

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 9:46-62

Much of the rest of the Gospel of Luke can be considered further elaboration upon Luke 9:23, where Jesus said, *“If anyone would come after me (or follow Me, or be My disciple...depending on your version/translation) he must...”* The bulk of Jesus’ teaching in the book of Luke will now come to the forefront. And the broad, general theme of His teaching (most of which is directed toward His disciples) has to do with what it means to follow Him. So we will see lessons/instructions, concepts/ideas that followers of Jesus need to internalize. So in other words...we’ve got some important stuff coming and we need to pay attention to it, embrace it, embody it. Ready? Let’s go!

(9:46-48)

What does it mean to be “great” according to Jesus? Well, it’s certainly a different standard of measurement than the world uses. As the disciples were arguing amongst themselves as to which of them was the greatest (or superior), I would have loved to have heard the cases they were making for themselves. Whatever it was, we can safely assume it was based on a worldly value system. So Jesus turns the whole argument on its ear by offering a different standard by which to measure.

“The least among you all—he is the greatest.” (9:48b) Or as Mark puts it, *“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”* (Mark 9:35b) And Matthew’s gospel has the most extended thoughts on this moment (see Matthew 18:1-9) a portion of which says, *“whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* Words like “least”, “humble”, “servant” run very counter to the world’s idea of “greatness”. I suspect most of us know this. This isn’t new to us. So I suppose the real question is: have we internalized this? Do we embody this? Functionally, practically, does this describe us? On a heart level, do we embrace this?

On a deeper level, we could ask if we see this as an easier or harder way of thinking/being? It’s certainly challenging from the perspective that it goes against what we’re regularly exposed to from the world, against how we’ve been conditioned. But, the way of the Kingdom of God isn’t simply morally superior (though it is that), once embraced/internalized it’s actually easier and brings with it more freedom. We don’t have to strive to make ourselves more than we are. We don’t have to worry about how other’s view us. Being lowly, humble, servant-oriented, once learned, is actually easier. But it takes trust to begin the journey down that road.

(9:49-50)

Next we see an abrupt change of topic--I personally suspect it was due to how uncomfortable Jesus’ words were to the disciples. So we see Jesus address another aspect of broken humanity...that being how we tend to view others, and how territorial we can be. Apparently some guy was casting out demons in the name of Jesus. But since he wasn’t part of “the

twelve”, the disciples told him to stop doing that. Jesus took exception to that. We don’t know anything about this guy, but since he was doing his “ministry” in the name of Jesus we can assume that he was at least favorably disposed to Jesus, and not against Him in anyway. So Jesus basically said (to paraphrase), “leave him alone...let him do what he’s doing.” We have a tendency to be weary of those who “aren’t on our team”. Jesus seems to be saying, “you need to expand your understanding of ‘our team’, and more importantly, you might want to keep in mind that it’s ‘My team’, not yours.” (again, paraphrasing).

So perhaps, to bring this idea home a bit, a question we can ask ourselves is: how do we feel when another ministry that we’re not a part of is seeing success? Are we happy and excited for them? Do we see it as a “win” for the larger cause (i.e. the Kingdom)? Or are we sour, maybe even envious, and downplay “them” because they’re not “us”. That’s a mentality/attitude Jesus wants to thwart in His followers.

(9:51-56)

Verse 51 is a key turning point in the book of Luke, “*Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*” We are now about 3-6 months from His crucifixion. Even though we’re only at the tail end of chapter 9 (of 24 chapters), the bulk of this book really focuses on these last 3-6 months of Jesus earthly ministry. (And this is really true of all 4 Gospels.) Jesus knows His mission and destiny and heads toward it with resolve.

So from the region of Galilee the most direct route to Jerusalem (which is in the region of Judea) is through Samaria. But the typical Jewish person, if they were traveling between Galilee and Judea, would go way out of their way to avoid stepping foot in the region of Samaria. But Jesus is no typical Jewish person. He intentionally went through Samaria. (And we know from John chapter 4, this isn’t the first time Jesus went into Samaria.) We know that the Jews despised the Samaritans, but the feeling was mutual. That’s why we see in this passage, when the Samaritans found out that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, they become less than hospitable. But the crux of this section, when it comes to being a follower of Jesus, is the interaction between James and John with Jesus.

When the Samaritans did not welcome Jesus and His disciples, James and John had the bright idea that they should call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans. (An overreaction we might say.) I suspect the reason James and John even had such a thought (beyond their own hatred toward Samaritans which Jesus certainly would address), was that they had recently had an experience with Elijah on the mount of Transfiguration and their idea is reminiscent of a story of Elijah back in II Kings chapter 1.

In the simple statement that Luke offers, “*Jesus turned and rebuked them.*”, we see that an expectation that Jesus has of those who would follow Him, is that they share His value of people, and all that it takes to properly deal with people in a Kingdom way (things like love, compassion, patience, grace, forgiveness, blessing instead of cursing, etc.).

(9:57-62)

Next we see brief interactions between Jesus and 3 unnamed/unknown individuals. The first guy said to Jesus, *"I will follow you wherever you go."* To paraphrase Jesus' response, "Are you sure?" Basically, Jesus wanted this guy to count the cost of being one of His followers. If Jesus we're talking to us, early 21st century Americans, with our middle-class values, He might ask us to consider the cost of giving up our safety, security, comfort, and convenience. Do we even consider those things as obstacles/barriers to our fellowship of Jesus? **Is it possible that our discipleship unto Jesus has been compromised because we haven't paid the cost necessary to follow Him properly/well? Is it possible that we want to hold onto our version of the "American Dream" while trying to grasp the Kingdom of God at the same time?**

Jesus approached another guy and said "Follow Me." The man's response, *"Lord, first let me go and bury my father."* The key word here is "first". In other words, "Well, Jesus, I've got another priority that I need to take care of. Once I've taken care of that, then I'll follow you." Again to paraphrase Jesus, "That's not the way it works, bud." Following Jesus is meant to be our first priority. Again, to bring this home to us, is it possible that we allow other priorities to coexist with our following of Jesus and seeking His kingdom? Do we allow Him to orchestrate and structure our lives and priorities, or do we just try to manage our "religious/spiritual" priorities amongst all our other competing priorities that we're trying to manage?

Incidentally, some scholars think that this guy's excuse of burying his father doesn't necessarily mean his dad was dead. Rather, he wanted to wait until his father passed (and thus receive whatever inheritance he might be up for) and then he would follow Jesus. So to follow Jesus immediately could likely mean putting his inheritance at risk. If that's the case (and it could very likely be) we could say that Jesus wants our future security tied to Him and not to our inheritance (or savings accounts, retirement accounts, etc.) But even if that wasn't the case, even if the man's father had recently passed, Jesus still stakes His claim on this guy (like He does to us as well). As N.T. Wright states, "The obligation to bury one's father was regarded by many Jews of the time as the most holy and binding duty of a son; but Jesus says that, too, is secondary to the call to follow Him and announce God's kingdom."

A third guy came along and said, *"I will follow You, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."* There we see again, "but first...". We see here (and really with the last guy too) the tendency to want to follow Jesus on our terms instead of His. That demonstrates a lack of understanding of the idea of His lordship over us.

This does seem to be, sadly, a common approach in which many people deal with Jesus. "Yes, Jesus, I want to follow you...*but first*; let me get my education taken care of. Or let me get my career off the ground. Or let me get married and start a family...then I will follow you wholeheartedly." But what we see Jesus saying in this passage is that following Him comes first. Other goals or aspirations are submitted to Him. I think the reason for this common approach is because if we put Jesus first, it might mean to sacrifice other goals and aspirations. Exactly!

So what we really want is for Jesus to bless our goals and aspirations as opposed to Him being our sole goal and aspiration out of which He will shape and form our lives. So it's really an issue of control. Do we want ultimate control of our lives or are we willing to give control over to Jesus? At the end of the day, that's what Jesus is calling us to...to give the reins of our lives over to Him.

- Q. (possible icebreaker) Do you have any "standing arguments" (unresolved issues that come up from time to time...or perhaps topics/issues you try to avoid because you know it'll cause an argument) with anyone?**
- Q. Describe what your understanding of being a Christian meant when you first believed, versus your understanding of being a follower of Jesus now.**
- Q. How has being a follower of Jesus effected your heart/attitude in regards to serving others? How do you work at being last/least as opposed to first/greatest?**
- Q. What are the various challenges you've faced in striving to be humble?**
- Q. Is there anyone (or group of people) that you struggle to embrace as being on your/our team?**
- Q. If you could call down fire from heaven on someone, who would it be? In your own words, articulate what Jesus' rebuke of that might be. (If that seems too harsh, try this one: who do you have a tendency to look down upon or negatively label? What might Jesus say to you in regards to that.)**
- Q. What has it cost you to follow Jesus?**
- Q. What goals/aspirations or expectations have you sacrificed (let go of) in order to follow Jesus more faithfully? (Or what, perhaps, are you currently struggling with letting go of because you feel Jesus may be asking you to?)**
- Q. How have you experienced the desire for safety, security, comfort, and convenience effect your faith?**
- Q. What tension points (in the form of competing priorities) do you face in your life? Where/how do you find yourself saying to Jesus, "Yes, Lord, but first..."?**
- Q. In what ways have you found the way of Jesus to be easier, to bring more freedom, than the way of the world?**

