

No Limit Disciples
May 29, 2016

When I was in college, I worked at a 7-Eleven convenience store. One evening a man came in to the store and said "This is a stickup." Both the assistant manager and I were behind the counter, the only two employees working that night. He looked at me with a smile, as if the man were joking. But when the man pulled out a 45 automatic pistol, it was suddenly no joke. We put all the money from the two cash registers in a paper bag, laid down on the floor, and he took off out the door around the building, and up through the woods. The police figured his getaway car was on the far side of the woods.

Another time, one evening, we were low on cups of some kind. I was sent down the street to another 7-Eleven store to borrow some. I walked in and a man was leaning on the counter with his back to the door. He turned around, holding a pistol on me, and had me move to the back of the store, while he finished his request for money.

Banks get robbed. Gas stations get robbed. Any business with a cash register might get robbed. But smaller businesses are more likely to get robbed, like a convenience store.

So, if you were afraid of getting robbed, why work in such a place at all? One woman I knew of, in another store had told her manager when she hired on, that if she were ever robbed, she would quit. True to her word, one afternoon, a man came in and robbed the store. As soon as she finished talking to the police and her manager showed up, she walked out and never came back.

I didn't understand her reasoning. If you are going to quit, because you get robbed, why start such a job in the first place and take the chance of getting robbed? Why would you put such a condition on your employment? Why not just go work somewhere else?

In the same way I don't understand why someone would put a limit on following Jesus. But people do that. In fact you,... in your heart,... might have such a condition for following Jesus. You may never have spoken it aloud. You may not even have thought it to yourself. But if you search your heart, is there a condition there on following Jesus?

So look at the statement in your outline.

I will serve Jesus as long as _____.

What would you put in that blank this morning? You might put something you want to happen in your life. You might put something you are looking forward to at some point in your future. It might be something you have always assumed would be true of you. Let me give you some examples.

- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I get to go to the college of my choice.
- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I get to marry some day. Not everyone gets to marry. Some of God's people have lived a long life without the joys and heartaches of marriage.
- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I get to be a dad or mom. Not everyone gets to be a parent who wants to.

- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I have a good income. Not everyone, even in our church, has a good income.
- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I am able to buy a house. Some will never be able to buy a house.
- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I get to retire from employment. Some don't see how they will ever be able to afford to retire.

Another way to fill in that blank is to put something you don't want to have happen. For example, you might say,

- "I'll follow Jesus, as long as... I don't develop a chronic health problem." But Christians get asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart problems as much as non-Christians do. The longer you live the more likely it is that you will develop some kind of health problem.
- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I don't lose an arm. As long as I don't lose a leg. As long as I can walk instead of being wheelchair bound. It is a good thing we have so many people willing to be soldiers for their country. We certainly cannot make such promises to them. Many have come back from Afghanistan and Iraq without legs or arms.
- I'll follow Jesus as long as... You don't call me to be a missionary. Or, a related one is, as long as you don't call my child to be a missionary. I have known of too many adults who claimed to follow Jesus, only to balk when Jesus called their child to be a missionary and move to another country.
- I'll follow Jesus as long as... I don't lose any of my immediate family members to death. There was a boy of about 11 years of age in my home church who turned his back on Jesus when his dad died. I know a man who, as an 18 year old was hit by a car when he was riding a bicycle. It was his fault. He had some brain damage and has mobility problems left from the injury. He blames God for not keeping him safe and has nothing to do with God now. Though he did not state his condition ahead of time, it was in his heart. "I'll follow you as long as You keep me safe."

These are common, unspoken conditions that some people have towards following Jesus. They hold the assumption that if they follow Jesus, He should keep such things from happening to them. And when God doesn't meet their expectations, they back out.

Do you have any assumptions about what Jesus should or should not do with your life? Are you assuming that you will not experience cancer? Are you assuming that you will not lose your spouse? Are you assuming you will never be homeless? Are you assuming you will live a certain number of years? Are you assuming that since you are a Christian, some possibilities of human suffering are automatically off the table for you?

Listen, Jesus doesn't make such promises to His soldiers. He doesn't promise health or wealth on earth. All of the good He has promised us comes in the afterlife. He wants us to know that. He wants us to follow Him, but with our eyes wide open when we join. **Jesus wants us to think carefully what it cost us to follow Him.** We cannot put limits on following Jesus. We cannot put conditions on following Jesus.

Look with me at today's Bible passage in Luke 14.

Luke 14:25-26 (NIV) Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

Now, Jesus does not mean for us to take these words of hate literally. Jesus is using a Jewish way of speaking to make a strong point. He is using one of several kinds of comparisons to make His point in a more powerful way. He is saying that family cannot come between you and God. God must come first. If you choose to follow Jesus, following Jesus must be your number one priority.

We see this in Jesus. Jesus served God's purposes, but He did not hate Mary or his brothers. He did not tell his disciples to divorce their wives. He did not tell them to abandon their children, or ignore the needs of their parents. Our missionaries don't reject their families, but they agree to go overseas for four years at a time to serve Jesus, far from family, friends, and the security of living in the United States.

Jesus is using a common Jewish comparison to give emphasis to the point He is making. He is telling us to think carefully about what it costs to follow Him. He is saying that **No relationship can be more important to you than your relationship to Jesus.** He does not mean literally that you must hate your relatives. He is strongly stating that no loyalty can be higher than your loyalty to Jesus. No relationship to anyone else can be as important to you as your relationship to Jesus.

Your devotion and loyalty, your love, for Jesus must be first in your heart, first in your prayers, first in your actions. Jesus must be the priority of your time, your money, your activities. Jesus must guide your speech, your behavior, your goals, and your values. In short, you must turn your life over to Jesus. You must put yourself fully into His hands.

Is Jesus first in your activities? Or are there some activities you engage in and ask Jesus to wait outside?

- "Don't look, Jesus, while I surf the internet. You don't want to go to the sites I'm visiting."
- "Jesus, you may not want to listen in on this phone conversation. There may be some gossip going on."
- "Uh, Jesus, You may not want to watch this TV show with me. It doesn't support your values."
- "Jesus, I've got a date tonight, and you can't come."

Jesus has some serious words for such attitudes.

Luke 14:27 (NIV) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

If you mark your Bible, you might want to underline carry his cross and cannot. A person who is carrying their cross is on their way to be crucified. Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. The Romans used it on the worst criminals and on anyone who talked about rebelling against the Roman government. One part of the crucifixion was to have the person carry their own cross to the place of death.

Jesus is using this as a picture of giving Him your life. To follow Jesus you must be willing to give up everything, even life itself, for Jesus. Our soldiers make a similar commitment to serve their country. We make them no promises of health or wealth or where they will live. Jesus asks all of that and much more.

Then Jesus gives two pictures to illustrate that becoming His follower must be given careful thought. The fact that he gives two pictures was another way of giving strength to the point He was making.

Luke 14:28-30 (NIV) "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

Thirty years ago our local Baptist association office was on Jumpers Hole Road. Every time I went to the association office I would go down Benfield Road and then up Jumpers Hole Road. There was a building on the left, made of brick, that sat unfinished for over a decade. I think it was to be some kind of office or business, for it did not look like a house. I often wondered when I saw it what happened that it was never finished. Did they run out of money? Did they not get clear title to the land? I never knew the story. But it was very sad.

Luke 14:31-32 (NIV) "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

You must consider carefully what it COULD cost you to follow Jesus. You must be willing to put everything into His hands. That is what we sang a few moments ago. "All that I am and all that I have, I give it to You. All my desires and all of my dreams, I give them to You." Those are not just words that mean nothing. They are exactly what Jesus is telling us to think carefully about.

Luke 14:33 (NIV) In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

You must be willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. You must be willing to give up your health, give up your possessions, give up your family, give up your life expectations, give up your self-centered hopes.

He doesn't say you have to give these up. While he told one man to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor and then come follow Him, we do not see Jesus telling anyone else to do so. He did not make His other followers do that.

Jesus isn't calling you to separate from your family. He isn't saying to stop taking your medicine. He isn't saying to sell all of your possessions. He IS telling us to put all of this into His hands. He is calling for a carefully considered full commitment of ourselves to Him.

If you are NOT willing to lose everything to follow Jesus, if you are not all in, if you are harboring limits in your heart, then you are not ready to be His disciple.

Jesus is not desperate for followers. He doesn't take just anyone. He accepts only those who are fully committed to Him.

Are you ready to give all of you to Jesus? Are you ready to serve Him no matter what it costs you on earth? Then tell Him this morning. **Pray yourself into His will.**

As you carefully consider the cost, also consider the gain. Jesus promises to forgive your sins and give you eternal life with Him. If you turn your back on Him, you are giving up the only Savior there is. It's not like there is a better eternal life alternative to following Jesus. You have to take the bigger picture into view as you consider the cost. Count the cost but also count the gain.

Give your life to Jesus. He gave His life for you. Give your life to Jesus, your heart, your future, your possessions. Put everything into His hands and follow Him.