



37: JESUS AIN'T YOUR SIDEPiece (Luke 9:57-62)

We live in a culture that is absolutely overflowing with distractions. We swim in the world of AI and social media. We're constantly being bombarded with sales pitches, information, misinformation, and ads. We can't even pump our gas anymore without watching a short video right at the gas pump!

But have you ever been distracted away from doing something that really matters to you?

When I was eighteen years old, I had just barely made it out of high school. I constantly gave into the addictions that attacked my mind and pulverized my grade point average down below a 2.0. I had been making terrible choices for four years and didn't see a real way out of my destructive patterns. I went to college briefly at the University of Akron in the Fall of 1999, and addiction had its way again. I failed out and dropped out. I got a job as a Barista. I was living at home with my parents just faking my way through life. I was regularly smoking weed and getting drunk all weekend. I wasn't doing hard drugs any more. But I was going nowhere in life. Something inside me to the contrary of my situation was constantly burning. My conscience was on fire with discontent and the realm of possibilities ahead of me.

I knew I shouldn't be in the cycle I was in. I was **distracted**. I was missing out on life.

Finally, during the summer that I turned 19, I got sober. It's as if the whole world exploded before my eyes with a new vibrance and tenacity never before experienced. With the distractions of THC and alcohol removed from my life, I was able to focus like never before. A flurry of creativity flowed out of me. A desire to work hard was reborn in me. A desire to redeem my academic record and get back into school burned in me. A desire for spiritual answers and a plethora of spiritual questions rushed into my mind and heart. I was on a new course.

Have you ever been distracted?

Plenty of people were too distracted during the time of Jesus to be able to commit to following Him.

Discipleship was not a casual affair to Jesus, as Luke 9:57 - 62 certifies. In a series of three encounters, Jesus showed the high priority he placed on discipleship. It was no accident that this text followed a passage that centered on rejection. Part of what made discipleship so demanding was the fact that some type of rejection was a given for the believer.

Discipleship takes focused commitment. Luke makes it clear that the task of kingdom preaching is the point of urgency, since two of the three calls mention the kingdom of God (on the kingdom, see Luke 10:1 - 24; 11:14 - 23; & 17:20 - 21).¹

The central term in this section is "follow" (vv. 57, 59, 61). Like the threefold call of Elisha, the text makes this central point repeatedly, but with one key difference: What involved a threefold call to a single figure in the Old Testament is a single call to three different figures in the New Testament (2 Kings 2:1 - 6). The three cases here involve two where the disciple initiates the encounter (the first and the third) and one where Jesus does. But the point in each case is the same: ***In life, discipleship must come first.***²

Let's dig into the text!

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57 As they were traveling on the road someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Luke 9:57-58)

The first exchange began with a confident statement by a man that he would follow Jesus wherever he went. This remark required reflection, so Jesus warned the man precisely what that would require. The man probably had in view the example of students following a rabbi, where they learned from the teacher. Following a rabbi meant nothing other than walking behind him, and it also suggested the student's submission to the teacher. But to follow Jesus meant a different form of discipleship. It was more like following a prophet. The prophet was an itinerant teacher, not part of an established community. He had an uncertain existence and lived on the donations of those who responded to the ministry.³

To follow Jesus, therefore, is to follow a prophet who calls one to faithfulness to God. The priority is to turn one's attention to the presence and arrival of God's kingdom. It requires viewing this journey with total dedication, especially since the Son of Man will not have a home. Unlike foxes and birds, which have holes and nests, the Son of Man has no home. He is an alien sojourning for a time in a foreign land. Rejection will be a given, and finding a home may be difficult. Jesus is preparing his prospective follower for those times that lie ahead.⁴

People believe in Jesus for all sorts of reasons. "Jesus healed me of my addiction!" "Jesus restored my marriage!" "Jesus drove demons out of me!" "Jesus physically healed me!" "I just really like Jesus!" "I just really like being a part of the Church!"

But then when it comes to having to give up comforts, security, or assurance and follow Jesus into the unknown, people get second thoughts! As soon as a valley hits, because of not being rooted in Christ there's a falling away, or a choking of the fruitfulness of the Word in them. (Matt. 13:21-22)

Jesus didn't mince words about it though! This person in Luke 9:57-58 seemed to want to follow Him at all costs, but Jesus responded by saying *"Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

David Wilkerson was a pastor of a little country Church in the hills of Pennsylvania in the 1950's. One evening he read the headlining newspaper article of his newspaper. The article showed a picture of a bunch of New York city boys in a gang who had

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murdered a handicapped person, and were on trial to go to jail for it. Wilkerson, who had recently given up his daily two hours of TV watching to dedicate to prayer to the Lord, felt something shift inside of him. He knew he had to go to New York to this trial and try to reach out to these murderous boys.

He did end up going to New York City. He didn't end up being able to connect with the boys, but ended up in some wildly insane scenarios- sleeping in his car in the worst neighborhood of Brooklyn, having street kids issue him death threats, and more.

The rest is history and is written down in Wilkerson's account "The Cross and the Switchblade". He ended up in New York City doing ministry to the toughest of the tough street kids, and founding the ministry called "Teen Challenge". Years later in the late eighties, he would plant what is now known as "Times Square Church", right in the middle of Broadway in an old theater.⁵ He saw many many many tough kids and street folks come into vibrant, life-changing relationships with Jesus Christ!

Will we really follow Jesus wherever He goes to lead us? Even if He leads us into insane situations that are beyond what we're willing to endure?

Guess what- even if we have no den or nest, and even if we have no place to rest our heads, God is with us! Through Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit can warm a soul on the streets. The Holy Spirit wants to breathe encouragement, life and warmth into the lives of desperate people. He also wants to breathe encouragement, life and warmth into our lives! No matter what we go through, no matter what we face, no matter the heartache, no matter the pain, no matter the difficulty, no matter the uphill battle, **we are Christ's and Christ is ours!!!!**

The text continues;

59 Then he said to another, "Follow me." "Lord," he said, "first let me go bury my father."
60 But he told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:59-60)

In the second case, a prospective follower wished to bury his father before joining the group. The request seemed reasonable, since burying a family member was a priority in Judaism (1 Kings 19:19 - 21). In fact, Jesus' request would've struck a Jewish ear as almost outrageous. But what was tolerated in the old era needed to be left behind in the more urgent new era. Strikingly, Jesus said to the man, "Let the dead bury their own dead." The seemingly harsh reply was rhetorical, but it made the point that discipleship and one's commitment to the kingdom took priority even over family considerations.

⁵ <https://youtu.be/8dUvO0FmsDM?si=7wVvGpU2tHr2HANO>

This saying was similar to other texts from Jesus that spoke of hating mother and father — which meant that if a choice was to be made, God needed to have first place. Taking care of funeral rites for a family member was a lower priority. Instead, this man had to go and proclaim the gospel. More important than caring for the dead was preaching the offer of life. Disciples must move forward to share that need, not memorialize what is past.⁶

Additionally, there may well be one significant difference between discipleship in Jesus' era and discipleship in the West today after two thousand years of church history. In Jesus' time, those who came to him often had to leave their family because of their decision. Jewish rejection was so strong that to decide for Jesus meant deciding against one's family.⁷ This is still the case for many in Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures, as well as extremely conservative Jewish cultures. But for many westerners, following Jesus doesn't usually mean rejection from family. Take it from me, I came to Christ in an agnostic family. My parents were initially annoyed that I became a Christ follower, and tried to reason me out of it, sometimes my Dad, now a believer, even tried to cuss me out of it! But I wasn't disowned for my faith.

But despite what kind of relationship we have with our family, is Jesus, telling us that discipleship- following Him- is more important than our spouse? Our kids? Our parents? Our close friends? Our extended family?

Yes- that's exactly what Jesus was saying.

Again, this seems like such a harsh word from Jesus. But there is a freedom in it. Jesus also said poignantly in Mark 10:29-30;

29 *"Truly I tell you," Jesus said, "there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time —houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions —and eternal life in the age to come.*

The big point is that Jesus deserves all of our love, affection, and devotion. And He deserves it all because He can handle it! Plus, He'll respond to it with more love, affection, and devotion to us than we could even imagine! Guaranteed, people will let you down. People are fickle. People are sinful. People have mixed motives. People have good days, bad days, good weeks, bad weeks, good months, bad months, good

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years, and bad years! But our Jesus is **consistent** through it all! And He is also **Lord** of all! Col. 1:15-17 states of Jesus;

15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.*

Instead of trying to love your spouse or significant other, why not ask the One who created your spouse or significant other to love them **through** you??? Instead of trying to love your kid, why not ask the One who created your kid to love them **through** you??? Instead of trying to love your friend, why not ask the One who created your friend to love them **through** you??? Instead of trying to love your neighbor, why not ask the One who created your neighbor to love them **through** you??? Instead of trying to love your enemy, why not ask the One who created your enemy to love them **through** you???

You think you can do a better job on your own? Man I know how messed up I am, and I hope you do too. I can't tell you how many times I've made mistakes with my wife, my kids, my friends, my neighbors, my co-workers, and more. We all do this. Even the little mistakes are impossible to avoid in our flesh.

But I'm telling you, the Holy Spirit can operate through us. We can ask the Holy Spirit in prayer- "Holy Spirit, come fully into me and be the better husband, wife, parent, child, friend, co-worker, neighbor, citizen, and worker **for** me and **in spite of** me! You think He won't do it? He will! Plus, He'll even do us one more and keep removing the garbage from our lives that keep Him from having His way more fully in us! Oh what a glorious reality- the third person of the Godhead literally dwelling in us!!!!

Back to the text!

61 *Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house." 62 But Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:61-62)

A similar request surfaces in the third encounter. Here a man wants to tell his family farewell (see Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19 - 20). Again Jesus issues what on the surface seems a harsh warning: Those who look back are not fit for the kingdom. Jesus' remarks have Old Testament precedent. Lot's wife preferred Sodom and looked back. The Israelites longed for Egypt and complained because God brought them deliverance and a journey through the desert. Those who cling to life on earth as it is are not ready

for the reformation that salvation brings. Jesus saves not just to grant us a place in heaven but to transform us here and now into new people, separated from the world (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Titus 2:11 - 14). The disciple cannot hang onto the old life and be prepared for the rigors of discipleship. Jesus wants to make this truth clear from the start. Salvation is not a road paved with ease, for true spirituality takes discipline.⁸

The picture of looking back while plowing is apt, since in Palestine the terrain is rugged. To look back while plowing was asking to make mistakes in preparing the field. The task required a focused eye on what lay ahead. So discipleship demands attention to the rough road before us. To look back risks being knocked off course.⁹

The tendency of human beings is to look back and think “things were better back then!” I constantly do it. If we have a rough day with one of our kids I think, “Maaannnn... I remember when me and Sarah were married and didn’t have kids yet!” If Sarah and I get in a fight, for a moment I even think, “Maaannnn... I remember when I was on my own.” When things are going rough in my current job I think, “Maaannnn... I remember when I had that other job.” I’m just being real with you all. Come on- if you’re actually honest about your inner thought life, you think things like this and worse too. Unless you’re just a religiously smug know it all.

It’s the human condition to not be committed to the things God has right in front of us!

Just think of the Israelites! They had literally spent 430 years as slaves in Egypt (Ex. 12:40). That’s a lot of generations! The conditions were unlivable and brutal for them there. Through miraculous signs and wonders of the Lord, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. They literally miraculously walked through a parted Red Sea, and got to the other side, only to see the rushing waters engulf the Egyptian army that was coming after them to slaughter them. They sang a song of deliverance and celebration.

But then came the wilderness. Wandering, waiting, struggling, sinning, messing up, getting confused, backtracking, and experiencing and seeing God’s judgment firsthand. They forgot about the amazing deliverance that God performed by the time the account of Numbers 11 took place;

4 *The riffraff among them had a strong craving for other food. The Israelites wept again and said, “Who will feed us meat? 5 We remember the free fish we ate in Egypt, along with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. 6 But now our appetite is gone; there’s nothing to look at but this manna!” (Num. 11:4-6)*

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Yea we were slaves in Egypt. Yea we were beaten. Yea we were overworked and not paid. Yea we could get killed by a slave master any day. Yea we despaired of existence. But man we're gonna forget that and listen to the "riffraff"- the mixed multitudes who have no faith among us. We miss the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. What's with this stupid miracle honey bread? We wanna go back to Egypt!

No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God! The thing we need to be most faithful to is the things that God has put right in front of us! By the power of the Holy Spirit, be a faithful spouse, be a faithful kid, be a faithful parent, be a faithful worker, be a faithful neighbor, be a faithful citizen, be a faithful home owner, be a faithful apartment renter, be a faithful friend, be a faithful attender of the Church, be a faithful volunteer in the Church, be a faithful discipler of people, be faithful to the mission, the people, and the neighborhood that God has called you to! Stop thinking "woulda, coulda, shoulda!" What good is that gonna do you anyway?

Jesus is not your sidepiece.

Jesus deserves the first seat in everything in your life. He deserves the first seat in your thoughts. He deserves the first seat in your choices. He deserves the first seat in your finances, your relationships, your habits, your time, and your use of your abilities! **Jesus is not your sidepiece!** He won't tolerate being put on the shelf!

Why do you want the leeks and onions of the past anyways? Do you really miss the sins of your past? The places your lust led you to? The places your addictions led you to? The places your bad choices led you to? The places your immaturity led you to?

Do you really want to rewind back to a worse time? Why is it in our nature to think things were better "then" when they **weren't**? Maybe the real problem is our current bad attitude. Maybe the real problem is our current bad perspective!

Cause back then, we didn't know Jesus like we know Him now. Back then, we lacked the wisdom that the Holy Spirit has given us which we possess now. Back then, we were in situations we wouldn't be in now. Back then, we thought we knew better when we didn't. Truth be told, for so many of us, we were not the spouse, the parent, the worker, the citizen, the neighbor, the disciple, and missionary back then that we are now, so why do we want the stinky leeks and onions?

Jesus ain't our sidepiece! Let's remove every distraction that keeps us from Him! Let's not allow any of the bad things keep us from His presence- the drugs, the smoke, the booze, the lust, the porn, the anger, the violence, the foolishness, the adrenaline addictions, the religious smugness, the hypocrisy, the duplicity, and the deceptiveness!

And let's not let any of the good things keep us from His presence; our love for our spouses, our kids, our friends, our neighbors, our Church people, our cities, our physical health, our mental health, our emotional health, our psychological health, even our spiritual health!

Cause guess what? If we stop making Jesus our sidepiece and make Him the first love that He deserves to be, He'll remove our addiction to the drugs, the smoke, the booze, the lust, the porn, the anger, the violence, the foolishness, the adrenaline, the religious smugness, the hypocrisy, the duplicity, and the deceptiveness! He'll love our spouses, our kids, our friends, our neighbors, our Church people, and our cities through us! He'll take care of our physical health, our mental health, our emotional health, our psychological health, and our spiritual health better than we ever possibly could!

But oh man do we need the Holy Spirit to do this.

Who can remove an addiction to fentanyl? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove an addiction to meth? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove alcoholism? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove weed addiction? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove nicotine addiction? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove crack addiction? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove porn addiction? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove sex addiction? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove an unrelenting spirit of anger and rage? The Holy Spirit! Who can remove a murderous spirit? The Holy Spirit! Who can help us make the right decisions all the time? The Holy Spirit! Who will encourage and protect us through everything? The Holy Spirit! Who will make us desire the things of God? The Holy Spirit! Who will move us from religion into a tender relationship with God? The Holy Spirit! Who will cut through our fake Christian masks and get us to get real? The Holy Spirit! Who will make us the same person behind closed doors as we are in public? The Holy Spirit! Who will prevent us from being deceptive and destructive? The Holy Spirit!

Stop trying, stop striving, stop struggling. Surrender everything to the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit fully baptize you and fill you. Invite Him in, **NOW!** (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5) Just let Him fully have his way!

As disciples in the world, we had better be prepared. God may call us to a place where comfort is uncertain, for the Son of Man has no lay to place his head. Because of the uncertainty, one cannot let the daily worries of this life overcome the demands of being a disciple, since the dead are to bury the dead. Discipleship has an urgency to it that should have first place. And once we go, we should not look back. God does not issue his call for a season, but for a lifetime. Service for the kingdom begins at the moment we receive Jesus and continues until the Father calls us home. What does this look

like? In detail, it is different for each person. Some are called to serve where they grew up; others are called to journey thousands of miles away. Some live in hardship and lose their life for the faith, like Peter who died for the faith, while others live a long life, like John who apparently died of old age. What is the same for all is the call that discipleship should have priority over everything else.¹⁰

Jesus ain't your sidepiece! Wherever He leads you, wherever He calls you, that's the place to be. Let's go with Him together!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What has distracted you in the past? What is currently distracting you from God's presence?
2. What have you had to give up to allow Jesus to more fully have his way in your life? Has there been regret or joy in those sacrifices?
3. Who are the most important people in your life? How could making God more important help or hinder you from loving and valuing those people?
4. Have you fully invited the Holy Spirit to baptize you and fill you? (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5) Pray to invite Him to do so now.

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