

Walking in the Way of Jesus



Dear Friends,

Part 1 - Jesus' Way of Sacrificial Love

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." (1 John 3:16). Jesus' way was a way of sacrificial love. His was a life of toil and trouble, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, devoted service to the multitudes demanding His attention. The Gospels record, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and illness" (Matthew 9:35). What a sacrificial life these few words express! Think of the hardships involved. Just travelling from Capernaum to Nain meant a day-long walk-in mountainous terrain under the intense glare of the Middle East sun. Thus Jesus wandered from town to town. When the people of Capernaum were unwilling to let Him go, He said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). In His boundless love for human souls Jesus chose the strain of a travelling ministry to share the Good News.

Up and down the country He journeyed, on the road for days as He travelled from town to town.

Day and night He served the people and His followers, sacrificing comfort and ease, peace and quiet. Again and again, He forwent the solitude He coveted with His Father. Crowds followed Jesus wherever He went (Luke 7:9,11). They “pressed about him” (Mark 5:24), even “pushing forward to touch him” (Mark 3:10). On one occasion “the whole town gathered at the door” (Mark 1:33). Even in His hometown Capernaum He couldn’t flee the crowds, not even at night. At sundown people came from everywhere with the sick and possessed (Luke 4:40-42). Ministering to people’s needs till late at night, Jesus must have had many sleepless nights. At times the pressure of the crowds was so great that Jesus and His disciples “were not even able to eat” (Mark 3:20) when they came back home exhausted. Tired and hungry after hours of walking, Jesus would have immediately tended to the people, healing the sick and casting out demons. Sometimes the pressure of the crowds was so intense that “Jesus could no longer enter a town openly” (Mark 1:45). We can only imagine how often He would have made a 30 or 60-minute trek into the wilderness in order to converse and eat with His disciples in private. “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest’” (Mark 6:31; Luke 5:16).

In His desire to spend time alone with His Father, Jesus would even send His disciples on without Him, while He climbed a mountain to pray (Mark 6:45-46; Luke 5:16). After long hours of walking and ministering, He did not shirk climbing at night. There at the mountain summit, free from crowds, He could pray in peace.

Not once did He indicate that the hectic life and constant pressure of the crowds were too much. He served selflessly, despite knowing what was in a person's heart (John 2:25) and how shamefully His sacrificial love would be repaid. On the contrary, when the crowds caught up with Him, Jesus "had compassion on them and healed those who were ill" (Matthew 14:14).

His was a sacrificial love. He gave of Himself completely. He allowed Himself to be squeezed like a lemon. He spent His last ounce of energy in service. Healing drained Him in body and soul. This we know from the story of the woman subject to bleeding for twelve years. "Jesus said, 'Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me'" (Luke 8:46). How much strength and energy Jesus must have given out after healing thousands in the course of a single day and night, and even more so when He cured the demon-possessed? Jesus was a magnet for all that was sinful, diabolical and sick. All these forces would have hurled themselves at Jesus like bandits or beasts of prey attacking their victim, draining Him of His energy.

At every turn Jesus had to deal with the spirit of sickness and take the illnesses upon Himself. "Behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years." (Luke 13:11 NKJV). After crossing the lake, He was attacked by the demons in a possessed man (Mark 5:2). Wherever Jesus taught and healed, His critics watched Him closely in the hope of trapping Him in His words and actions. After leaving the area of Gadaren, where He healed the demon-possessed man, He was again confronted by death and led into the house of Jairus.

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28). This is what defined His years of public ministry.

Jesus sacrificed His life and energy. He did not spare Himself. He did not count His life as dear to Himself. His acts of healing and deliverance were sacrificial in nature. He sacrificed His strength and suffered the animosity of the Pharisees. The Pharisees noted everything He did and said to bring help and healing and then they twisted it. The purpose was to build a case against Him as a criminal who deserved to be crucified. So His healings literally prepared the way for His death. He actually bore the people's illnesses.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:16). Laying down His life is what characterized Jesus' path on earth. With His call, *Come, follow Me* Jesus now invites us to walk this path. Every step of the way is paved with sacrificial acts: sacrifices of strength, time, peace and quiet, ease and comfort, emotional joy and pleasure. Sacrifice is what Jesus asks of every true disciple. Think of Paul. He could say with conviction that the way he walked was "in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 4:17). Looking at Paul's life, we see what faith in Jesus means: walk in His way. In 2 Corinthians 11 we have a whole catalogue of sufferings Paul endured. Toil and hardship, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, fasting, cold and exposure, the pressure of concern for the churches, hazardous trips across river, sea and desert. Danger from bandits, danger of betrayal by false brothers, danger from Jews and Gentiles out to kill him. Then there were beatings, stonings, imprisonment and deadly peril. Still, Paul could declare, "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself" (Acts 20:24 NKJV).

How far we have strayed! Do we really measure our lives by Jesus' sacrificial life? On the contrary, we are upset at the slightest bump in the road. Demands on our time. 4

Longer working hours. Freezing temperatures. Hunger. The hardships and hazards of being constantly on the road. Toxic relationships. We rush to eliminate the bumps appearing on the road. We want our lives to run smoothly. Unlike Paul we can't say, *None of these things move or trouble me*. In fact we do mind when anything threatens our health, strength, sleep, peace and quiet, security, comfort and ease, earthly and emotional joys. When the Lord leads us on to such a path of sacrifice, we don't respond, saying, *This is only right. This is the way in Christ Jesus. Here I am. Now I'm walking in His steps. I am called to walk this path with Him*. Instead, we act as if we are on the wrong track and hasten to leave it, taking the first exit we find.

We act as if we had never heard Jesus say if we want to follow Him, we have to deny ourselves and lose our life (Matthew 16:24-25). What does our life comprise? Strength, sleep, security, comfort and ease, emotional joys and the like. Have we ever given up any of this in obedience to the will of God? Doesn't it put us to shame seeing Jesus empty Himself, though He had no need to? Wasn't it enough for Him to lay down His life on the cross? But day after day He laid down His life as He walked this earth. He demonstrated what self-denial is by giving up His wishes, peace and quiet, security and physical well-being. He set an example for us to follow.

Seeing that Jesus laid down His life for us, how can we claim to believe in Him while living for self? We are only deceiving ourselves and are in for a rude awakening in the next world. We are so susceptible to this deception.

Who wants to die to self? Way too uncomfortable for our old sinful nature. Satan throws at us the usual arguments:

“That’s legalism!” – “Catholic penance!” – “Righteousness by works!” Our sinful self-clings to anything to avoid the pain of dying to self. We can become so deluded that we are convinced we are doing a good work when we take the opposite stance. “Righteousness by works? That obscures true faith!”

Of course, when it comes to discipleship, we need to look at our motives. Are we out for our own glory? Do we die to self for love of Jesus and for His name’s sake? If not, we are anything but true disciples, our lives a distortion of what they should be. Seeking spiritual gratification is not love, as 1 Corinthians 13:3 makes clear. It is righteousness by works. Opposing this is justified. But where there is no distortion at play, then opposition is wrong. Those speaking out against uncompromising discipleship may find themselves, inadvertently, actually opposing Jesus Himself. After all, this is the way He walked. Surely believers all out for Jesus should have the freedom to follow their hearts – and their Lord. So what are the real objections? Very often they stem from the sinful human heart. Critics may feel threatened. Jesus’ way of lowliness, sacrifice, poverty and the shame of the cross doesn’t suit them. It makes them feel uncomfortable. They are not prepared to lose their lives: they want to preserve them (Matthew 16:25). However, those who shy away from the way of sacrifice and suffering will lose everything that really matters. They will ultimately lose their relationship with Jesus. Yet He is the One who has meant life to us ever since we found Him. So either we die to self, allowing Jesus to become greater in us (John 3:30). Or we cling to our lives and continue on our wrong pathway, misguided and erring. Then we will find that Jesus will increasingly withdraw from us and in the end abandon us to our own devices.

The choice is ours. Jesus is asking us to decide. “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:39). Jesus laid down His life for us. As sinners guilty in the sight of God it is only right that we lose our lives, renounce self and empty ourselves. Such a life would spell death to our sinful nature. We are sin-laden, and so we have it coming to us. If we still don't want to go the way of Jesus, let us consider how Jesus embraced this way for love of us. Surely such love fills us with awe. It can only draw from us the response: *Lord, I will follow wherever You go, however You lead. I embrace Your leading whatever it looks like. Even if Your path for me means nothing but sacrifice, I will go this way for love of You. I can't do otherwise. Your way shall become my own.*



*I follow now close in His footsteps
The path that He trod here below.
I only desire what He gives me,
And only His way I will go.*



Loving Father,

*Thank You for offering up Your only begotten Son for us.
This You did, even though You knew how shamefully
we would react, failing to walk in the steps
of Your Son and lay down our lives.*

*In response to Your love in sacrificing
what is dearest to Your heart, I now surrender all.
It's all Yours, loving Father—my will, loved ones, money,
belongings, abilities, time, energy
and most importantly my love.
My heart is Yours. Amen*

How do I give Jesus proofs of my love?

When I trust in His love in every situation.

*When, rather than complain, I am thankful, knowing
that He always has my best interests at heart.*

*When I forgive those who have hurt me or wronged me,
as He has forgiven me.*

When for love of Him I gladly do things that I find hard.

*When I bear difficult people in love and patience,
just as He always bears with me.*

When I celebrate His victory in the midst of my defeat.

When I humble myself before God and people.

*When I seek only to please Him rather than win
the approval, love and esteem of others.*

*When I desire only what He desires,
accepting that it is His to give and His to withhold.*

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