

FITNESS AND FAILURE IN THE KINGDOM LUKE 9:37-62

REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

As much as we might often hear about successes in the Christian life, we do not often hear (or want to hear necessarily) about failures. We hear of great works for God performed throughout history and in our own time, but we almost never hear of the failures of discipleship. Our passage today is about the disciples' failure to understand fully who Jesus is, and their identity as disciples who can trust and follow him.

In our passage today in verses 37-62 Dr. Luke focuses our attention on the fitness as well as the failures in the Kingdom of God. What we should appreciate about the Gospel accounts (as well as the entire Scriptural corpus) is that human sin and misunderstanding is revealed as well as faith. In other words, the revelation of God's Word shows God's people, his elect, often "warts and all"!

In chapter 9, verses 37-62 the disciples "cannot" exorcise a demon (37-45), they misunderstand their call to be humble and "least" in the Kingdom (46-48), they desire pridefully exclusive rights to minister in Jesus' Name (49-50), and they covet the prophetic power of God for their own purposes of vengeance against the Samaritans (51-55). In verses 56-62, Jesus graciously teaches those who are "faithless and twisted" (41) what it means to be a disciple and follow him- *-AGAIN!*

Here is how the disciples reveal their weakness and faithlessness; they say these five things:

"We Can't Do it."

"We Want to be Great."

"We Want Exclusive Rights to Minister in Your Name."

"We Want God's Power for Our Own Purposes"

"What Exactly Does It Mean to Follow You?"

The disciples' failure however exalts Christ and emphasizes HIS grace and mercy toward sinners! God indeed is merciful and long-suffering, patient with his people as they learn as his disciple-children! It is true that NO ONE may boast- -and if they do, they must boast in the LORD!

^{ESV} **Psalm 34:2** My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 1:31** Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 10:17** "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

As New Testament Professor Joel Green describes this passage: "All [the disciples] are indicted in this portrait of the bankruptcy of faith and perceptiveness" (*Luke*, NICNT, 386).

I. "We Can't Do it." (9:37-45)

a. Down from the mountaintop (37a)

- i. After Jesus' experiences the glory that is inherent to his nature (cf. John 17:5) and is able to be encouraged by a moment of exaltation, he descends the mountain to return to his *Via Dolorosa* and mission of humility to die. Jesus returns to his ministry to slow of heart and unbelieving disciples after speaking with Moses and Elijah.
- ii. The last painting by the great Raphael is a representation on a huge canvas of the glorious Transfiguration of Jesus on the mount and the all too inglorious failure of the disciples at the bottom of the mountain to heal a child from an unclean spirit.
- iii. Three of the disciples, Peter, John, and James have just witnessed Jesus' power and glory, and heard the voice of God affirm Jesus as "His Son, His Chosen One" (35-36). They have been commanded to "Listen to him" (35).
- iv. As the three disciples come down from the mountain, the other disciples have apparently already forgotten what they have learned in their lessons with Jesus (see 9:1-6 when Jesus sends them out with power and authority to exorcise all demons). They have already had experience (and success!) with exorcisms!

b. A great crowd (37b)

- i. The crowds continue to follow Jesus in his ministry.

c. A demonic possessed child (38-39)

- i. An only child (38) who is constantly threatened by demonic forces beyond his power.

- ii. The child's father does not have the power or authority to help his son against the demons or unclean spirits.
- d. The Disciples can't...and don't understand the full implications of their mission and call to minister in Jesus' Name (40, 45)
- i. The disciples had told the man that they could NOT heal his only son.
- e. Jesus' rebuke (41)
- i. A severe rebuke from Jesus: "O faithless and twisted generation". You can imagine how Jesus felt after a night in communion with God on the mountain, experiencing his Father's power and glory, and then returning down to a world of sin and misery full of weakness and faithlessness.
 - ii. The Greek word "faithless" or *apistoj* means unbelief as well as faithlessness; it can also mean unfaithful or incredible (Acts 26:8).
 - iii. The Greek word "twisted" or *diestramme, nh* means utter perverseness; this word also means misled or lead astray. Jesus is quite grieved that none of the disciples had the child-like faith that could overcome the evil spirit.
 - iv. Old Testament echo of Deuteronomy 32:1-5:

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 32:1-5:** "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. ² May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. ³ For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! ⁴ "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. ***A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. ⁵ They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.***

God is faithful, but the people "deal corruptly" and are a crooked and twisted generation because of their unfaithfulness. Jesus is speaking the same words to the disciples that YHWH spoke to the Israelites in the Exodus in the context of God speaking and the people hearing (32:1; cf. Luke 9:35: "...Listen to him").

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:11-13:** The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will

also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful- for he cannot deny himself.

New Testament teacher Joel Green wrote: “The incorrigibility of the disciples is exacerbated by the inconsistency, even deterioration, of their faith –present but not manifest in the boat scene of 8:22-25, on display in their ministry activity in 9:6 but again hidden in the episode of the feeding miracle of 9:12-17, and now altogether absent. Jesus is already anticipating his execution (9:22, 44), after which his followers will share responsibility in the divine mission, and they are in a deplorable state of readiness” (NICNT, pg. 389).

Why couldn't the disciples ultimately heal the boy? They could not because they believed not. Their problem was a spiritual one. In Matthew's gospel, Matthew records the reason Jesus gives them:

^{ESV} **Matthew 17:19-20:** Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰ He said to them, "***Because of your little faith.*** For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and ***nothing will be impossible for you.***"

In Mark's Gospel we read further that it was because of their little faith revealed by a lack of prayer and trust in God:

^{ESV} **Mark 9:28-29:** And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

In Matthew's account Jesus says they have little faith and in Mark's account we are told that the little faith is specifically demonstrated in lack of prayer. The disciples' had a spiritual failure in trusting God at his word. They disciples failed to remember that they had exorcised demons before, and they had experienced the faithfulness and power of God, but here they did not demonstrate the proper faith that was needed.

- f. Jesus' healing (42)
 - i. Jesus commands the man to bring the son to him (41b)
 - ii. The demon (unclean spirit) ferociously attacks the boy and throws him to the ground in an effort to kill him and prevent Jesus from helping (42a)

- iii. Jesus simply heals this only child and exorcises the demons through rebuke, showing his power and authority over them again (42b).

ESV Luke 9:43 And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples...

While the crowds are seeing the majesty of God revealed in Jesus' Word and Deed, Jesus reminds his disciples that his glory must be hidden by suffering and death soon.

- g. Jesus' reminder to the disciples about his mission (43c-44)
 - i. Jesus' mission is to die. Although the people are presently happy with Jesus' presence, especially the man and his only child; in Jesus' mind what is most important is his death, and this will come soon when the crowds will no longer receive him but reject him.
 - ii. As he has told the disciples before (9:21 ff), and had sent the disciples out (9:1-6) so that they would learn how to minister with power and authority when he is resurrected-ascended to God's right hand. The disciples must understand that he will only be with them for a season, then they will be delegated by him to continue his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God in Word and Deed.
 - iii. Yet the disciples do not understand, and are afraid (45). After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and particularly after Pentecost, they will understand much more clearly as to what Jesus has been saying; but at this point they are unable to fully understand.

Acts 4:8-12, 24-28: Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders,⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed,¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

...And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,²⁵ who through the mouth of our

father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, " Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'- ²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

II. “We Want to be Great.” (9:46-48)

- a. Jesus has told them of his mission (44): ***“I must go to die.”*** Through Jesus’ humility, his people will be saved. As the Apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:

^{ESV} **Philippians 2:4-11:** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- b. Now they want to know who is the greatest (46)
- i. Ironically, the disciples want to know who is the greatest at the very time Jesus is reminding them of his imminent death at Jerusalem. It must have greatly caused Jesus pain to see his disciples still ***so self-centered, especially in light of his suffering and death*** (no comforting him; no encouragement).
 - ii. The disciples’ idea of the Kingdom is still too worldly! One commentator wrote: “The question of precedence seems to have occupied the minds of the disciples more than once. It reveals the ideas of the kingdom which made it difficult for them to understand the cross” (Quoted in Geldenhuys, pg. 288).

Even at the end of Jesus’ life at the Last Supper, the disciples are still asking this question in response to his suffering and death:

Luke 22:15-27: And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not

eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²² ***For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!***" ²³ ***And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.*** ²⁴ ***A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.*** ²⁵ And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

- c. Jesus shows the profound illustration an example of a small child (47-48)
- i. A small child was considered least like women in that culture. One historian wrote: "Children were the weakest, most vulnerable among the population. They had little implicit value as human beings, a reality that is related to the likelihood that they would not survive into adulthood. Even if women procured their place in the household by bearing children, especially sons, children themselves were of the lowest status" ("Roman Family" from *Family in Ancient Rome*; edited by Beryl Rawson).
 - ii. In the Hebrew family a child was a gift from God, but in the culture itself they were considered insignificant. In the *Talmud* it is written that to spend time with children was a waste of time. One rabbi wrote: "Morning sleep, mid-day wine, chattering with children and tarrying in places where men of the common people assemble, destroy a man."
 - iii. Jesus uses this graphic example in order to teach the disciples that if they want to be great, then they must first learn to be small, insignificant in the eyes of others. ***A child in that culture would have been judged insignificant by the culture, but never by God. This means that the disciples had to learn to see themselves and their status not as the world judges importance or significance,***

but as to how God himself judges what is important or significant.

- iv. The truth would be that many in the Roman culture would view Jesus Christ the Son of God as a mere thief and liar who was crucified, but God declared him to be the Son of God with power in his resurrection from the dead. How do you view or judge yourself? In the eyes of the world, or in the eyes of God? What truly matters to you? What God thinks of you, or what the world thinks of you? This is what the disciples and we must learn as followers of Christ.
- v. **The disciples must learn humility**; the kind of child-like humility that ever trusts and depends upon his parents because he is weak without their aid. They must truly learn to receive or welcome in Jesus' name those that are considered the lowest in status: the poor, children "in Jesus' name". Jesus is saying that to receive the insignificant and lowly, is to receive Jesus, as well as the Father who sent him (v. 48):

"Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

Yet the disciples are still slow of heart to listen and hear what Jesus says to them:

^{ESV} **Luke 18:15** Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. *And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.*

- d. The least is the greatest (48)
 - i. Jesus teaches that the least are the greatest in the Kingdom.
 - ii. The least are those who depend upon the power and authority of God by faith to do whatever Jesus calls them to do.
 - iii. **We must never forget**: Our significance in him is realized only when we realize our insignificance without him.

III. "We Want Exclusive Rights to Minister in Your Name." (9:49-50)

- a. Others who do not follow are casting demons out (49)

- i. Jesus was so popular that many knew that he was casting out demons or performing exorcisms (perhaps some of these who were doing this had witnessed the healing of the child (42).
 - ii. The crowds knew that Jesus had power and authority to be given in his name, perhaps because they had heard of the disciples being sent out (9:1-6) to minister and perform exorcisms in his name.
 - iii. The one casting out demons in Jesus' name was apparently a believer in Jesus; his allegiance was not to the evil one and his kingdom, but rather in Jesus and the Kingdom of God that had come (cf. 11:20).
 - iv. Dr. Luke is giving us an ironic contrast here. The disciples "can't" minister in Jesus' name although they have experienced his power and authority to cast out demons (9:1-6, 40). Yet there is a great jealousy revealed here because they do not approve of this person- -and if they cannot exorcise demons then no one else should show such faith either ("He does not follow with us"- 49). There is a close relationship with the pride of wanting to be great, and the associated jealousy that goes with it (They had just been told to receive a child, forgetting their status as Jesus' disciples, and they have already forgotten this important lesson!).
 - v. It is indeed true that this person who was casting out demons in Jesus' name did not have Jesus' specific endorsement and authority to do what he was doing; nevertheless in Jesus' gracious judgment he is not opposing him, nor the disciples, nor threatening the mission of the Kingdom of God. Geldenhuys wrote: "...Although [the person's] faith and attachment to Christ were not perfect, he nevertheless acted in honor of Christ" (*Luke*, NICNT, 289).
- b. Jesus' lesson on those who are not against us (50)

"Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you."

- Toleration with wisdom.
- This does not mean that we should not disagree with one another in our studying scripture together.
- This does not mean that we overlook any and all differences with those who are not "against Christ".
- It **does** mean that we must be tolerant with wisdom. We must recognize that Jesus does his work through many means- -and this includes people who truly preach and teach the gospel of Christ, even though we may disagree with them theologically,

or methodologically. The question is: “Do they preach and teach the gospel?”

IV. “We Want God’s Power for Our Own Purposes” (9:51-55)

- a. Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem to die (51-53)
 - i. “Set his face” is a Hebraism that means that Jesus has a fixed purpose and goal to accomplish his mission from the Father.
- b. A visit to a village of the Samaritans
 - i. Jesus’ Galilean ministry is over and he now leaves Galilee and enters Samaritan territory (which marks officially the second part of Dr. Luke’s gospel as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem). Jesus sends messengers so that he and his disciples can stay in Samaria as they travel to Judaea.
 - ii. **There was a long history of Jewish-Samaritan antagonism.** In fact, Samaritans were particularly hostile to Jews who traveled through their lands in order to go to the temple in Jerusalem to worship (Geldenhuis, 292). This is what it means that “the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem” (53). Here we have the formal rejection of Samaria, as we will later see the formal rejection of Jerusalem in the death of Jesus.
 - iii. During the time of the rebuilding of the second temple after the Jews’ returned from exile, the Samaritans were not allowed to help in the building under Ezra and Nehemiah (Ez. 4:3; Neh. 2:20) and so the Samaritans hatefully tried to hinder the work being done.
 - iv. The Samaritans decided to build a rival temple and a different priesthood to worship on Mt. Gerazim (see John 4:19-24). The hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans was particularly heated and bitter during Jesus time (cf. Luke 10:33ff).
- c. The disciples James and John called elsewhere the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17) want to call fire from heaven upon the sinful Samaritans (54)
 - i. James and John seem to be full of pride and are offended by the Samaritans rejection of Jesus (even though Jesus has told them that rejection would be involved in discipleship- 9:21ff).
 - ii. The disciples desire eschatologically to punish and judge the Samaritans NOW for their unbelief much like Elijah before them:

^{ESV} **2 Kings 1:9-11:** Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty men with his fifty. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top

of a hill, and said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" ¹⁰ But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. ¹¹ Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty men with his fifty. And he answered and said to him, "O man of God, this is the king's order, 'Come down quickly!'"

- iii. **Irony:** The disciples couldn't exorcise a demon in Jesus' Name, but they apparently know how to access fire- -and fire from heaven like Elijah- -no less!!

d. Jesus rebukes them again (55)

- i. The disciples reveal their worldly thinking once again here. They suppose that it is their place as followers of Jesus to judge and condemn the Samaritans for their unbelief and rejection of Jesus.
- ii. A disciple must never "minister" in Jesus' name out of vengeance or revenge. Even when men reject Jesus, they must learn to sheath their swords and remember that eschatological vengeance and judgment belong to the LORD alone. As the Scriptures teach:

^{ESV} **Romans 12:19** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:30** For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."

^{ESV} **Luke 6:27-28:** "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

- iii. Wisdom from Jesus teaches us that there are two kinds of toleration; one kind of toleration must be strictly avoided like multiple gods, or multiple ways to God. Another kind of toleration that Jesus commends is to not be overzealous and out of harmony with his kind mercy and graciousness toward sinners.
- iv. Later in Luke's Gospel, Jesus will teach that a good Samaritan can put even the most religious Israelite to shame by his showing mercy (Luke 10:25ff)!

- v. As we will learn in Dr. Luke's second volume, many Samaritans come to faith in Jesus Christ through Philip's preaching and John and Peter go down to minister to them (Acts 8:5-26).

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women- 8:12

- vi. We should never be surprised at God's grace and mercy toward us, and we should never be surprised at God's grace and mercy toward our enemies –realizing that we may also one day be called to minister to them as brothers and sisters in Jesus' name!
- vii. Jesus turns social constructions upside down by saying a child is great and should be welcomed. In a similar way he stretches our imagination and thinking to include a possible belief and hope that even the worst of our enemies might be saved for his glory. As Jonah the Prophet learned in the Old Covenant, even God's worst enemies can be saved by His grace!
- viii. "Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful, and has been merciful to you." Imagine that even your worst enemy could become a brother and sister in Christ by His grace, and pray that this would happen.

If you as a wicked sinner have been saved and shown mercy, why do you judge and condemn others who trouble you- - even your greatest enemies? Pray that God would enlarge your imagination and hope so that you could see that he could bring salvation to the home of your worst enemy!

***"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy"
(Matthew 5:7)***

V. "What Exactly Does It Mean to Follow You?" (9:56-62)

- a. Give it all up to follow me (58-61)

As Jesus has told his disciples earlier in chapter 9 (23-27) about following him by carrying a cross, here we have other vignettes of what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus as some claim a desire to follow Jesus as he responds to their request and objections:

First would-be follower: "I will follow you wherever you go." (v. 57)

Jesus' response: My road is a not a road of comfort; my road is a road of possible homelessness and rejection; on my road I am not received with the hospitality and care of the people- -you may not be either (v. 58).

Jesus says:

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

One commentator wrote: "Those who would be his disciples then and now must reckon with how identifying with Jesus might place them outside the boundaries of what is acceptable to a world not oriented toward the aim of God" (Green, NICNT, pg. 407).

Jesus' invitation: Jesus says to another man - ***"Follow me."*** (v. 59a)

Second would-be follower: "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." (Excuses, excuses; finding something else that is more important prior to falling in behind Jesus). This is a failure to understand the urgency of Jesus' call and invitation to follow him; a failure to understand how insignificant everything else is, even noble matters in one's life, in comparison to the significance of following Jesus as a disciple.

Jesus' response: ***"Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*** Jesus is saying that life is found in discipleship; don't make excuses when there is an urgency to finding life in him through the proclamation of the Kingdom. Leaving the dead to bury the dead is a picturesque way of describing those who do not follow Christ: the living dead.

As the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:2: **"Today is the Day of Salvation."** As the author to the Book of Hebrews writes in chapters 3-4: **"Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

Third would-be follower: ***"I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."*** Again, this is an excuse of something more important than discipleship *right now*. Jesus is calling for a true disciple to realize that everything else, even good things in this life, pale in insignificance to the importance of following him as a disciple; that is, the important significance of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Jesus' response: ***"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*** Jesus is saying that with the presence of the King and the Kingdom, all disciples must reorganize all of their former allegiances. Everything that once was, and/or seemed important, must be

reconsidered in light of Jesus' Kingdom, and the urgency to follow him. As Jesus will say more clearly and poignantly later in the Gospel of Luke:

^{ESV} **Luke 14:26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Jesus is probably alluding to Lot's wife in looking back after they had been rescued from Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:26 where she became a pillar salt (cf. Luke 10:12).

It is interesting to note that both the second and third would-be disciples call Jesus "Lord" but they fail to do what he tells them to do, showing that their interest in discipleship is only on the surface. For as Jesus says earlier in Luke:

^{ESV} **Luke 6:46** "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?*"

As Pastor Kent Hughes wrote: "No one who commits to following Christ, and does so, lives a life of ease. No one. If your Christianity has not brought discomfort to your life, something is wrong. A committed heart knows the discomfort of loving difficult people, the discomfort of giving of yourself until it hurts, the discomfort of putting oneself out for the ministry of Christ and his church, the discomfort of a life out of step with modern culture, the discomfort of being disliked, the occasional sense of having nowhere to lay your head. But Christ's rewards far outweigh anything lost by following him" (*Luke, Preach the Word series, pg. 372*).

Jesus' disciples must have an eschatological focus that is beyond this present age. We must learn as his disciples to seek our vindication not here, but later; to await God's judgment at the restoration of all things and not to put our hope in temporal things. Our reward is great in Jesus Christ. Jesus taught in Mark 10:29-30:

^{ESV} **Mark 10:29-30:** Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,³⁰ *who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.*"

- b. Put *your* hand to the plow (62)

We may look at the failures of these disciples and we might be tempted to judge them for being so slow of heart to understand as disciples of Christ.

But the truth is, as true disciples, we probably- -we should!- - see ourselves in their weakness and faithlessness.

Yet even when we are weak and faithless, God is still strong and able, as well as faithful to us!

We may look at the failure of the disciples and wonder why Jesus did not just leave them and find some more fit disciples. But that is the amazing grace and work of God to call the lowliest and hardened sinners to be disciples that will boast only of being in Christ, and giving all glory to God!

God calls people like the disciples, and we, not to leave or forsake us, but to teach us our whole lives through, so that all of the glory of our sanctification and Christ-likeness would be for God's glory alone!

Jesus says to us too when we fail: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Putting our hand to the plow as Jesus' disciples in the Church is to learn from the disciples, but most importantly from God's grace and mercy found in Christ.

Let us go back over the disciples' failure in their objections, sinful tendencies, and misunderstandings and not only learn from them, but more importantly learn fitness for the Kingdom by focusing on the Word of the Living Word of God that still speaks. Jesus Christ still speaks to His Church-Disciples through his word.

Rather than: **"We Can't Do it."** Let us be reminded that we can do all things through Christ who gives us the strength (Phil. 4:13). Whatever God calls us to do as his disciples, let us do it confidently knowing that God's grace is sufficient for us- -and HE IS ABLE. We will not be called to exorcise demons as the disciples were, but we will be called to exercise our faith in many situations that look too difficult for us- -but through prayer and humble reliance upon the Lord, we will behold his faithfulness.

Rather than: **"We Want to be Great."** Let us learn to be humble. Let the mind of considering others more important than ourselves guide our thinking each day. Let us remember that if Jesus receives or welcomes the lowliest child in the culture of his day, then we are to receive and welcome the lowliest in his Name, understanding ourselves as the least in the Kingdom because of our sins, but being made the greatest in the Kingdom through Jesus' humble suffering, death, and grace extended to us.

Rather than: **“We Want Exclusive Rights to Minister in Your Name.”** Let us learn that God works in and through many different kinds of Christians. This does not mean that we necessarily overlook all of our differences, or that we are disinterested in one’s theology, or that we overlook the fact that God has ordained specific offices to be fulfilled in his Church. It does mean that we seek God for wisdom in toleration, so that those who are seeking to proclaim the Kingdom of God, even if they may differ with us, and may even need some instruction in their understanding of certain aspects of theology, if they are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ then they are not against us!

Rather than: **“We Want Power for Our Own Purposes”** Let us remember that God has shown us mercy and so we should be merciful as our Heavenly Father is merciful. We should not seek vengeance on our enemies and those who persecute us for righteousness sake. Rather, we should have a big enough understanding of God our Father who “saved a wretch like me” and have hope that he will save even the worst of our enemies.

This is what it means to be a disciple that is fit for the Kingdom. This too is a work of God’s sovereign and merciful grace to us in Jesus Christ!

Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ who is patient with his disciples, instructs and nurtures us, and never leaves nor forsakes us.

Bibliography- For Further Reading

Beale, G. K. and D. A. Carson. Editors: *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Baker, 2007.

Bock, Darrell L. *Luke: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Volumes 1-2, Baker, 1994.

Bromiley, G. Editor: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Volumes 1-4, Eerdmans, 1982.

Geldenhuis, Norval. *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (New International Commentary on the New Testament, NICNT)*, Eerdmans, 1952.

Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke (NICNT)*, Eerdmans, 1997.

Green, McKnight, and Marshall. Editors: *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. IVP, 1992.

Hughes, R. Kent. *Luke, Volumes I-II (Preaching the Word Series)*, Crossway, 1998.

Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke (The New International Greek Testament Commentary)*, Eerdmans, 1978.

Morris, Leon. *Luke: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, IVP Academic, 1988.

Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman. Editors: *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, IVP, 1998.

CRB

www.aplacefortruth.org