams do you keep clinging to that God is calling you to surrender and trust Him? Often when God begins to draw us to Himself we begin to think, "But what about this and what about that?" We have our plans because we prefer to live in the illusion that we are in control. So, when the Lord calls we say, "Not now, Lord. How about next week? How about next year? Let me first bury my father." Jesus is saying, "Let go of those worries and concerns. Quit dismissing and delaying. Follow Me and tell others about Me. Focus your life not on the temporary things that come and go, but on the things that are eternal." I don't believe that the Lord is calling us to dismiss legitimate responsibilities. We should be faithful in fulfilling our commitments. However, I do believe that we should never use our legitimate responsibilities as an excuse for delaying and disobeying the Lord. If we trust the Lord, surrender to Him, and seek Him, we don't have to worry about the details of all the possibilities concerning tomorrow. We just have to live by faith and obedience today. **Proverbs 3:5-7a** explains, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes." Do you hear this last statement? We can worry and fret about so many things when we try to walk in our own wisdom. In **Matthew 6:33-34** Jesus tells us plainly what our focus should be, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." We can't fix every possible thing that may come up tomorrow, but we can live faithfully for the Lord by living for His kingdom and sharing Him with others today. We don't know every possible scenario that may need attention in the future, but we can trust Jesus and follow Him today. Apparently, the second man also missed his opportunity.

### III. The Conflict of Close Companions (vs. 61-62)

As soon as Jesus addresses the second man, a third man speaks up. Much like the first, he initiates the response, "I will follow You, Lord." With the first statement, everything was good. It seems that he is willing to genuinely follow the Lord, and then he continued, "But..." That three-letter word has such a horrible impact. "Lord, I believe in who You are, and I definitely want to follow You, but...here comes my reasoning, here comes my excuse, here come my restrictions and limitations, here come my demands." What was it that could be so important that it would cause him to give excuses to Jesus? It was his deep love for his friends and family.

The man's statement to Jesus seems somewhat innocent. He simply says, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say goodbye to those at home." Clearly the man had family, friends, and

neighbors back home whom he loved deeply. It seems reasonable that he would ask to say goodbye to them first. After all, God did allow something similar for Elisha in the Old Testament. In 1 Kings 19, God led the prophet Elijah to go to Elisha and place his mantle on him. Elisha responded, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." In Elisha's case, God allowed him to do so. In the case of the man in Luke 9, Jesus reveals that his love for his close companions was a hindrance to his love for the Lord. While the text does not explain every detail of this, it is interesting that Elisha specifically named father and mother only, while this man gave a general statement about "those" who were at home. The implication is "all those" who are at home. In my paraphrase, he is actually saying, "Jesus, I will follow You, but let me first go to all the people that I love and give them a hearty 'goodbye.'" It seems that he wanted more of a farewell tour before leaving to follow Jesus. Perhaps he even hoped that they might talk him out of it, but we can't be sure. It is important, though, to note that there is nothing wrong with loving our family and friends, and it is vitally important that we do so. As a man, Scripture makes it clear that there are certain callings and responsibilities that we have in our role as a husband, father, son, and even a friend. However, when our love for these surpasses our love for the Lord, something is gravely wrong. If we are not careful, we can make good things, even God-given relationships, into idols when they become more important to us than the Lord. Jesus said it well in **Matthew 10:37-38**, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Jesus is examining the man, "Who do you love?" Sadly, his answer is clear, "Let me go home **first.**" **His focus was on whom he loved first, not on Who loved him first.** He was more concerned about who he would leave rather than Who he had found.

I believe this is a very important lesson for us today. It doesn't matter if you are a child, a parent, or a grandparent, Jesus is calling us to consider who we love **first**. Who is first place in your life? Who do you love most? **\*\*ILL:** Several years ago I was pastoring in Christiansburg and watching my young children growing up without really knowing my grandparents. I longed greatly for them to know the individuals whom I deeply loved and who deeply impacted my life. I remember at that time getting a phone call from a gentleman who informed me of a great church 20 minutes from my hometown that was looking for a pastor. Without reservation, I gave him my name and number. I privately hoped and longed that God would lead us back to be closer to family, but upon visiting that church, God deeply convicted me and showed me that I was in the wrong for considering that route. Why? Because my interest was only motivated by my personal desires concerning family, not my devotion to follow Him first.

There are many times I have had to examine myself to make sure that I am not making my family an idol or a hindrance to the Lord. Parents especially, we need to hear this today. Many of us have bought into a lie that if we're good parents, then we're going to follow our kids around and support them in doing everything they want to do. We should indeed love and encourage our children, but our calling from God is not to follow them wherever they want to go, but to lead them in the way that they should go. The best way we can love them is by loving the Lord first and by modeling for them and instilling in them a love for Him. Instead, we are easily buying into the temptations of the enemy. Instead of loving and living for the Lord first, we are often showing our children that we are loving and living for them and their will first, not for the Lord's. It should not surprise us then to find that the vast majority of young people who are growing up around the Church are leaving the Church in droves. It is not that they are leaving the Christian faith, it's that they are

leaving the version of Christianity that they saw half-heartedly practiced by so many. Maybe you're one of those young people sitting here today and you're thinking, "Yeah, Pastor Matt, that's me. I'm struggling to see if this is real." I want you to know that you're not alone. Jesus Himself is disgusted by it. Many years ago in **Revelations 3:16**, there was another church that was lukewarm, they were neither hot nor cold, and Jesus said, "So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." The word used is best translated "spew, vomit, hurl." That's how disgusted Jesus was with the fake facade of half-hearted devotion to Him. Jesus calls all who follow Him to love Him **first**.

This idolizing of family is even happening with many grandparents. It is wonderful to find joy in family, but we must remember that our goal is to lead them to the Lord, not to be their lord. Christian young people tell us today that the two biggest hindrances to them going on the mission field are: 1) a fear of being alone forever, and 2) the pressure of parents. Why? Because the parents question them and guilt them, "Why would you leave us? Why would you go so far away? How will we be with our grandchildren? What about our picture-perfect family? Is this the thanks we get for all we've done for you?" It is wonderful that their questions reveal love, but it is love for family or self over love for the Lord. We must remember that the Lord's call is to surrender everything to Him, trust Him with the results, and follow Him. Maybe that seems too great a cost, but consider what Jesus promised in **Mark 10:29-31**, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the Gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

Jesus' response to the family-first man was simple, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." We all understand that you won't go forward successfully if you're constantly looking back. Jesus knew that the man's divided affection would lead to divided attention. Who we love supremely will determine what we focus on and strive for. It will determine our actions. There is nothing wrong with a loving farewell, but if it gets in the way of obedience to God, it becomes a sin. Jesus saw that this man's heart was not wholly with Him, that he would be "plowing" and looking back, so He called him to let go of the past and follow Him. All of us have to reach the point where we are willing to break from our past so that we may follow Jesus and serve Him. Whether that be a good, loving past of a wonderful family or whether that be a sinful past that is haunting, we must let go of the past and focus on our responsibility to surrender to the Lord today. Paul said it well in **Philippians 3:13b-14**, "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Friends, there is good news: Jesus invites us all to come and follow Him. We can experience forgiveness of sins, new life in Christ, blessings overflowing, and joy never-ending, but we must count the cost. He has not call us to a half-hearted, wishy-washy relationship of convenience. He is calling us to be "all-in," fully devoted, trusting Him, surrendered to Him, and willing to follow Him wherever He leads. Are you "all-in" with Jesus? Is there a conflict that you need to settle today? If so, there's no better time than the present to begin fully following Him!