

**Awaken to the Call**  
**Luke 9:51-62**  
**3.31.19**



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

*“Have you ever experienced the frustration of entering into an agreement or relationship or job without the benefit of knowing what that relationship/job would require of you? Why do you think Jesus said that before we commit to discipleship, we should ‘count the cost?’” [Luke 14:28]*

*“Do you think it’s true that we actually value more highly those things for which we sacrifice? Why?”*

*“Have you ever expressed your love/devotion to someone in a way that others would have considered irresponsible or irrational? Did it seem like sacrifice?”*

*“What if Jesus put his finger on your, “But first”, issue? What would it be?”*

*“Where in your life are you realizing (celebrating) the joy of commitment? Why doesn’t it feel like sacrifice?”*

*“Are you able to identify a place in our life where a narrowing down of your options (devotion) may help you to realize a more full-life in Jesus?”*

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### **Teaching Notes...**

Growing up, there were a couple of our neighbors amongst whom was some proverbial, ‘bad blood’. Due to the inhospitality toward one another, the one neighbor made it evident that you could not ‘trespass’ his yard. This became problematic for me because his yard was somewhere in the middle of the most direct route to one of my best friend’s house. Therefore, I was forced to take an alternative, and much longer, route. His yard was “Samaria”.

The way to Jerusalem was through Samaria, but the Samaritans didn't like you *"cutting through their yard"*. Many (not all) would 'Waze' their way around to the east in order to avoid contact with these folks.

The Samaritans were descended from an exchange of population during the conquest of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 722 B.C. It created a "syncretistic" environment, religiously which developed into an "us" versus "them" proposition.

2 Kings 17:32 begins the description this way: *"They worshipped the Lord, but..."*

They had their own Bible, their own holy mountain, their own church (temple), their own pastors. It resembled the Jewish story, but it was a "best of" sort of amalgamation of spiritual expression, not unlike what we experience in our own culture (John 4).

### **Samaria is where we will spend the better part of our lives.**

With people who neither share our beliefs nor our conclusions about God and life in his world. The ones we too often make a habit of trying to avoid. By intentionally journeying with his followers in and amongst them, Jesus was, in some fashion, helping to establish the context for mission.

Jesus has been speaking and acting as if he were the "Messiah". Israel's long-anticipated rescuer and King. With the coming of the new King (and his Kingdom), Jesus will tell stories and offer challenges which invite people to re-think what it means to be God's people.

Characteristically, given the difficulty of travel, people only make the trek to Jerusalem for a couple of key reasons: 1) to participate in a scheduled festival, 2) anoint (crown) a new King. This was where their beloved King, David, was crowned and from where he ruled the people for/with God.

He sets out, not on an extensive 'lecture series', but on a journey filled with *"story-time with Jesus"* and dinner parties.

### **Along the way, Jesus uses a consistent refrain: *"Come. Follow me."***

It's an invitation that's challenging for us to receive because we are flooded with information, much of which is directed toward "easing our lives" instead of making them "meaningful".

The best we can offer, at present, it seems, is Oprah's most recent reflections which are provided as *"clusters of knowledge... here to help you unearth powerful seeds of faith in yourselves"*. They come in the form of quips from *"renowned dignitaries and superstars: from Deepak Chopra and Jay-Z to Joel Osteen and Ellen DeGeneres."* (USA Today, March, 2019).

So, our plumb-line runs right through the middle of our own disorderly heart. We are the authority. We are the standard of measure. Adherence to Jesus is, oddly, considered “conformity”.

Jesus calls. We respond. This is unusual because in the first century, *students chose rabbis*. Rabbis didn’t recruit students. Jesus takes a unique approach. He knows he is life and that his ways are the best response to “reality” (John 14), so he initiates contact.

The call always disturbs the status quo. It confronts us with our present approach to life and its viability. At this point, it is the ‘yes’ that simply initiates faith. We will spend time with Jesus, watching his movements, listening to his teachings, observing the ways in which he interacted with this one he called, ‘Father’, and the ways in which it so clearly compelled his interactions with others.

Jesus has come that we might have life, but he refuses to simply be a means to an end. We live in a culture that gives us permission to be self-indulgent and fickle; to maintain negotiable commitments of self-interest which are fragile and temporal.

*“Listen, Jesus. I’m lovin’ the idea. I’m in... ‘but first’...*

*I’ll follow you once I get myself established in this new career.* He wants in on the ‘delayed-entry’ program.

*Let me go get my financial future secured before I make any rash decisions.* Arab commentator interprets it this way: *“Let me go and serve my father while he is alive and when he dies, I will bury him and come find you”.*

*As soon as I get my kids through college, Jesus, I’ll have more time to allocate to this whole Kingdom endeavor.*

**No matter how stimulating our career, how exhilarating our latest adventure, or exciting our newest relationship, they are all too tentative and unpredictable to merit ‘devotion’.**

Jesus knew that the challenge had to be ‘sharp’ and clear. In his call, he seems to use some disturbing language. In Luke 14, he says, *“If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple.”* Jesus is speaking “comparatively”. It’s hyperbole.

**Jesus must have “first-love” status (Revelation 2:4).**

Jesus was NOT encouraging a return to some giddy- infatuation which we had when we first declared our love for him. In many ways, that’s a romantic ideal about Jesus, not love for Jesus.

**‘protos’**--- *first in rank; place of honor; influence*

If we don't love Jesus 'first' (as a centering love; love of first importance) then we can't love anyone else, rightly. If I don't love Jesus first, I can't love my wife appropriately, because I lose the "*as Christ loved the church*", example. If Jesus is not a priority love, then I can't love those who accuse or mistreat me, because my identity and significance is too wrapped in other's assessment of me.

If I don't have love for Jesus as of first importance, I can't love my neighbor as myself, because I don't know that kind of self-emptying love.

**The call to discipleship--- following Jesus into life--- can only be heard and embraced by those who...**

... receive it as an invitation and not an ultimatum.

... are fully frustrated and fatigued by their present approach, and not simply disgruntled or bored. Such an approach will never sustain the determination necessary to realize transformation.

... realize that there will always be a cost associated with following Jesus, but there will always be a greater cost for choosing 'not' to follow.

Jesus offered (2) stories (Matthew 13) about the heart-posture which initiates our growth into love: a *treasure in a field* and a *pearl of greater value*. **(4) things stand out:**

**The perceived goodness of the find.**

**The extravagance of the response prompted by what we treasure.**

**The 'opportunity cost'. What we will not experience as a result of our choice.**

**The sacrificial response and the joy it prompted.**

**You can't follow Jesus unless you are willing to follow him all the way into Jerusalem. There are no empty professions in Jerusalem, only costly companionship or betrayal.**

We are unable to reconcile the call to self-denial with the promise of abundance. We don't associate being happy, really-well-off, blessed, with self-denial and death.

So, we walk through life with this 'low-grade' dissatisfaction which is actually the fruit of our unwillingness to commit more fully to the way of Jesus.

**At the center of our motivation is the symbol of the cross.**

It was, undeniably, an image/symbol of "death". Although, for many, martyrdom would become a reality, Jesus was quite obviously speaking metaphorically ("daily"). He was addressing the notion of "self-denial" as the essential posture for one who desires to participate in the Kingdom.

If you ever leave the house, if you are in a significant friendship with someone, if you have a spouse or a job, you will have hundreds of opportunities to die to yourself this week.

Following Jesus is about those moments when you have the opportunity to either satisfy yourself or serve another; to keep your head in your I-Pad or engage your family; to “consume” vs “contribute”.

In “*putting it to death*” (Colossians 3:5; Romans 8:10-17) we actually function as if it loses its influence over us. We are no longer able to ‘relate to it’ in the same way (e.g. as with a dead person; we are no longer able to interact with it in ways that are influential).