

Following Jesus Luke 9:57-62

Often we work with a two-tier concept of salvation: those who want to be saved from sin and go to heaven pray to receive Christ; those who are especially dedicated live for him. Jesus does not endorse two-tiered spirituality. In this passage he sets out his expectations for *all* who 'follow' him: "I will follow you" (9:57); "follow me" (9:59); "I will follow you" (9:61).

Since the passage has only three sections, with only three directives, and the week has six days, I use the extra opportunity to illustrate the practice of application when our context differs widely from the first century. These differences do not permit us to change the meaning of the text, but they do require that we adjust our applications.

Day 1: Luke 9:57-58 Following Jesus without home: direct application

Some Christians take Jesus' injunction literally, either of necessity or from commitment to the poor. With some missionary agencies, stipends are never sufficient for staff to save up toward home ownership: they have to hope that either inheritance will provide them with a family home, or that they can retire to a 'missionary home' owned by their agency or another charity (provided the agency remains fiscally solvent). Others – often the young or the socially conscious – intentionally move into depressed neighborhoods, in order to live and serve among the poor, despite the privations and risks.

Notably, though, Jesus is not speaking just to missionaries, to youthful idealists, or to social organizers and advocates. He is speaking to all his followers.

While this is a giant leap for most of us, and while Jesus may be using hyperbole to make a point rather than laying down a minimum requirement for all his followers, we do well to give thought to how we might help those who, either from service to God or from economic deprivation – like Jesus – have no place of their own to lay their heads, no roof over their heads to call home.

Day 2: Luke 9:57-58 Following Jesus with our homes: 'baby steps'

The Son of Man 'has no place to lay his head.' But we generally have not only pillow under head, but also roof over it. Jesus is clearly using hyperbole to drive home his point. So we presumably need not feel guilty if we own a house, much less, a bed. Still, we cannot entirely dismiss Jesus' challenge.

Until the recent housing collapse, homes were growing bigger and fancier by the year. And it is not evident that Christians were any less susceptible to luxury than non-Christians. If you have not yet purchased a home, give some thought to the question, 'How big a home do I actually need?' If you own a home, give some

thought to its decoration, furnishings, and renovation: how much money can I justify spending on my temporal home? Either way, give thought to how you can best use your home not just for your own comfort, but also for hospitality and for other forms of ministry. God promises reward for money and effort we spend serving others, but none for what we spend on ourselves and our families. How can you reduce your investments in the comforts of this life, in order to invest in others now, and in your own eternal future?

Day 3: Luke 9:59-60 Following Jesus in our families: inverse application #1

In this saying, Jesus assumes that devotion to parents is as high a priority, and as strong a commitment, as owning a home. Many – perhaps most – of us do not live that way.

In fact, just the opposite. When students head off to college, many apply to schools across the country. When job hunting, many prefer to work out-of-state. When we marry, we may opt to live between both sets of parents rather than near either. When parents' age, we may prefer to place them in a 'retirement' home (apart from the cost), rather than having them live with us whenever possible.

While Jesus does not require us to attend state college, work locally, or live at home, he does presuppose that we will value and love our parents at all stages of our lives, and care for them as they age. This is, after all, one of the 10 Commandments (Deut 5:16), even coming before the commandment not to murder. And, as the apostle Paul reminds us, it is the first commandment which promises a blessing for the obedient (Eph 6:2).

How is your relationship with your parents? Is it as important to you as owning a home? What have you done recently – or what can you do regularly – to demonstrate respect and love for your parents?

Day 4: Luke 9:59-60 Following Jesus in our families: inverse application #2

While American culture does not reinforce love and respect for our parents, it does emphasize devotion to our children. So were Jesus speaking today, he would likely exchange devotion to parents with devotion to children as a rival to our love and service for him.

Consider how your devotion to your children may compete with your love for Christ, and how your commitment to your children may interfere with your involvement in ministry. The New Testament sympathizes with those who have families, recognizing that they will live in tension between two priorities: God and family (1 Cor 7:32-35). But it never allows us to suppose that we can neglect God or ministry for the sake of our families. Give some thought to your own family life: Is caring for your children taking priority over your walk with God? Is it totally removing you from ministry?

Evangelical culture often capitulates entirely to American culture with pious-sounding pronouncements, such as, “My children *are* my ministry.” Jesus expects us to prioritize service of God *over* family; Paul expects us to find time for both family *and* service. Do you need to make some lifestyle changes in order to balance work and family with God?

Day 5: Luke 9:61-62 cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21 Following Jesus right now!

God told Elijah to anoint a successor, to follow in his footsteps as a prophet to Israel. So Elijah found Elisha while he was out plowing his field, and called him to follow. Elisha had only one request, “Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will come with you.” Elijah’s response? “Of course!” So Elisha returned home, sacrificed his oxen, burned his plow, and held a farewell feast for family and friends. Then he set out to follow Elisha.

Three connections demonstrate that Jesus – and Luke – are alluding to this incident: Jesus, like Elijah, calls followers; the follower, like Elisha, requests permission to say goodbye to family. In his answer, Jesus references plowing, Elisha’s vocation.

One notable difference highlights the disconnect between the two accounts: Elijah permits Elisha to say farewell as an obvious courtesy; Jesus forbids the courtesy.

What’s the point? In this draconian prohibition, Jesus dramatically underscores two points. First, he is superior to Elijah. Second, just as Jesus preempts even the most fundamental demands on our lives (housing and family), so he preempts all our plans: he calls us to follow without delay.

No commitments can block us from following Christ; no commitments can postpone our following Christ.

Complete this sentence: “I will for Christ after I have ”
If you are waiting to achieve some goal or milestone before you give your focus to serving Christ, ask yourself this: Are his expectations for you likely to be any lower than for his contemporaries?

Day 6: Luke 9:61-62 cf. 9:22-23 Following Jesus in the path of the cross

Why does Jesus’ expect such commitment from us?

Because he demonstrated such commitment to us.

These exhortations are set in the immediate context of Jesus’ trip toward Jerusalem, where he would be crucified. “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (9:51). He was ‘taken

up to heaven' through crucifixion; that he had some idea of the suffering which was coming is evident in him 'resolutely' setting out.

We find a similar connection between Jesus' commitment and his expectation for us in this same chapter. After Peter affirmed that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus warned his followers that, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and ... be killed" (9:22). That being so, he expects his followers to follow him in this also: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (9:23).

So every time we celebrate Christ's death for our sins, to secure our salvation, let us also remember that he calls us likewise to die for him. In so doing, we do not earn his love; instead, we reciprocate his love.

Is there any aspect of your life in which you can in good conscience say, "Here I am dying – at least to a small extent – out of love for Christ and in service to him"?