

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life

Series for January 23: A lifestyle of sacrifice

January 11, 2011

We are a people who love processes and procedures—not just people in the United States but the entire planet. Whether it's starting a new job with the possibilities of promotion, buying a new car or home, we like to see the whole thing laid out for us.

And go ahead and try to show someone how to do something—anything—without starting off with, “First, do this. Then,” It puts us on the same page with one another; we are acknowledging we understand one another.

It works in reverse too, how many of you know what it's like to do exactly what you were supposed to do and then be told, “No”? You feel cheated and wronged because you've done everything expected of you and now the other person, or organization, needs to hold up their end of the agreement.

The Bible is full of processes, too. Take some time to find verses and passages that have “if, then” statements in them. “If you do this, then this will happen.” Of course, God has always held up his end of the deal.

Jesus is having one of these “process conversations” in Luke 9:23-24. He says, “If you want to follow me, you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me.” Did you see it? First, deny yourself; then, take up your cross daily; then, follow.

In educational worlds, it's called invariant sequencing, and it means just what the name implies, you can't vary from the sequence. You have to do

the first thing first, then the second thing second, and so on; you can't skip step one and start with step two.

Let's put Luke 9 in our context and the process or steps that Jesus lays out. You see, many of us struggle in our spiritual lives and our walks with Christ because we've tried to alter the sequence or skip steps altogether. Many of us are trying to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, but we're having difficulty—and getting frustrated—because we haven't denied ourselves first. You can't have your hands full of what you want to do and try and pick up a cross as well. When we say yes to Jesus we should be saying yes to him with empty hands that are ready to be filled with our crosses, which is the cause of Christ.

Saying "yes" to Jesus means saying "no" to yourself, sacrificing. And when we say "yes" to Jesus in the way that he is calling us, it means we are handing him a blank check of sorts. You sign your name and ask him to fill it in with whatever he wants you to do with your life. He then gets the final say so on your life of which you already have said "yes" to.

Too many times today, and even what we see in verses 57-62 of Luke 9, people are giving Jesus the conditions by which they follow him, and he just won't accept the terms. Understand this, Jesus never negotiates, if he did, it would certainly be to our undoing.

Remember a time when you had your plans all figured out only to have them changed and worked out for the better? How about those of you who just knew you were going to marry a particular person because you were so in love only to break up and find the love of your life? Perhaps we'd be better off and much happier if we actually said "no" to ourselves.

Of course this flies in the face of culture which is telling you to say "yes" to you and just respect what others have felt culture has told them to say "yes" to. Pretty easy to see how it can really spin out of control, isn't it?

When you and I are left to what we want and not having to sacrifice anything, we quickly find ourselves jammed up and crying out to a God who is faithful and keeps his end of the deal, even when we don't.

Luke 21:1-4 and we see Jesus observing worship. The Mark 12:41-44 account is much more intentional about saying Jesus pulled up a seat to watch this happening. Catch the weight of that, Jesus observing people worship, watching you and me worship him. Does it make you feel uneasy? If anything it should make us more aware of what we're doing and saying and feeling.

Jesus' attention is captured by a poor widow who, in the midst of all the others, comes and puts in an entire treasure in the form of two small coins. It's a big enough deal that he calls his disciples to himself—because they're obviously not paying attention, typical —and wants them to see this amazing thing. Jesus is so unimpressed with the large amounts of money some are depositing; you can't buy Jesus' attention or affection, particularly since all the money in the world is his anyway.

It's funny when you think about trying to buy Jesus' love with his own money. If it's all really his anyway, all your stuff and all your money, then is there anything you can really have? Yes, Jesus. The only thing you can have or possess is Jesus, so why do we spend so much time and energy trying to have something more?